



Competition Belaying Handbook

COMPETITION BELAYING
LEAD & TOP ROPE

ELITE | YOUTH | PARACLIMBING | COLLEGIATE

USA Climbing Competition Belaying Handbook Version 20230202

This Handbook shall remain in effect until a subsequent version has been published.

Any amendments to this handbook will be published on the USA Climbing website <http://usaclimbing.org/> and shall be read in conjunction with and shall take precedence over the original document.

This Handbook is subject to approval by the USA Climbing Chief Executive Officer. In the event of any conflict between USA Climbing's Bylaws and this Handbook, USA Climbing's Bylaws will control. This Handbook is intended to supplement and not to conflict with the USA Climbing Rulebook. To the extent that matters covered in this Handbook are appropriate for inclusion in the Rulebook, USA Climbing intends for the Rulebook to be updated in the usual course accordingly. In the event of any conflict between USA Climbing's Rulebook and this Handbook, the Rulebook will control.

All climbing and safety equipment used during any USA Climbing competition or event, including but not limited to harnesses and belay devices, must be used in full compliance with manufacturers' specifications. Nothing in this Handbook is intended to conflict with the manufacturers' specifications. However, to the extent there is a conflict between this Handbook and any manufacturers' specifications, the manufacturers' specifications shall govern regarding the use of all climbing and safety equipment.

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This Handbook was originally drafted by the USA Climbing Competition Belaying Working Group (CBWG), whose term expired on August 31, 2020. USA Climbing belaying matters may be addressed to: belaying@usaclimbing.org.

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1 Significant Changes

Since the original version of the USA Climbing Competition Belaying Handbook, the Competition Belay Working Group has sunset, and the work has transitioned to a volunteer National Belay Coordinator under the supervision of the USA Climbing VP of Sport.

Many of the updates in this version are due to USA Climbing terminology changes (e.g., Chief Belay to Head Belay, Chief Judge to Jury President) as well as alignment with Rulebook updates since the original Handbook version (e.g., handling Z-clips).

Significantly, the belayer development program has expanded, specifically in areas of planning, communication, recruitment, deployment, and evaluation. Some of the policy, process, and content is in this Handbook, and other portions are migrating from volunteer administration to being contained within a Belaying page of <http://usaclimbing.org> (under development). Additional information is available by emailing belaying@usaclimbing.org.

2 Introduction

The USA Climbing Competition Belaying Working Group (CBWG) was formed to provide guidance, instruction, and standards around belaying at USA Climbing competitions, as outlined in the Working Group's Charter as approved by the USA Climbing Board of Directors.

The CBWG's focus was safety, competition fairness, and consistency for belaying across all USA Climbing events. All competition series are included: Youth, Collegiate, Paraclimbing, and Elite.

The CBWG sunset as an active Working Group in December 2020. Belaying matters have subsequently been managed by the USA Climbing Head National Belay and USA Climbing staff

For any given USA Climbing event, if the facility/venue hosting the event (Host Facility) requires or recommends that its own *belayer certification (aka belayer check)* requirements be met in the context of a USA Climbing event, then this Handbook's efforts do not replace, nor obviate the need for, such Host Facility belayer certification. This USA Climbing Competition Belaying Handbook (Handbook), in this second edition, is intended to provide an updated set of recommended guidance and standards around safe and fair belaying in *USA Climbing competitions*, but in all cases such Host Facility belay certification processes, standards, and methods shall be in addition to this Handbook. The USA Climbing CEO, VP of Sport, or National Belay Coordinator should be consulted in the event of any conflict between such Host Facility processes, standards or methods and those of this Handbook.

This Handbook serves as the focal product output of the CBWG and is the result of not only the CBWG member meetings, but also coordination and collaboration with other entities within USA Climbing: USA Climbing staff, Board of Directors, Risk Management Committee, Rules Committee, Judges Committee, National belayers, and others. To the extent that matters covered in this Handbook are appropriate for inclusion in the Rulebook, USA Climbing intends for the Rulebook to be updated in the usual course accordingly.

