

Athlete Safeguarding in USQRA Classification

The first wheelchair rugby sport specific classification system was developed in the United States in 1990. From the beginning of the USQRA, classification procedures have ensured all athletes are treated with respect and protected from harassment and abuse. Athlete classification in the USQRA has been built on respect and cooperation between athletes, coaches, team management and support staff, competition organizers, and classifiers.

Crucial to safeguarding athletes is having policies and procedures in place in the USQRA that protect against harassment and abuse. The specific procedures that promote safe sport and safeguards against harassment and abuse in USQRA classification are found in the USQRA Classification Rules outlined in this document.

USQRA Classification Manual Rules and Regulations

The article numbers from the United States Quad Rugby Association Classification Manual Rules and Regulations reference specific procedures in the USQRA classification rules, 4th ed. 2017-2018. Comments to the articles provide further detail.

The United States Quad Rugby Association Classification Manual Rules and Regulations, 4th ed. 2017-2018 is publically available on the USQRA website.

Article 3 Athlete evaluation

This article describes the process by which an athlete is assessed according to the USQRA Classification Rules. Of particular importance to athlete safety, the USQRA classification rules require a panel of three USQRA certified classifiers to conduct athlete evaluation.

Comment: USQRA classification rules require a panel of more than one classifier for several reasons, one of which is athletes' safety. Athletes are evaluated in a more private environment for multiple reasons, one of which is to safeguard athlete safety when they are asked to remove parts of their uniform in order to observe and palpate muscle function, measure range of motion, and in those athletes with limb deficiency, take measures of limb length. Having the physical assessment conducted in a more private atmosphere takes care to respect the sensitivity of this environment for athletes.

Exceptions to a panel of three certified classifiers are described in Article 7.7.2.9 of the USQRA classification rules.

Article 7 Classification procedures

This article describes the procedures used in USQRA classification, of specific importance for athlete safeguarding:

Article 7.2 Athlete presentation for evaluation

This article describes the procedures used when the athlete presents to the classification evaluation session. Of particular importance to athlete safety is athlete presentation for evaluation in Articles 7.2.2 – 7.2.6.

7.2.2 The Chief Classifier or designee should meet with the athlete and accompanying support staff in the classification reception area. If the athlete chooses not to have an accompanying support person at any stage, they may do so. However, the athlete is only undertaking orientation to the process to ensure the athlete has met the requirements for dress and equipment needed to proceed to athlete evaluation with the classification panel.

7.2.4 Athletes have the right to request a support person, such as a coach or team representative, accompany the athlete when attending athlete evaluation.

7.2.6 Athletes may also request a Player Classification Representative (PCR) be present during athlete evaluation to observe the assessment. (Refer to Article 11.8 for the description of the PCR and explanation of their roles during athlete evaluation.)

Article 7.4 Classification process briefing

Athletes and accompanying support staff are briefed on the procedures in the classification process including what is required with appropriate dress and equipment, and to bring up any issues that need to be addressed in the evaluation. For example, if an athlete wishes to not remove clothing for evaluation, other alternatives can be arranged.

Article 7.5 Athlete evaluation procedure

7.5.2 Athletes may be requested to remove uniform tops if necessary to test and observe muscle contractions and movements during the evaluation. Female athletes should wear appropriate underclothing to permit removal of uniform tops.

Comment: Removal of uniform tops may be necessary for classifiers to determine if and how much specific shoulder, back and chest muscles are contracting (necessary to measure impairment in these muscles, which impacts on the allocation of the correct sport class). Visual observation of the muscles and limb length assists in accuracy. Being aware of the sensitivity of athletes removing parts of their uniform, guidance is given to be prepared with whatever underclothing they would prefer to wear underneath the uniform to make it possible to observe the muscles or limbs. Any athlete may decline to remove uniform tops and if so, the classifiers will make as best a decision as possible. In this situation, the accuracy may be reduced; and if so, the athlete may be allocated a sport class that is higher (less impaired). For athletes with limb loss, removal of uniform tops and wearing shorts that allow exposure of hip bones may be needed to make accurate limb length measures. If the athlete declines, the classifiers will make the best decision possible, and in cases where accuracy is reduced, this may result in a decision of a less impaired class and potentially a not eligible class. As stated in the rules, the panel will consist of more than one classifier and the athlete may have a support staff and PCR present.

7.5.3 Athletes are also transferring out of their rugby wheelchairs to other surfaces for testing, such as a treatment table or mat. If a passive transfer is required, and athletes do not feel

comfortable with the classifiers lifting them (for whatever reason), athletes may request their support staff perform the transfers.

7.5.4 Athletes should be evaluated without any other athletes, coaches or support personnel present.

Comment: The classifiers make every effort to have a secluded location so the athletes are free from observation or attention of other athletes, coaches or support staff. If the competition organizers do not provide this and logistics do not permit an appropriately secluded area, the athlete may decline to undergo athlete evaluation. If the athlete is New and does not have a sport class, the athlete will leave the competition without a sport class. It is up to the competition organizers to decide if the athlete may participate at that completion. If the athlete entered with a valid USQRA sport class, the athlete will leave with that sport class and review status (R) meaning they will have to undergo evaluation at the soonest opportunity where a classification panel is present. In the case this is a post-season event, an athlete will not be able to participate without a valid sport class.

