

# **SKINDIVING RULES**

**Underwater Society  
Of  
America**

**Rules Approved  
March 2010**

**UNITED STATES NATIONAL  
SPEARFISHING CHAMPIONSHIP RULES  
(Approved Version – March 2008)**

**ARTICLE I**

The sport of competitive freediving spearfishing is governed by the Underwater Society of America (referred to hereafter as the *USOA*), administered through the office of the Director of Competitive Freediving (referred to hereafter as the Freediving Director) and designed solely for *USOA*-affiliated Councils and/or Clubs in good standing (referred to hereafter as the Councils/Clubs).

1.1 Definition: Freediving spearfishing is defined as diving where no artificial breathing apparatus is used. This sport of underwater spearfishing is a type of competitive freediving in which the individual is equipped with mask, foot fins, and spear or spear gun(s) and is submerged in the water when the spear is used.

1.2 A national championship freediving spearfishing event, officially titled "United States National Freediving Spearfishing Championships" (referred to hereafter as the National Championships), shall be held annually.

1.3 The Freediving Competition Committee is headed by an elected Director with an appointed assistant director and secretary.

**ARTICLE II  
NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS BID REQUIREMENTS**

In addition to the requirements listed in the *USOA Standardized Competitive Rules*, the bid requirements for sponsoring the National Championships shall include the following:

2.1. The National Championships shall normally be held in the month of August. A one day competition is required, but the bidding Council/Club has the option of holding a two day competition.

2.1.1 The Host Council/Club may also schedule a series of dates for the National Championships with the option of delaying the competition date(s) past the first scheduled day if weather conditions warrant. The decision to postpone shall be made at the staging area on the morning of the competition day. The decision will be made by a vote of a simple majority of councils/clubs represented with one vote per council/club. **(1997)**

2.2 Competition Area: A complete description of the diving area is required to include the following:

2.2.1 accessibility, types of fish, and water conditions (such as clarity, temperature, depth, surfs, currents, etc.).

2.2.2 An ocean chart/topographic map

2.2.3 The meet area shall be **(2003)**

2.2.3.1 one square mile for the West Coast

2.2.3.2 two square miles for Inland and Northeast

2.2.3.3 12 square miles for Gulf and Florida.

2.2.4 The meet area shall be calculated from the shore to the 60' depth contour line. This shall be used to establish the maximum side boundaries. **(2003)**

2.2.5 Competitors may dive seaward of the 60' contour line as long as they stay between the side boundaries. **(2003)**

2.2.6 The Freediving Director shall have the prerogative to increase the size of the meet area if requested to do so by the bidding Council and if it best serves the needs of the competitors.

2.2.7 The National Championships shall not be held in another Council's area without that Council's written approval.

2.3 The date of the banquet, if it deviates from the requirements listed in Article III, Paragraph M *Standardized Competitive Rules*.

2.4 *Bid Proposal Form*: see page 2a *USOA Freediving Spearfishing Championships Rules*

2.4.1 Bid to include travel expenses for the National Director, if non competing, up to \$400.00. **(1998)**

### **ARTICLE III REGULATIONS GOVERNING THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Additional general rules, not set forth in the *Standardized Rules*, are as follows:

3.1 Council/Club Eligibility:

3.1.1 Competition is open to teams representing *USOA* member Councils/Clubs in existence at least 3 months prior to the Championships.

3.1.2 Competition is not open to individual divers.

3.2 Competing Council/Club Teams:

3.2.1 A competing team shall consist of three men or two women or a two person mixed team. **(2003)**

3.2.2 Mixed team: a mixed team can be made up of the following two combinations: An adult male diving with any adult/minor female or with a

minor male (under age 16). An adult female diving with either an adult or minor male. **(2003)**

3.2.2.1 Divers from all divisions qualify for the World meet based on their gender **(2006)**

3.2.3 An alternate may be designated for each team.

3.2.3.1 No alternate will be allowed to replace a team member after the start of the competition for any one day.

3.2.3.2 Less than a full team may compete at the discretion of the Meet Committee, subject to the approval of the Freediving Director.