The Handbook may be used to produce secondary CBWG output, including videos, training programs, and evaluation forms. The content of these secondary output materials is but a different manifestation of the content in the Handbook, and these secondary materials are not intended to include processes, content, nor practices that are not in the Handbook. In the event of a conflict between the Handbook and secondary CBWG materials, the Handbook will control.

As a Working Group, the term of the CBWG has expired, but the intent is long term safety and belay consistency across all USA Climbing roped competitions. While most areas of the Handbook will be implemented or used immediately, USA Climbing recognizes that some efforts outlined by the CBWG will take longer to evolve.

This Competition Belaying Handbook document covers Lead and Top Rope belaying. Speed climbing belaying is outside the scope of this document.

Capitalized terms, where not defined in this Handbook, have the meanings ascribed to them in the USA Climbing Rulebook.

3 USA Climbing Competition Belaying Officials

The Belaying Official listed below shall be designated by the Event Organizer. Further, the Belaying Official should be identified by the Event Organizer to USA Climbing event staff, typically in the USA Climbing Sport & Speed Regionals (or Divisionals) Questionnaire.

3.1 Head Belayer

Each USA Climbing event with Lead and/or Top Rope competitions shall have a designated *Head Belayer (or HB)*. The event may also have a designated Assistant Head Belayer (or AHB).

The Head Belayer (and Assistant Head Belayer) shall be responsible for the following duties:

- Create Belay Plan
 - Use the Belay Plan template available on the Belaying page of the USA Climbing <http://usacimbing.org> website
 - Maintain an updated Belay Plan leading to and throughout event, especially as one works with the Host Facility and Event Organizer (see below) and with the Event Organizer (see below).
 - Submit the Belay Plan to the Jury President, Event Organizer, and belaying@usacimbing.org
 - Recruit a quality Belay Team (see below).
 - Share the Belay Plan with all relevant competition officials; notify them of any updates.
- Work with the Host Facility and Event Organizer.
 - Determine the gym's policies on belay devices, and on "safety knots." (e.g. overhand, or a double-fisherman.
 - As appropriate, explore with the Host Facility the possibility of one-time, event-specific policies that could be established to provide a more appropriate environment for USA Climbing competition belaying at the event.
 - Determine the method of connecting Top Rope competitors to the belay rope. (tie-in, or carabiners.)
 - Schedule the date(s)/time(s) and times for any scheduled Host Facility belay checks.
 - Devise a method of tracking any Host Facility belay certification status for belayers, and coordinating to keep it up to date.
- Work with Event Organizer.
 - Determine the Host Facility belay check date(s)/time(s), if necessary.
 - Determine the time and location of the belay meetings.
 - Determine the number of desired belayers for each session.
 - Also determine the need and number of rope handlers.
 - Publicize the call for belayers, and provide method for belayers to submit their interest via a volunteer signup (e.g., SignupGenius) or [National Belayer Interest Form](#).
 - Determine the volunteer signup slots for belayers (if desired) as well as rope handlers.
 - For Paraclimbing competitions, gain familiarity with the methods and logistics of belaying for the Paraclimbing competitors.
- Recruit the Belay Team.
 - Begin the recruiting process early so belayers have adequate time to make travel and housing plans.

