

## The Groucho Marx Club

*By Jon Blank*

At the September USMS convention, your national delegates approved resolutions aligning USMS with current FINA rules. These rules include new interpretations of what is a legal backstroke finish and a legal breaststroke turn. In addition, one rule generating concern was the adoption of a FINA rule regarding unattached swimmers.

Going forward, any sanctioned USMS meet that enrolls an unattached swimmer will have ALL times invalidated for Top Ten times. Note that it will not just be the invalidation of the unattached swimmer's times, but all entrants' times. Some thought this a draconian decision. Others recognized it as a pragmatic mirroring of USMS to FINA requirements. Adoption of the rules changes included the designation of "emergency approval", this is because 2013 is a "legislation year", as opposed to a "rules year". Some USMS members expressed dismay that these rules were approved without sufficient time for contemplation.

After the convention, on the USMS online Discussion Forums, further controversy ensued. In the past, many USMS athletes have competed as unattached (UNAT) swimmers. Some don't train with a club, and so have no overt club designation. Others are switching from one club to another and need a period of time as a non-aligned "unattached" athlete. The perceived problem for these swimmers now, is that they will need either not compete, or to align with a club in order to compete in USMS sanctioned events. Otherwise, "unattached" swimmers risk alienating every single swimmer who hoped for Top Ten times from that meet.

Why did USMS accept this rule? Simply put, FINA required it. Apparently, FINA had concerns at the international level (not necessarily for masters meets, though) about swimmers who did not belong to a national federation.

So, in order to ensure every competitor had a federation affiliation and would thus be governed by national federation rules, FINA decreed that no swimmer could compete "unattached". USMS, as an entity ultimately governed by FINA, had no choice but to comply. So, going forward, no USMS swimmer will be unattached.

In a masterstroke, though, USMS cut the Gordian knot of this problem by decreeing: *Rule 201.3.4 an unattached swimmer is an individual [USMS] member who is registered with the club Unattached through an LMSC. Competing while registered with the club Unattached shall not be considered as representing a club for purposes of 201.3.5.*

Thus, USMS has created a new category: **Club Unattached**. Now, in any USMS meet, no one can swim unattached, instead they are automatically entered in **Club Unattached** (which by ruling is not a club) at the time of entry into a USMS-sanctioned meet. Swimmers may still be without affiliation, and everyone's times in a sanctioned meet will still count. It's transparent to the swimmer who is otherwise unaffiliated, and satisfies FINA regulations. It also reminds me of the convoluted logic that allowed two disgraced solo ice skaters to compete as a pairs team in Will Ferrell's movie, "Blades of Glory",

**Club Unattached**...This brings me to Groucho Marx' classic line. For those who may not remember, I'll set the stage: Julius Henry "Groucho" Marx was a legendary vaudevillian, the leader of the Marx Brothers comedy troupe. Upon learning of his election to a famous comedy organization (the Friar's Club), he demurred, with the statement, "I don't care to belong to any club that will have me as a member".