

USA TRIATHLON
Judicial Committee

In the Matter of:

Tina Whiteford
IRONMAN 70.3 Dallas Little Elm

Panel Members:

Davis Backer, Esq., Chair

Melanie Neumann, Esq.

Greg Billington, Athlete Representative

DECISION AND ORDER OF USAT JUDICIAL COMMITTEE

On March 18, 2026, Tina Whiteford submitted a complaint to USA Triathlon (“USAT”)¹ pursuant to Section 2, Paragraph 2(C) of USAT’s Grievance and Disciplinary Policy in connection with an event sanctioned by the IRONMAN Group.² After review by the USAT Office of General Counsel, the complaint was referred to the Judicial Committee for resolution. And on April 10, 2026, a three-member panel of USAT’s Judicial Committee (the “Panel”) convened to consider the merits of the complaint. Having considered both in-person testimony and written material submitted by Ms. Whiteford and race officials, the Panel finds as follows:

¹ USAT is the National Governing Body (or National Federation) for triathlon and multisport in the United States. USAT sanctions events for race directors throughout the United States, including for the IRONMAN Group. Under Section 3.06 of the IRONMAN Competition Rules, an athlete’s right to protest or appeal is governed and handled by the event’s sanctioning body or the relevant National Federation. In this case, USAT’s Grievance and Disciplinary Policy governs the Judicial Committee’s review of this matter.

²See https://assets.contentstack.io/v3/assets/blteb7d012fc7ebef7f/blt61c40cd4806721b4/6849ed1cdd62106f86eba2eb/USAT_Grievance_Policy_May_2025.pdf. Last visited: July 25, 2026.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On March 15, 2026, IRONMAN hosted the 70.3 Dallas Little Elm Triathlon in Dallas, Texas. The race was originally supposed to consist of a 1.2-mile swim, a 56-mile bike, and a 13.1-mile run. Severe weather conditions on race day, however, dictated cancelling the swim portion of the race for amateur athletes. Sustained winds of 25-35 miles per hour, with gusts up to 45 miles per hour, created challenging conditions for athletes, race officials, and volunteers alike. Firsthand reports of havoc on course and in the transition area were plenty: bike racks collapsing, helmets and other race equipment being scattered in the wind, and race infrastructure toppling over. For many athletes it was a day to forget.

One of those athletes—Tina Whiteford—crossed the finish line in 8 hours 20 minutes and 2 seconds. Sometime after, Ms. Whiteford went back to transition to collect her belongings including her bike, helmet, and other race equipment. Ms. Whiteford would experience the same disarray hundreds of other athletes were forced to navigate that day as many of them found that their belongings were not where they originally left them, having been scattered in the wind. For Ms. Whiteford, some of her equipment appeared to be missing altogether. It remains unclear what happened to some of these items, whether they were mistakenly picked up by other athletes, or whether they ended up wind-blown into a nearby field adjacent to the transition area.

As a matter of course, when athletes leave the transition area, there are designated race volunteers whose role is to check athletes' race numbers against the equipment they are carrying to ensure that the right equipment goes home with the right athletes. In this case, Ms. Whiteford's interaction with this particular race volunteer as she was leaving transition is the subject of her complaint and the focus of the Panel's review.

Decision and Order of USA Triathlon Judicial Committee
In the Matter of Tina Whiteford
2026-01

There are two conflicting accounts of the interaction shared between Ms. Whiteford and Rosa Acree—the IRONMAN volunteer who was stationed at the exit of transition and who was responsible for checking athlete wristbands against the equipment they were carrying. Ms. Acree alleges that Ms. Whiteford approached her with her bike and was visibly upset. When Ms. Acree asked what was wrong and whether she could help, Ms. Whiteford allegedly responded with a series of expletives, venting her frustration at her missing equipment and asserting that Ms. Acree was in some way responsible for the disarray. Ms. Acree explained that her role was simply to verify athletes' wristbands against the bike they were carrying. At this point, it is alleged that Ms. Whiteford stepped closer to Ms. Acree and, in the midst of her frustration, may have inadvertently spit on Ms. Acree. As for the missing equipment, Ms. Acree explained that another athlete may have inadvertently picked it up as they were collecting their own gear and offered to take down Ms. Whiteford's contact information in case her gear was later returned or found in the post-race cleanup. Ms. Whiteford allegedly directed further profanity at Ms. Acree, accusing her of negligence, before leaving transition in the direction of her car.

