



MEMORANDUM

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2025-2026 NCAA Track and Field & Cross Country NCAA Championship Competitions Explanation of Scratches, Did Not Start, Failure to Participate, and Misconduct / Unsporting conduct

For these topics, there are many discussion threads that can occur and many of them overlap. Therefore, pointed questions with short and direct answers are almost impossible. The following discussion attempts to isolate some of the key elements, provide answers/solutions/interpretations for them individually and then incorporate conclusions into an acceptable procedure. The material which follows, prepared by the NCAA Men's and Women's Track and Field Secretary-Rules Editor, makes reference to and is based not only on the Competition Rules, but also the policy and procedures adopted by the Sport Committees. The key elements are not in any pre-determined order of presentation. Rule citations are mentioned where applicable. It is important to remember that this discussion is mainly focused on Championship protocol, beginning with the Conference Championship. However, certain elements do have application in other types of competitions, but the consequences are far less severe.

A Scratch (SCR), for any reason, is a voluntary abandoning of an event by the participant prior to the staging of the event. In general, the staging of the event is the point in time where participants are escorted to, or allowed to be at, the site of the event. The timing of a scratch and the type of scratch may have different procedures and ramifications for a specific competition. For Championship competition, as a result of the declaration process, a scratch cannot be automatically generated by simply not reporting for an event. In many non-Championship competitions, not reporting does generate a scratch and seeding occurs after the close of reporting.

Within the Championship competition format, scratches are usually allowed on an event-by-event basis, without prejudice or ramification, during the declaration period of the Championship. After the close of declaration, a scratch can no longer be on an event-by-event basis regardless of the reason. Simply stated, the declaration of a competitor is not revocable (Indoor Rule 6-2 and Outdoor Rule 14-2). Committees have adopted policy that any scratch after the close of declaration must be for all declared events for the competitor. The primary reason for this policy is the protection against the shifting of personnel after the full field has been disclosed.

The requested reporting of a medical scratch is to help administer the Championship by giving the Committee an opportunity to take appropriate steps – such as finding replacements in order to achieve mandated caps or field sizes, consider redrawing heats or flights, maintain fair competition and minimize last-minute changes within the competition.

A competition site scratch is rare at a Championship. However, Did Not Start (DNS) situations are more common. A 'no show' at an event where a declaration has occurred, should normally be listed as DNS, not as SCR. Some effects are the same for both, but some are distinctly different.

For a scratch, once made, the result is the same as indicated for a scratch after declaration; the competitor is removed from all declared events. There is no opportunity to return to competition for medical or any other reason. The provisions of Indoor Rules 4-18(c) and 6-2(d) and Outdoor Rules 12-19(c) and 14-2(d) do not apply for a scratch once made. A DNS at a competition site has the effect of invoking several actions, some are a result of Indoor Rule 6-2 and Outdoor Rule 14-2, Failure to Participate, and other effects are the involvement of the Referee and the Committee in their authorized roles to determine the reason for the DNS. Not always is the result the removal from all declared events.

Participation, defined in Indoor Rule 6-2(b) and Outdoor Rule 14-2(b), is mandated in Indoor Rule 6-2(a) and Outdoor Rule 14-2(a). In an overly simplified statement, a competitor, if declared, must start the event. If not, then it could be considered Failure to Participate. The challenge is in determining whether a DNS satisfies the conditions for violation. The Referee is responsible to make the determination on one major element. That element is the existence of any condition or circumstance beyond the control of the competitor. When none exists, the determination is straight forward. A violation of this rule imposes the removal from all remaining participation in the competition, except for events that are 'in progress'. An 'in progress' event is one in which attempts are currently being executed. A Combined Event is defined as a single event and once the first of its stages has started, the entire Combined Event is 'in-progress'. 'In progress' does not include an event in which one round has completed and a subsequent round has not started. There is no requirement that the Referee or Meet Management waits for a complaint or protest before determining the existence of a violation of Failure to Participate. In many Championships, this is the automatic result of a report from the Clerk or an observation by a member of Meet Management.