3.2.4 Each *USOA* member Independent Club may enter three (3) men's and three (3) women's teams in the National Championships for the first 40 *USOA* members; and one (1) additional men's and women's team per each additional 50 *USOA* members or portion thereof. **(2003)**

3.2.5 Members must be registered with the *USOA* 30 days prior to the National Championships to be included in the membership count.

3.2.6 No Council may split its membership for the obvious purpose of entering additional teams in the National Championships.

3.2.7 All women/men in tournament will compete for high individual aggregate and largest fish trophies and All-American team honors based on gender. **(2006)**

### 3.3 Regional Team Eligibility:

3.3.1 A team, selected in a single contest between two or more Councils/Clubs within a given region (Mid-Atlantic, Southwest Pacific, Great Lakes, Southeast, Northwest Pacific, Midwest, and Northeast), is eligible to compete in the National Championships in addition to any/all other eligible council/ club teams.

3.3.1.1 The Freediving Director must be notified, at least 30 days in advance and sent a copy of the rules governing the contest.

3.3.1.2 The majority of the Councils/Clubs within the region must agree on the conditions (i.e. time, place, and regulations).

3.3.1.3 At least 2 teams from 2 Councils/Clubs must compete.

### 3.4 Defending Champions

3.4.1 The Defending Champions are defined as the first place men's and women's and mixed teams and the first place high aggregate individual men's and women's from the immediately previous National Championships.

3.4.1.1 The sponsoring Council/Club shall furnish all banquet fees for Defending Champions.

3.4.2 All members of the defending team have the right to compete

as the Defending Team. **(1997)**

3.4.2.1 One or more members of the defending team may change teams for the Nationals if s/he chooses to do so. **(1997)**

3.4.2.2 A member of the defending team may not be voted off the defending team by the other members or the Council/Club the defending team represents. **(1997)**

3.4.3 If the members of the defending team are not in agreement concerning who they are representing in the Nationals, the National Freediving Director shall dissolve the defending team for that year. **(1997)**

3.4.4 In the event one member of the defending team is unable to attend the National Championships or decides to represent another council/club and/or team at the Nationals, the defending team's council shall select a replacement. **(1997)**

3.4.4.1 Should two members of the defending team be unable to attend or choose to represent another council and/or team at the Nationals, the defending team ceases to exist, and the hosting council is not obligated for any defending champions fees/expenses. **(1997)**

3.4.4.2 The decision of each defending team member to remain or separate themselves from the team must be made before their council/club begins their National team(s) qualification process. **(1997)**

3.5 Meet Headquarters shall be designated by the Meet Chairman;

3.5.1 These headquarters shall be established and operated at or near the team housing area for one week in advance of the meet.

3.6 Legal/state requirements: If requested by the Meet Committee, each competitor will be required to show a current fishing license.

3.7 entry fee(s) shall be decided by the Meet Committee except

3.7.1 entry fees shall not exceed \$300.00 per men's team and \$200.00 per women's and mixed team and includes the *USOA* National Entry Fee. **(2005)**

3.7.2 Each competitor shall pay a \$30 International team support fee in addition to the normal entry fee. The hosting club or council will collect these fees and forward them to the Society Treasurer. **(2005)**

3.8 To qualify as National Championship, the following conditions apply:

3.8.1 There must be at least three eligible teams in at least one division (men or women) from two different Councils registered within three weeks of the meet.

3.8.2 If there should be no National Championships in any one year, all bid requirements pertaining to the Defending Champions will be dissolved.

3.8.3 Should a division of the National Championships be canceled, teams from the canceled division may compete in the remaining division.

### 3.9 Host Responsibilities

3.9.1 Transportation to and from the nearest air terminal to the National Championships shall be arranged for competitors and their equipment if so requested.

3.9.2 Lead weights should be furnished to those competitors traveling to the National Championships by air.

3.9.3 For **land based** competition, the competitors shall be housed near the diving area, within walking distance, if possible.