For her part, Ms. Whiteford disputes this account—strongly. She insists that she never directed any profanity in the direction of Ms. Acree (or any race volunteer for that matter). She admits that the challenging race conditions left her exhausted and frustrated when she could not find all of her belongings in transition but, as a member of the racing community, insists that she would never verbally abuse race staff as has been alleged. Her account of this interaction is far more measured, and she insists that after inquiring what may have happened to her belongings, she calmly left transition for her car. The only admitted use of profanity came when she attempted to lift her bike into the back of her car (a few hundred yards away) and a gust of wind blew the bike into the side of her car, causing her to curse in frustration.

Decision and Order of USA Triathlon Judicial Committee
In the Matter of Tina Whiteford
2026-01

Following their interaction, Ms. Acree reported her experience to Nancy Goodnight—the IRONMAN race director for Dallas Little Elm 70.3. Ms. Goodnight conferred with the IRONMAN race officials who would later disqualify Ms. Whiteford’s race result after finding her in violation of Sections 2.01(a) (unsportsmanlike conduct) and 2.01(e) (abusive language) of IRONMAN’s competition rules. Ms. Whiteford later filed the present complaint challenging her disqualification and requests that her result be reinstated. This Panel was convened to review the complaint and issue a decision on the merits.

BURDEN OF PROOF

Under USAT’s Grievance and Disciplinary Policy, in the case of disciplinary matters disputed by a member of USAT, the burden of proof rests with IRONMAN to prove its allegations by a preponderance of the evidence. *See* Paragraph Q. “Preponderance of the evidence” means “more likely true than not true.” *Id.*

ANALYSIS

The Panel begins with a principle that informs—but does not decide—its review of this matter. Volunteers are indispensable to amateur sports. Events like this one depend on individuals who freely contribute their time to staff aid stations, monitor courses, manage transition areas, assist athletes, and perform countless other, often thankless, tasks necessary to holding a safe and orderly competition. Without their service, many amateur and professional sporting events could not occur. Race organizers and national governing bodies therefore have a legitimate and important interest in fostering an environment in which volunteers feel welcome, respected, and encouraged to continue serving the athletic community.

That interest is more than a matter of courtesy. Across amateur and youth sports, governing organizations and public reports have documented a clear rise in persistent verbal harassment,

Decision and Order of USA Triathlon Judicial Committee
In the Matter of Tina Whiteford
2026-01

intimidation, and, in some instances physical attacks directed at officials and volunteers by athletes, coaches, parents, and spectators.³ These reports can, and do, drive experienced volunteers away, discourage others from stepping forward, and ultimately threaten the continued availability of the competitions that athletes look forward to. Rules requiring athletes to treat these volunteers with respect therefore serve an essential function. This broader concern does not establish what occurred in any particular interaction, nor does it relieve IRONMAN of its burden of proof here. It does, however, explain why allegations of abusive conduct toward a race volunteer must be taken seriously and evaluated carefully.

As an initial matter, the Panel acknowledges that it is not ideally situated to determine what exactly may have been said between Ms. Whiteford and Ms. Acree in the transition area on race day. No video or audio recordings of the exchange were provided and so the Panel is limited to (i) the written reports submitted in connection with Ms. Whiteford's complaint and in the documentation supporting her disqualification by race officials; and (ii) the in-person testimony provided by Ms. Whiteford, Ms. Acree, and Ms. Goodnight after speaking with the Panel in the course of our investigation. The Judicial Committee, guided by USAT's Grievance and Disciplinary Policy, was not designed to litigate instances of hearsay (in layman's terms: "he-said, she-said") but the Panel is obligated to make a threshold credibility determination here. On the one hand, Ms. Whiteford insists that she took a calm and measured approach to her exchange with Ms. Acree and shared her disappointment that some of her belongings appeared to be missing. On the other hand, Ms. Acree, Ms. Goodnight, and at least one other race representative, attest that they

³ See, e.g., <https://www.today.com/parents/youth-sports-referees-across-us-are-quitting-because-abusive-parents-t126087>. Last visited: July 25, 2026. See also <https://www.naso.org/resources/legislation/state-legislation/>. Last visited: July 25, 2026.

were in the vicinity of the exchange and all three corroborate a similar story: the athlete—Ms. Whiteford—was rude and verbally abusive to a race volunteer who was doing her best under challenging conditions. The Panel has no reason to find any motive for these individuals to falsify their version of events. Given the information available and the two contradicting accounts of the interaction in transition, the Panel is satisfied that IRONMAN has satisfied its burden of proof and that it is more likely true than not that Ms. Whiteford directed inappropriate, and potentially abusive, language towards Ms. Acree. The Panel next considers whether race officials were warranted in disqualifying Ms. Whiteford’s race result based on IRONMAN’s competition rules.

