Amended Report and Recommendations of the

Aerial Training Development Task Force

Original Report Approval - September 16, 2011

Revised – March 19, 2025

INTRODUCTION

This committee was formed at the 2009 USAS Convention, charged with the initial responsibility to research and determine the feasibility of USA Diving changing its current policy prohibiting athletes from performing out-of-belt somersaults and twisting elements (OOB) on dryland equipment (principally dry board and trampoline). Hand spotting or other activities on ground mats are not included in this report.

Prior to the approval of the original Report, USA Diving coaches were not permitted to authorize athletes to perform somersaults or twisting skills out of the belts customarily used. USA Diving coaches asked for the matter to be researched and, if possible, to revise this policy so that out-of-belt skills could be performed without violating USA Diving policies.

The first step undertaken was to determine whether USA Diving had really established a policy on the subject and whether that policy had become a general "standard of care" within our sport. We reviewed the various publications of USA Diving and determined that the answer to the first questions was "yes," and probably "yes" to the second, at least to the extent the policy applied to everyone regardless of skill, education, experience, or competency.

The second step was to research and define the extent of the OOB policy application as a "standard of care" and to determine whether it is possible to refine, redefine, or change this policy, and the concomitant question of how such modification could occur. To this end, we engaged a law student at Stetson University College of Law who, collaborating with myself and a Stetson torts professor, undertook national research on these questions and prepared a detailed article, concluding:

A. USA Diving's policy and the resulting standard were adopted for general application, giving no regard to either a coach's or athlete's ability.
B. The policy could be changed upon it being determined that there existed good faith reasons warranting a change and that the changes would be based upon reasonable assessments of both athlete and coach readiness, together with facility safety requirements.

Accordingly, the purpose of the Original Report was to submit for the Board's consideration the process for the revision of the former OOB policy, to allow coaches to permit athletes to perform out-of-belt somersaults and twisting elements on dryland equipment under defined conditions.

The circumstances supporting our change of OOB policy were and remain substantial, as explained by numerous coaches, including:

1. Our competitive level coach and athlete members feel they are disadvantaged by the existing policy, as it negatively impacts their training without a corresponding safety benefit for those capable of executing these elements.
2. We are, as far as we can determine, alone in this arena, as we are the only NGB or sports body that has this OOB limitation, even though other sports and organizations have similar activities in both their training and competitions. This determination is worldwide.
3. Other organizations without the current OOB restrictions report no injury history associated with their out-of-belt activities which would give rise to safety concerns, i.e., there is no available record showing injuries associated with out-of-belt activities are more likely, frequent, or serious than injuries in other aerial sports generally.
4. Our members are virtually united in their opposition to current policy. While this is not necessarily a reason to change, it does indicate the collective judgment of the world's largest diving body on a subject within their expertise.
5. We have substantial member support. Our coaches and experienced athletes understand the issue and will support reasonable criteria in affecting this change.

As we go forward, it is important for us to remember a few concepts:

1. We are refining our current "one size fits all" policy, not discarding it. The current policy will still apply to everyone except those who meet the criteria to come under the revised policy based on the three areas defined below.
2. In no way shall our revision of the OOB policy require any member to participate in OOB activity. This change in policy merely allows coaches to include OOB training under the circumstances described in this document. This change in policy does not provide any certification of competence of the coach or athlete; it merely defines the conditions under which OOB skills may be permitted. A coach, facility owner, or other party may adopt different policies as they wish.
3. The responsibility for a coach's decision to permit an athlete to perform out-of-belt elements lies only with the coach (or facility management) and not with the USA Diving. We do not and cannot control our coaches or the facilities where they operate their programs.
4. The criteria and qualifications we set must be reasonable and be set forth in language as clear and objective as possible. They must also be perceived as fair and capable of attainment by our member coaches.
5. In this document, USA Diving provides strategies and suggested guidelines for our coaches to help manage risks associated with dryland training using trampolines and dry boards for out-of-belt somersaults. It will be the responsibility of the individual coaches to manage the risk associated with the actual training at their locations and training sites.
6. In the USA Diving Safety Manual, Second Edition, we describe the procedures for risk management for diving coaches (pg.8). USA Diving does not and cannot guarantee the safety of any coach using OOB training under any circumstances. The purpose of this document is to provide coaches with procedures and policies to assist in their independent

decisions to allow athletes to perform out of belts somersaults and twists, and do so without violating the policies of USA Diving. To that end, we have prepared a recommended policy comprised of three elements:

A. Coach Selection
B. Facility and Equipment
C. Athlete Readiness

A. COACH SELECTION

Not all coaches are able to determine athlete OOB readiness. Before a coach may allow an athlete to perform out-of-belt somersaults or twists, the coach must have the requisite training, as provided through the USA Diving Safety Manual, and sufficient experience as a coach using dryland equipment to make the decisions required.

To authorize OOB activity, the Coach must:

Be a Coach Member of USA Diving, Inc.
Be immediately present when OOB activity is taking place
Warn of Inherent Risks
Keep Records
Plan an OOB lead up process for each skill and athlete to prepare for OOB skill
Provide an appropriate facility with reasonable safety elements in place
Provide Proper Equipment
Provide Adequate Supervision
Provide Proper Instruction
Know a Diver's Skills and Limitations in comparison to the OOP skill to be done.
Assess an athlete's physical and mental/emotional readiness
Provide Proper First Aid & Emergency Care if necessary
Maintain Current Competencies as a coach
Maintain the current abilities of the athlete over time
Be aware of material changes in the athlete's performance, and
Adjust training as needed.

B. FACILITY AND EQUIPMENT

The following general principles apply to any dryland training facility, including those with only a dry board, only a trampoline, or those with multiple boards, trampolines, or other apparatus.

A. The equipment and its installation are consistent with the provisions of the USA Diving Safety Training Manual, 2nd edition, Parts 5-8 (1999), manufacturer specifications, and local codes.
B. The equipment is inspected regularly and maintained in safe operating condition.

C. The facility is constructed and maintained according to applicable building codes and has adequate lighting, ventilation, and other conditions allowing normal use for dryland training activities.
D. The facility has adequate clearances in all directions for the safe use of dryland equipment.
E. The coach is a coach member of USA Diving, and all athletes are USA Diving members before any program athlete performs OOB activities.

Equipment specifications should be goal-oriented and not tied to particular dimensions. There are many ways to accomplish different safety objectives, and USA Diving cannot anticipate every local situation or conceive of every way safety can be achieved under local conditions.

Coaches, in cooperation with facility administrators, should be aware of the safety objectives required for out-of-belt somersaults and twists. Coaches must adopt procedures and facility improvements to meet these objectives, including those referenced in this report, the U.S. Diving Safety Manual, Second Edition, the USA Diving Coach Development Reference Manual, and any others that may include relevant safety information.

Trampolines

The recommended minimum size of the trampoline bed should be 6 feet by 12 feet or a round bed with a minimum diameter of 12 feet. Spring pads are also recommended, sufficient to cover the springs. There should also be apparatus in place to accommodate an athlete who loses their balance, under or over rotates, and "runs" to catch their balance. Side and end decks are the most common.

The side and end decks should also have adequate restraints (rails) around them to prevent falling. Also, safety padding may be placed on the ground adjacent to the trampoline.

There are other ways to accomplish the safety objectives involved, such as nets, placing the trampoline next to padded walls, aligning multiple trampolines to use the same deck space, the use of in-ground trampoline beds, and a combination of these and other methods.

In the end, the objective is to create a reasonably safe environment for the athlete who under/over rotates or otherwise loses balance.

Dry Boards

The facility requirements for dry boards are set forth on pages 79-88 of the U.S. Diving Safety Manual, Second Edition. Although out-of-belts somersaults and twists are discouraged in the manual, page 80 in the manual does give the dimension requirements for the landing pad when out-of-belts somersaults are permitted, taking into consideration the possibility of "lateral drift":

Length: Minimum 12 feet; 16-18 feet "average" length

Width: Minimum 7 feet; 8-10 feet "average"

Depth: Minimum 32 inches; 36-42 inches is also available. The landing pad must be comprised of purpose-designed material; alternatives such as bed matrasses, gymnastic work-out pads and other 'soft' materials piled together are not sufficient.