3.9.4 Nothing shall be planned which will occupy the competitors' time when they can be in the water or after 9:00 p.m.

3.9.5 No activities shall be planned for the competitors 24 hours in advance of the meet.

3.9.6 For **paddle board based** meets, paddle boards are to be furnished free to all teams during the actual meet.

3.9.7 Meet start and end signals shall be determined by the Meet Committee. **(2003)**

3.10 The following meet officials will be ineligible to compete in the National Championships:

3.10.1 Meet Committee Chair, Safety Committee Chair, Weigh Master, Timekeeper and all field judges.

### 3.11 Scheduling:

3.11.1 The National Competitive Committee Meeting shall be held 3 days prior to the championships.

3.11.2 A competitors' briefing shall be held 3 days prior to the championship.

3.11.2.1 The National Committee Meeting and Competitors' briefing are usually combined, that is held at the same place, with the meeting immediately preceding the briefing.

3.11.3 Banquet of Champions shall be held in a dignified manner and in keeping with the prestige of the National Championships.

3.11.2.1 The banquet shall be held two nights before the meet, starting by 7:00 p.m. to insure completion for competitors by 10:00 p.m.

3.11.2.2 Attendance by officials and competitors should be considered mandatory, and every effort shall be made to honor the competitors and advise the public of their skill.

3.11.2.3 If the banquet is held after the Nationals then the banquet attendance by officials and competitors is not mandatory.

3.12 The hosting council must provide in their budget \$600 maximum for roundtrip shipping and insurance for the Churchill trophy to the Awards banquet. **(2005)**

## **ARTICLE IV RULES GOVERNING FREE DIVING SPEARFISHING CHAMPIONSHIPS**

4.1 This event shall consist of freediving spearfishing only; no artificial breathing apparatus will be allowed.

4.1.1 Competitors shall be swimming in or under the water when the spear is used.

4.1.2 Every competitor must enter the water with a float.

4.2 The competition may be **land, ship or boat based**, as determined by the Meet Committee.

4.2.1 In **land based** competition, divers must enter and leave the water only in the staging area and must check in with a designated official.

4.2.1.1 In **land based** competitions where kayaks/paddle boards are used, there shall be a travel time at the beginning and at the end of the competition. **(2006)**

4.2.1.1.1 The travel time shall be approximately equal to the time taken by an average paddler to reach the furthest point of the meet area from the staging area.

4.2.1.1.2 The travel time option must be indicated in the bid. **(1999)**

4.2.2 In **boat based** competition, each team will be transported by one boat equipped with a motor.

4.2.2.1 Where boats are used to travel several miles during the competition, every effort must be made to assure that all boats are operated as though they had equal power with 30 MPH being the top speed for any boat during the competition. **(2003)**

4.2.2.2 The minimum travel time for **boat based** meets shall be equal to the time it takes the average boat in the meet to reach the farthest point of the meet area. **(2003)**

4.2.2.3 Team members may use the boat to carry spare equipment, to repair equipment, to rest and to remove fish from their spears.

4.2.3 In **ship based** meets, all competitors work from one or more boats at the staging area in place of a land staging area, and the rules are to be identical to those in a land based meet.

### 4.3 General Regulations

4.3.1 Team members must check in with a designated official when returning to the staging area.

4.3.2 Spear guns shall be loaded in the water and unloaded before leaving the water.

4.3.3 Since local conditions such as tides, weather, water temperatures, visibility, fish species and size, conservation principles and legal regulations vary from area to area, those rules are designed to be flexible.

4.3.3.1 These rules give the local Meet Committee sufficient latitude to conduct a well-organized and safe meet.

4.3.4 Final determination of such items as: diving area, duration, allowed fish species, etc. should be made by the Meet Committee within the limitations of the following rules.

4.3.5 The following rules will also take precedence over all local, state, provincial or Council rules under the jurisdiction of the *USOA*.