Article 7.6 Sport class and sport class status

7.6.7 Once the panel has made the sport class decision, the athlete is informed of the decision as soon as is logistically possible. The rules state at least one panel member will inform the athlete of the decision. In practice, this is done with two panel members, the athlete and the coach, unless the athlete declines to have the coach present. If further discussion is needed the athlete and coach may set up an appointment with the Chief Classifier for further steps (7.6.7.1).

Article 7.7 Sport class and sport class status allocation

7.7.2.9 An incomplete panel, particularly at developmental tournaments or training clinics, may allocate Temporary (T) sport class status.

Comment: In these situations, formal evaluation does not take place and the athlete does not go through a full athlete evaluation. The athlete does not have to remove uniform tops and will have a coach and/or team representative present for the informal evaluation.

Article 8 Athlete responsibilities

This article describes the responsibilities of the athlete in undergoing classification.

8.2.2.3 Describes that the athlete who opts to attend athlete evaluation without a support person present, is not penalized for failing to meet their responsibilities. They may undertake athlete evaluation and their choice to attend without a support person is noted on the athlete's classification form.

Article 11 Classification personnel

This article defines classification personnel and classifier responsibilities.

Article 11.2 Classifier

11.2.1-11.2.2 Classifiers are USQRA officials responsible for athlete evaluation as a member of a classification panel, with the exception of a level 3 or 4 classifier allocating a temporary (T) sport class status. (Article 7.7.2.9)

11.2.3.1 Comply with the USQRA Code of Conduct

11.2.3.2 Comply with the USQRA Code of Conduct

Article 11.3 Classification Panel

11.3.2 A valid USQRA panel must include at least three certified classifiers.

Comment: the only exception is for a temporary class, which does not involve a full evaluation and allocation of a valid sport class. Removal of clothing is not required. (Article 7.7.2.9)

Article 12 Entry criteria for classifier training

This article includes qualifications, professional experience and sport related experience.

Article 12.1

12.1.1 Qualifications include medical and health professionals with formal education and professional certification. For many, this will include training and education regarding patient safeguarding procedures, which may translate to working with athletes.

13 Classifier training

This article includes entry level and advanced training.

Article 13.1 Entry level

While the formal entry level training and education does not specifically include training on safeguarding athletes, this may be confirmed to have been included their formal professional education curriculum that includes safeguarding patients and clients.

14 Classifier certification process

This includes general principles and certification process for entry to advanced levels as well as evaluation of competencies and approval of certification.

Article 14.6

14.6.1 Entry level competency requires classifiers sign and comply with the USQRA Classifier Code of Conduct and the USQRA Code of Conduct.

15 Classifier code of conduct

Pertinent content in this article includes the general principles, roles and responsibilities of a classifier.

Article 15.1

15.1.1 Integrity in classification rests on the ethical conduct and professional behavior of each classifier.

15.1.2 When acting as a classifier or trainee, classification personnel must adhere to the behavioural and ethical standards set out in the USQRA Code of Conduct and the USQRA Code of Conduct.

Comment: The USQRA classifier code of conduct is located in Appendix D.2 of the classification rules. The USQRA Code of Conduct is on the USQRA website (<http://usqra.org/USQRA Code of Conduct>).

Considerations for Additional Athlete Safeguards

There are areas where additional safeguards may be considered by the USQRA in organization in general and specifically in classification:

USQRA Code of Conduct

USQRA may want to consider an organizational wide code of conduct and require that all relevant persons who have contact with athletes, such as coaches, team support staff, officials (referees and classifiers) formally state that they will abide by this, for example, through signing a USQRA code of conduct. USQRA Classifiers and trainee classifiers are required to formally do this for classification by signing the USQRA Classifier Code of Conduct.

Specific education course for athlete safeguarding

The USQRA may want to consider a platform to provide education for all who work with athletes on athlete safeguarding. The IOC has an Athlete Safeguarding course, available as a free online course provided via the IOC. (Perhaps SafeSport is available through USOPC?). If the USQRA does not require this organization wide, and if classifiers are identified as being at risk despite their professional certification, then the USQRA may consider adding this to the basic training of USQRA Classifiers as an entry level competency.

Criminal background checks

Criminal background checks are routine for health professionals and many already undergo these sorts of checks in practice settings. The USQRA may want to consider requiring a copy of a workplace background check as part of the application to undertake classifier training, or if the applicant has not undergone a background check, to do so as a condition of undertaking a basic training course.

For Athletes under 18:

At this point in time, our consents for under 18 require a parent or legal guardian signature. If athlete is under 18, parent/legal guardian has been allowed to remain in the room along with the team representative or coach. Other under 18 organizations have incorporated child abuse classes as requirements for staff. USQRA could incorporate this as requirement for all who will be interacting with players under 18. Health care providers are mandatory reports and majority of states do require ethics course as well as abuse related courses for licensure.