The risk of an athlete landing out of balance exists on dry boards just as it does on trampolines; however, the rebound characteristics of the landing pad are generally less hazardous than those of a trampoline. End decks on the far end of the landing pad are not generally considered necessary due to the lack of rebound from a landing pad, though we do recommend padding be placed on the floor from the plumet of the board to the end of the handrail or platform.

Athletes should also be instructed to just sit down on the pad if possible when out of balance.

Facility Summary

We do not intend these recommendations to be requirements, other than those set forth in the USA Diving Safety Manual, Second Edition. We recognize there are undoubtedly many other ways that reasonable safety objectives can be achieved, depending on the local circumstances. Coaches need to be aware of the safety objectives and create safe environments to meet their needs.

Coaches also must be aware that certain risks are inherent in these activities, regardless of the precautions taken. Local situations may arise where additional or alternative precautions may be appropriate. We encourage all coaches to discuss their facility requirements with their facility owners/managers.

C. ATHLETE READINESS

The readiness factors for athletes include planning, proper instruction, supervision, and knowledge of the diver's skills and limitations. Coaches should be aware of the physical readiness of each individual athlete, the demands of each skill, and the athlete's mental/emotional readiness. It is important for coaches to evaluate both the physical factors that determine whether an athlete *can* perform a skill and the mental factors that determine whether the athlete is *mentally and emotionally prepared* to perform the skill. We suggest the coach ask the following questions, among others:

Should the athlete perform the skill, and if so, why necessarily now? Is the athlete prepared both physically and mentally; Is the Coach reasonably and objectively confident the athlete can perform the skill safely; Have adequate lead-ups been performed to give the athlete confidence in the athlete's ability; Does the athlete want to perform the OOB skill or, is the athlete reluctant to even try?

The following factors are recommended as minimum considerations: coaches must be aware that there may be other factors to consider depending on individual circumstances:

Readiness Factors for Athletes

- Physical Readiness – medical evaluation, pre-participation screening once a year, and cleared to participate.

- Demands of each skill and the abilities of the athlete performing the skill; multiple somersaults require a significantly greater level of skill than single OOB somersaults.
- Factors include strength, power, flexibility, muscular endurance, cardio-respiratory endurance, body composition, and physical skill level.
- Mental Readiness, does the athlete *believe* he/she *can* perform the OOB skill?
- The athlete must possess self-confidence, especially to overcome uncertainty
- Important factors include – learning to manage stress and control anxiety, the use of imagery skills, improvement of self-discipline, focus, and self-control, and identification and control of fear.
- Supervision by coaches and spotters on the sides of the trampoline or dryboard landing pad when necessary.

It is the responsibility of the coach to determine when an athlete is ready to perform out-of-belt somersaults or twists. We are providing only minimum recommended skill factors. Coaches will have the flexibility to have athletes advance in OOB skills when adequate preparation and safety conditions indicate the athlete is ready and able to do so.

As always, coaches must keep accurate records of practice plans and each athlete's accomplishment of pre-somersault elements, including the number of repetitions of each skill. In the event of an accident, the coach then has records to demonstrate that the diver was prepared to perform the skill.

CONCLUSION

The use of out of belt training greatly assists in the preparation of an athlete to perform skills in the water. Out of belt training permits the athlete to have a closer 'feel' of how the skill will feel in the water, and gives the athlete more self-confidence that she/he can perform the skill from the diving board into the water with confidence.

Aerial Training Development Task Force

William H. Walker

William H. Walker, Chair

Note: The foregoing document was approved March 19, 2025 in response to a request by USA Diving, Inc. The qualification for coach selection was determined to be a USA Diving Coach Member, as this membership requires the studying and passing a test on the USA Diving Safety Manual, Second Edition, review of this document and confirmation of the safety elements of the facilities to be used. The actual athlete test of safety skills was developed and is available on video through USA Diving. Some edits to the original report have been made in this document based upon subsequent data and experience since 2011. Other than these edits, the text of the original remains applicable in this update.

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