4.3.5.1 Team members may help each other land fish.

**(1997)**

4.3.5.2 No other swimmers shall be permitted to help.

4.3.5.3 Judges may not assist team members except

4.3.5.3.1 Judges may assist team members to mark fish or in case of illness or injury.

4.3.5.4 Team members must keep catches separated. **(2003)**

#### 4.4 Officials

4.4.1 The minimum officials shall be one field judge, one timekeeper, a safety committee, patrol committee, a fish weighing committee.

4.4.2 In **ship based** meets there will be at least two judges on each ship, and in boat based meets one field judge shall accompany each team

4.4.3 The judges on boats must not be a member of the competing teams' Council, and further, can not be a friend or relative of any member of the team being judged.

4.4.3.1 Judge selection is at the discretion of the Meet Committee, subject to the approval of the Freediving Director.

4.4.4 All field judges shall be required to attend a judges' briefing previous to the start of competition.

4.4.5 The following persons must be in attendance at the meet site from one hour before until one hour following the close of the meet: Meet Committee Chair, Safety Committee Chair, Weigh Master and Timekeeper.

#### 4.5 Equipment

4.5.1 Equipment that may be used by individuals shall consist of snorkel, mask, nose clip, knife, fins, suit, weighed belts, spear guns, inflation type life preserver, floats and hardware, webbed gloves (web not to extend past end of fingers), fish stringers, connectors, lines, anchors, lights, watch,

compass, spare equipment parts, hand tools, notebooks and writing equipment, and containers (bags, bottles, boxes, etc.).

4.5.2 Only foot fins may be used for propulsion while in the water.

4.5.3 Only muscle-loaded spear guns or spears may be used.

4.5.3.1 Any questionable gun shall be ruled on by the Meet Committee, subject to the approval of the Freediving Director.

4.5.3.2 No detonating heads, power heads, or the use of chemicals for stunning or killing fish shall be used.

4.5.3.3 For safety, free spears shall be allowed only in clear water, as determined by the Meet Committee.

4.5.3.4 Prior to the actual competition, the Meet Committee has the right to limit the length of line attaching the spear to the gun, depending upon the visibility at the start of the meet.

4.5.4 Gaffs are permitted except where prohibited by state laws.

4.5.5 The use of paddles and/or oars in paddle board based National Championships is also allowed.

4.5.5.1 Floats other than paddle boards will be allowed (i.e. row boats, kayaks, canoes), although the following limitations will be imposed.

4.5.5.2 Only one competitor per float; no non-competitor shall be allowed on a competitor's float; and the competitor's float may not have any type of motor or propeller.

4.5.6 In **land based** meets, so called "poppers" of Life Guard type may be used as a float to string or hold a spear gun at the surface.

4.5.6.1 Said spear gun must have enough line between the spear and gun to prevent the popper from pulling a speared fish to the surface.

4.5.7 No electronic equipment other than lights, watches, compasses and **GPS (1999)**/Loran positioning equipment may be used on the day of the meet.

4.5.7.1 For **boat based** meets, depth sounders (recorders) and **GPS(1999)** /Loran positioning equipment (**1999**) may be used.

#### 4.6 Diving Area

4.6.1 The diving area shall be determined by the Meet Committee.

4.6.2 The Meet Committee must make every effort to have the following conditions enforced:

4.6.2.1 specific diving area should not be used by competitors or Councils members for the purpose of spearing fish for at least three weeks prior to the National Championships, or at the discretion of the Meet Committee, subject to the approval of the Freediving Director;

4.6.2.2 specific diving area is to be kept clear for competitors during the meet.

4.6.2.3 For **land based meets**, the shore staging area is to be kept clear of the public.

#### 4.7 Event Time

4.7.1. The meet shall not have less than six hours of dive time in addition to travel time. If the meet has no travel time, the meet shall not last less than seven hours. **(2005)**

4.7.2 The National Championships may cover two days.

4.7.3 At the beginning of competition, all competitors must be present at the roll call.

#### 4.8 Species and Size of Fish -

4.8.1 Eligible species are to be specified by the Meet Committee and must conform with local fish and game laws.

4.8.2 Eligible species shall include a minimum of four of the most common species within the size limits for saltwater meets and a minimum of two of the most common species within the size limits for freshwater meets.

