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BREAKING

Swimming Announces 'Open' Category For Transgender Athletes—Here Are The Other Major Sports With Restrictions Or Bans

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TOPLINE World Aquatics—the international governing body for swimming—announced Tuesday it will start an “Open” category that includes all transgender athletes, after the body joined several other sports organizations and issued restrictions on transgender women last year.



World Aquatics announced it would establish an "Open" category for transgender competitors. COPYRIGHT 2022 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

TIMELINE

📍 July 25, 2023

World Aquatics **announced** it will establish an “Open” category for **swimming** events, allowing competitors whose gender differs from their birth sex to participate, after the body announced last year it would prohibit any transgender woman who went through male puberty or had gender-reassignment surgery after the age of 12 from competing in female events.

📌 July 14, 2023

The Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)—the governing body for **cycling**—**announced** transgender women that “transitioned after (male) puberty” would no longer be able to participate in women’s events in an effort to “ensure equal opportunities,” though President David Lappartient said the sport was “open to everyone, including transgender people.”

📌 March 23, 2023

World Athletics **issued** restrictions on most transgender women in women’s **track and field** events, prohibiting any athlete that records a testosterone level above 2.5 nanomoles per liter for at least two years from competing.

📌 July 6, 2022

The British Triathlon Federation—which noted transgender women retain “physiology advantages”—**announced** it would hold a separate “Open” competition for **triathlon** competitors born male, including transgender and nonbinary people.

● June 21, 2022

The International Rugby League **issued** a ban on transgender women from competing in sanctioned women’s **rugby** matches, adding it believes “there is a requirement and responsibility to further consult and complete additional research” before allowing transgender athletes to compete.

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CRUCIAL QUOTE

World Aquatics president Husain Al-Musallam [said](#) Tuesday he wanted swimming to “be open to everybody,” adding, “It was very important that we protected fair competition for our female athletes.”

SURPRISING FACT

All of these policies specifically restrict transgender women from competition, and not transgender men.

CHIEF CRITIC

Hudson Taylor, founder and executive director of the LGBTQ+ sports group Athlete Ally, [said](#) World Athletics was “succumbing to political pressure instead of core principles of inclusion, fairness and non-discrimination.” The group also [criticized](#) World Aquatics, suggesting swimming’s governing body was policing “the bodies of all women,” while calling their restrictions “deeply discriminatory, harmful, unscientific.”

CONTRA

Martina Navratilova, a former top tennis player and famous LGBTQ+ advocate, [supported](#) restrictions on transgender women, saying the world had gone “topsy turvy.”

She has argued, along with many medical experts, that biological men who have gone through puberty have an undeniable physical advantage. Nancy Hogshead, a former Olympic gold medalist in swimming, said she [hopes](#) other sports enact restrictions.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

FIFA announced last year it would review its policy on transgender women from participating in the upcoming women's World Cup, though it has yet to announce any changes. Some officials [indicated](#) in January that the body would allow transgender athletes to compete.

KEY BACKGROUND

Restrictions for cycling events follow Austin Killips—a transgender woman—winning the women's Tour of the Gila in April, becoming the first transgender cyclist to win an event. Killips' victory prompted [criticism](#) from former Olympian Inga Thompson, who said allowing Killips to compete was “effectively killing off women's cycling.” The UCI initially supported Killips, indicating it acknowledged “transgender athletes may wish to compete in accordance with their gender identity.” Restrictions for transgender women in swimming followed criticism of University of Pennsylvania swimmer Lia Thomas, who [became](#) the first trans woman to win the NCAA swimming championship in the 500-yard freestyle.

TANGENT

[Over 20 states](#) have approved legislation targeting transgender girls and women athletes, as a discussion about transgender athletes in school sports has intensified in recent years. Some Republicans—including Florida Gov. [Ron DeSantis](#)—have promoted transgender sports participation as a culture war talking point. DeSantis previously claimed allowing

transgender girls and women to participate in school sports was an effort “to destroy women’s athletics.” North Carolina State Sen. [Vickie Sawyer](#) said a state bill prohibiting transgender girls and women from participating in sports supported “telling everyone that women’s sports are for women.” Earlier this year, the Biden Administration [proposed](#) regulations to prevent future state bans, though they included a loophole allowing school teams to develop their own policies.

FURTHER READING

[World Track And Field Body Restricts Transgender Women From Women’s Sports](#)
(*Forbes*)

[British Triathlon Latest To Limit Trans Athletes—Here Are The Major Sports Enacting Similar Bans](#) (*Forbes*)



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