A very common circumstance that fits this category and invokes the most controversy is best described as a temporary medical ailment. Proper documentation and administration of this condition can yield a non-violation ruling and therefore not mandate automatic removal from subsequent competition. There is no requirement that there be a clerk check-in or that the competitor be physically present at the event site. The Referee or Meet Management must be presented with evidence documenting a sufficient medical condition whereas the competitor's participation in that specific event is deemed to be physically detrimental to the welfare of that athlete. The condition may be of the nature that would make it detrimental in one specific event/activity and would not be detrimental in another event requiring another skill. Or it may be such that immediate treatment would produce a result that relieves the medical condition. In any case, Indoor Rule 4-18 and Outdoor Rule 12-19 require a 'certificate of fitness' for continued participation to be prepared by the medical advisor approved by the championship committee.

The medical clearance to compete is not an authorization to compete. The Referee must determine and allow further participation only if the competitor is eligible for further participation based on any other pertinent rules.

A situation that is cited frequently involves a competitor who is physically present at a running event, makes an attempt by participating in the start and then after a very few steps, withdraws from the event or fails to attempt to be competitive during the event. This is not by definition a Failure to Participate, therefore not a situation covered in Indoor Rule 6-2 and Outdoor Rule 14-2. However, it may be a Misconduct or Unsporting situation. The spirit of competition requires a competitor to compete in an honest and sporting manner to the best of their ability within an event, Indoor Rule 6-1 and Outdoor Rule 14-1. Not doing so is a violation and may be treated as Misconduct or Unsporting conduct. Unsporting conduct, such as issues of behavior, intentional false starts or non-competitiveness, are all treated in the same manner.

As with Failure to Participate, there is no requirement that the Referee wait for a complaint or protest before determining the existence of a Misconduct or Unsporting conduct (Honest Effort) violation. Meet Management may be proactive upon witnessing a performance that appears to not be the best competitive ability and initiate an investigation. However, it is more common for a report of this violation to come to the Referee in the form of a protest. The responsibility of the Referee is to determine if just cause exists for the apparent lack of best ability. If declared, a competitor must not only 'participate' but must also 'compete', Indoor Rule 6-1 and Outdoor Rule 14-1. The determination may include any evidence relevant to making a decision, such as medical information or competitor actions. With regard to Unsporting conduct, a basic question to answer is: 'Was there legitimate reason for the competitor's action?'

In cases involving Failure to Participate, the remedy available to the Referee is fully determined after a conclusion by the Referee of the existence of a violation. In Misconduct or Unsporting (Honest Effort) cases, there is greater latitude given to the Referee in the type of remedy authorized.

Remedies – The following are either mandated or otherwise determined through the Referee in the first instance and through Meet Management / Jury as an appeal to any Referee decision.

Scratch: The ramifications of a scratch are governed by Meet Management policy. Within Championship competition, where a defined declaration process is in place, committee policy has been very consistent. A scratch before the close of declaration can occur on an event-by event basis without jeopardy. After the close of declaration, any scratch, a voluntary removal from an event for any reason, results in a mandated removal from all further competition. This includes events not yet started and subsequent rounds of events already started. A removal for a temporary medical ailment, as described above, is not a scratch.

A competitor who abandons a Combined Event at a stage, after the first stage, does not jeopardize competition in any existing or future individual event since a scratch prior to the event, or a round, has not occurred. Similarly, a scratch from an individual event occurring while the Combined Event competition is 'in-progress' does not mandate the removal of the competitor from the remaining stages of the Combined Event.

Failure to Participate: This rule violation requires a determination by the Referee or Meet Management that a violation has occurred. After such determination, the mandated remedy is applied as stated in the rule.

Did Not Start: For this condition, the Referee must determine the cause. Such determination will result in imposing a mandated remedy or allowing solutions to be created and imposed as authorized by rule by the Referee.

Misconduct or Unsporting conduct: This is a rule violation that must be validated by the Referee or Jury of Appeal, who is then solely authorized to create and impose a remedy that best fits the situation.

MK:jf