4.8.3 The weight minimum is one pound per fish and when a length is used it shall approximate a one pound fish.

#### 4.9 Weigh-In

##### 4.9.1 Signs

4.9.1.1 located at the staging area shall adequately identify the meet and its significance; lettering shall be conspicuous, no less than six inches high

4.9.2 All persons not functioning in a necessary official capacity shall be restricted from an enclosed area reserved for competitors, their catches and the weighing apparatus.

4.9.3 All fish taken must be brought to the weighing stand immediately after the contest.

4.9.4 Certified scales sufficient for the largest fish taken are required.

4.9.3.1 Small scales are to be used for the smaller fish to show weight to the nearest ounce.

4.9.5 Fish may or may not be gutted prior to weighing depending on local climatic conditions.

4.9.6 Fish must be washed before weighing.

4.9.7 Each competitor's catch must be kept separated after s/he has weighed-in until all competitor's catches have been weighed and it is determined that there are no protests.

4.9.8 Official placement will be announced by the judges immediately after the end of the meet.

4.9.9 There will be no borrowing or swapping of catch for photographs or publicity.

4.10 Disqualification will result from any infraction of the above spearfishing rules plus the following additional infractions:

4.10.1 leaving specified diving area, except in case of an emergency,

4.10.2 not entering or leaving water at designated area,

4.10.3 failure to be on board or ashore at staging area at time designated by Meet Committee, except in an emergency,

4.10.4 chumming (whether it is day of the meet or in the 30 days prior to the meet), **(2005)**

4.10.5 deliberate mutilation of fish, and/or

4.10.6 fish reaching the measuring table in such condition that their original size is in doubt shall result in disqualification of either the individual diver or the entire team, at the discretion of the Meet Committee.

4.10.7 Any violation of regional, state and/or local fish & game laws including but not limited to size limit, bag limit, protected species, out of season species and so forth. **(1999)**

4.10.8 Failure to procure, present and/or carry local fishing license if required by law. **(1999)**

4.11 Scoring -

4.11.1 Places will be determined by a scoring method of one point per fish and one point per pound.

4.11.1.1 The maximum weight counted toward an individual or team aggregate score, for any one fish, shall not exceed 25 pounds.

4.11.2 First place will be awarded to the team with the most total points.

4.11.2.1 In the case of a tie in either team or individual aggregate, the place shall be awarded to whichever team or individual has the most fish.

## **ARTICLE V WINNERS AND AWARDS**

### Championships

#### 5.1 Championship Winning Teams

5.1.1 The spearfishing team in each division with the most points shall be declared the first place winner and Defending Champions.

5.1.2 Ties in points will be broken by the number of total fish brought in.

5.2 National Championship teams hold their title from 30 days after the Championships until 30 days after the subsequent National Championships.

5.3 Large Fish: To be eligible for the largest single catch or largest aggregate, all fish must be taken by an unassisted individual competitor

5.4 Award Presentations: Awards shall be presented in the following order by distinguished persons invited to the National Championships. No one person should present all awards.

Order Presentation:

- 1) Third - Second - First largest fish (Women)
- 2) Third - Second - First largest fish ( Men)
- 3) First individual high aggregate (Women)
- 4) First individual high aggregate (Men)
- 5) Third - Second - First team (Women) (*USOA* award) **(2003)**
- 6) US National Freediving Championship Trophy (Women)
- 7) Third - Second - First team (Men) (*USOA* award) **(2003)**
- 8) US. National Freediving Championship Trophy (Men)
- 9) *USOA* competitor patches/rockers to all competitors
- 10) US. All American Freediving Team (*USOA* award)

5.5 Official *USOA* Awards:

5.5.1 *USOA* official national championship awards shall be given for men's and women's divisions - first, second and third place teams. **(2003)**

5.5.2 *USOA* patches/rockers shall be given to all competitors .

5.5.3 all other awards are optional.

5.6 Trophy Value: When trophies are awarded, their value, based on the dealer's price list, shall not exceed \$250.00 for first place, \$150.00 for second place, and \$100.00 for third place.