Article II of IRONMAN’s competition rules addresses athlete conduct.⁴ As discussed *supra*, IRONMAN race officials assert that their decision to disqualify Ms. Whiteford was based on violations of Section 2.01(a), which states that athletes must “[p]ractice good sportsmanship at all times,” and 2.01(e), which states that athletes must “[t]reat referees, officials, volunteers, spectators, the public, and other athletes with respect and courtesy.” Given the Panel’s finding that Ms. Whiteford likely did direct inappropriate language at a race volunteer, the Panel is satisfied that she violated both of these articles of IRONMAN’s competition rules. Article II, however, is ambiguous about the consequences for such a violation. To illustrate, Section 2.01 catalogs fifteen different examples of “general behavior” that athletes must adhere to before, during, and after competition. In *six* of these examples, IRONMAN went so far as to explicitly caution that violation would result in *disqualification*. See, e.g., Section 2.01(l) (athletes must “[n]ot use any device that will distract the athlete from paying full attention to their surroundings. Using a device in a distracting manner will result in **disqualification**”); see also Section 2.01(o) (athletes must

⁴ See https://www.ironman.com/sites/default/files/2026-02/2026%20IRONMAN%20Competition%20Rules_Final_V2.pdf. Last visited: July 25, 2026.

“[a]void indecent exposure and public nudity at all times during the event. Indecent exposure and/or nudity may result in **disqualification**” (emphases in original).

Notably absent from 2.01(a) or 2.01(e)—the two provisions race officials relied on to support Ms. Whiteford’s disqualification here—is any mention of disqualification. Even if officials had relied on 2.01(g) (avoiding the use of abusive language), that provision too is silent with respect to disqualification. That the rules explicitly caution against the risk of disqualification for certain violations of Article II but not for others suggests that the rules committee knew how to warn athletes of this consequence where appropriate. The Panel must assume that IRONMAN was intentional where it chose not to spell out this consequence for violations of 2.01(a) or (e).

Our analysis, however, does not end there. Article III is dedicated to penalties generally.

Section 3.01(a) states:

Failure to comply with any of the Competition Rules may result in an athlete being punished with a thirty (30) second time penalty or a two (2:00) minute time penalty (for the IRONMAN 70.3-branded races); a sixty (60) second time penalty or a three (3:00) minute time penalty (for the IRONMAN-branded races); disqualification from the event, suspension from multiple events, or expulsion for life from all events.

It would appear that 3.01(a) serves as a catchall provision putting athletes on notice that failure to comply with *any* of IRONMAN’s competition rules carries with it the risk of disqualification. Section 3.03(b) reinforces this conclusion. It states that athletes may be disqualified from an event for severe rule violations including, but not limited to, “repeated rule violations, fraud/misrepresentation (*e.g.*, unauthorized transfer of a racing bib or timing chip to another athlete), disregard for directives given by race referees or race officials, or dangerous or *unsportsmanlike conduct*.” (emphasis added). Finally, Appendix A to IRONMAN’s competition rules outlines common competition rule violations and the corresponding penalties. The third entry

in the table: “using unsportsmanlike behavior” explains that the penalty is “DSQ or potential suspension.” *See* 2026 Competition Rules at 34.⁵

While Article II, Section 2.01 of IRONMAN’s competition rules could be revised to avoid some of the ambiguity identified above, the Panel is satisfied that race officials reasonably disqualified Ms. Whiteford’s race result given the allegations against her. Sections 3.01(a) and 3.03(b) afforded them that discretion and Appendix A confirms that this is common practice.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, the Panel finds that the race officials’ decision to disqualify Ms. Whiteford’s race result at IRONMAN 70.3 Dallas Little Elm was consistent with the plain language and spirit of IRONMAN’s competition rules and we uphold their decision.

Dated: July 30, 2026

DAVIS BACKER,
Chair, USAT Judicial Committee

GREG BILLINGTON,
Member, USAT Judicial Committee

MELANIE NEUMANN,
Member, USAT Judicial Committee

⁵ While IRONMAN’s competition rules govern the Panel’s review of this matter, the outcome would not have been different had USAT’s competition rules applied. Article 2.3 states: “Athletes must practice good sportsmanship at all times, and treat other athletes, officials, volunteers and spectators with respect and courtesy. Verbal or physical abuse of others is not acceptable or tolerated. Athletes shall always refrain from unsportsmanlike conduct while at the event site and during racing, including: (i) the use of abusive language; (ii) violent acts; (iii) intentional misconduct; (iv) any intimidating behavior directed towards athletes, officials, event staff, volunteers, and spectators; and (v) efforts by members of a team to abandon their ambition during a race.” USAT explicitly warns that the penalty for violation of this rule is disqualification and report to USAT for possible suspension.