5.7 Other previously approved awards must precede the above sequence of presentations.

## **ARTICLE VI OTHER HONORS & AWARDS**

There are several other yearly honors and awards for freediving spearfishers

6.1 All American Freediving Teams

6.1.1 Men - This honor is granted to the members (3) of the first place Mens Championship team at the national Championships plus the 2 highest scoring men not on the Championship team.

6.1.1.1 The host may award ribboned *Society* logo medals to

each member.

6.1.2 Women - This honor is granted to the members (2) of the first place Women's Championship team at the national Championships plus the two women placing highest not on the Championship team.

6.1.2.1 The host may award ribboned *Society* logo medals to each member.

6.2 Freediving Spearfishing Athletes of the Year -

6.2.1 By a method to be determined, one man and one woman will be designated as the Man and Woman Freediving Spearfisher of the year.

6.2.2 The designated athletes will be nominated to the Executive Committee to be considered as *USOA* nominees to the *USOC*.

6.2.3 A suitable memento of the honor will be bestowed

## **ARTICLE VII INTERNATIONAL TEAM SELECTION**

The process of selecting the *USOA* International Freediving Spearfishing Teams; rules apply equally to Men's and Women's Teams

7.1. A team consists of 3 competitors, 1 alternate competitor and a team captain

7.1.1 Team members must be US citizens or resident non citizens.

7.1.1.1 Resident non citizens may join the team if the non resident meets the *CMAS* current requirements. (1998)

7.2 Selection is based on a percentage ranking achieved at the two National Championships held during the two years prior to the international year of competition. (1996)

7.2.1. The top individual diver's score in the first National Championships will represent 100%.

7.2.2 All other divers scores will be a percentage of the top individual diver's score.

7.3 The same procedure will be applied to all National Championships thereafter, and the two year's scores are combined

7.4. The four divers with the total highest percentage scores will be the International Team members.

7.4.1 In case of ties, the most recent, previous National Championships scores will have priority.

7.5 Alternates: if a diver eligible to the International Team cannot participate, the diver with the next highest score replaces the team member. The process continues until a team of 4 is complete.

7.6 Divers eligible and participating on an International Team must

secure their position 270 days prior to the meet date or 30 days after the meet site announcement (whichever less) with a \$1,000 deposit to the Society Treasurer. **(2005)**

7.6.1 Deposit moneys may be used to pay entry fees, registration fees and other directly related expenses for the team. Any balance will be used for other athlete tournament expenses.

7.7 In any year without a National Championship, the two preceding championships standings prior to the international meet will be used.

7.8 The International Team Captain shall be chosen by the 4 diving members and is subject to the same regulations as in 8.3 - the deposit.

7.8.1 If no captain is chosen or available, the National Director may act as Captain.

7.9 Prior to 1998, the official *USOA* International Team was the National Championship team.

## **ARTICLE VIII RULE CHANGES**

The process for changing competitive rules is as set forth in the *Standardized Competitive Rules*.

### 8.1 Meeting Information

8.1.1 To insure a good competitive representation, the competitive rules meeting shall be held at the site of the National Championships three days prior to the meet.

8.1.2 Should a National Championships not be held in any given year, all rule changes and/or business would revert to the annual *USOA* Board of Directors meeting.

8.2 Rule changes voted upon and passed by the *Board of Directors* shall take effect immediately.

8.2.1 Rule changes approved by the *Board of Governors* shall be sent to all members of the *USOA* Competitive Committee by the Freediving Director within 30 days following notification of the approval of the *Board of Governors*.

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**2000** Rule Change: 3.3.2  
**2002** Rule Change: 4.7.1  
**2003** Rule Change: 2.2.3; 2.2.4; 2.2.5; 3.3.2; 3.10.9; 4.2.2.1; 4.2.2.2;  
4.3.5.4; 4.7.1; 5.4.5; 5.4.7; 5.5.1;  
**2005** Rule Change: 3.8.1; 3.8.2: 3:13; 4.7.1; 4.10.4, 7.6