- Use USA Climbing Belayer Roster to recruit experienced belayers.
- Recruit and encourage interest from other belayers, especially in an effort to grow a diverse pool of quality belayers, with an eye towards reaching out to candidates who may not apply on their own.
- As necessary, select the Belay Team from the belayers that expressed interest, taking into account relevant belay experience.
- Communicate to the Belay Team: meeting times and locations, etc.
- Designate an Assistant Head Belayer, and mentor them on the Head Belayer role.
- Review the Belay Team's experience in order to assign Belay Team members to belaying roles (e.g., top rope vs lead).
- Provide the Belay Team with the resources to be successful. (e.g., this Handbook)
- Review that all belayers are belay certified by the Host Facility, if required or recommended by the Host Facility.
- Work with Jury President and Chief Routesetter.
 - Inform the Jury President of the approved stopper knots, so that any climber/coach technical meeting(s) can include such information.
 - As appropriate, ask the Jury President to remind the judges that, other than an immediate safety issue, belayer feedback should be relayed through the Head Belayer.
 - Discuss the routes with the Chief Routesetter, including where to assign the highly experienced belayers, portions of routes that might be tricky to belay, any dynamic moves that might require more slack in order to avoid a possible short rope situation, etc.
- Supervise the Belay Team.
 - Conduct the belayer meetings, to communicate expectations, emphasize important practices, review event-specific (or facility-specific) details, review questions, etc.
 - Monitor and adjust the Belay Team.
 - The Head Belayer may consider rotating into belaying each route in order to understand/demonstrate any issues or situations that are specific to that route.
 - Either the Head Belayer or Assistant Head Belayer should be monitoring (and generally not belaying) at all times.
 - Aim for a consistent belay for all competitors in a given category. This might impact belay instructions, belay pairings or assigning a single belayer to a route, any belayer substitution (including the Head Belayer).
- Write evaluations and incident reports as warranted, using the Belayer Evaluation Form.

4 Competition Belay Team

The primary consideration in forming the belay team(s) is the safety of the competitors, belayers, and all spectators and officials at the event. Further considerations include providing belay consistency and competency that minimizes the possibility of fairness issues, providing a high quality of belaying that allows the competitors to focus on their climbing without concerns about their belayer, and striving to provide a belay team that represents the diversity (gender, race, etc.) of the competitors.

4.1 Competition Belay Host Facility Eligibility

To the extent required or recommended by the Host Facility, all competition belayers, including the Head Belay, must be belay certified by the Host Facility for the type(s) of belaying that they will conduct or oversee during the competition. There may be cases where belayers are indemnified by USA Climbing.

4.2 Competition Belaying Interest

Prospective belayers are to be invited to submit their interest via online forms or emails, as part of the volunteer recruitment process. Interested belayers may also ask USA Climbing (via belaying@usaclimbing.org) for information about how to express interest.

4.3 Competition Belay Team Selection

The belay team should be formed as early as possible before the competition, so that belayers have adequate time to make travel and housing plans. The Event Organizer and the Head Belay should schedule and publish a time for any Host Facility's belay check and/or belay team meeting. The date, time, and location of any Host Facility's belay check (Host Facility certification) should be identified and published as soon as practical.

The Head Belay is responsible for forming the Belay Team in conjunction with the Event Organizer and Jury President. The Belay Team will be selected from the list of interested belayers on the basis of experience and qualification.

When selecting a Belay Team, the Head Belay's primary concern must always be safety, and foremost the safety of the competitors.

Additionally, the Head Belay is to consider other areas, including but not limited to: direct or trusted knowledge of the belayer's experience at USA Climbing events; direct or trusted knowledge of the belayer's general belay experience and competence; how the team helps grow the pool of high quality belayers for USA Climbing; etc.

Further, a belayer's USA Climbing Endorsed Competition Belay program endorsement status/level should be considered. (Endorsement status is available on the Belaying page of <http://usaclimbing.org> website, or by emailing belaying@usaclimbing.org for information.)

USA Climbing has started and has continued to develop a Competition Belay training program. See the Belaying page of <http://usaclimbing.org> website or by email belaying@usaclimbing.org for information.

The Head Belay should form a team with enough belayers (as determined by the Head Belay) to belay all competition routes (all rounds) and with sufficient additional belayers to allow substitution or replacement.

The Head Belay may choose to select a portion of the team first, providing early notice to some belayers that they are on the belay team, prior to making the final selection of the entire team.

Where possible, the final team selection should be at least a week or two after USA Climbing posts the belayer interest forms and the volunteer signup.

4.4 Competition Belaying Route Assignments

For belay assignments, the Head Belay should consider the following:

- More-experienced belayers should be assigned to the more difficult-to-belay routes as determined by Head Belay in conjunction with Chief Routesetter and Jury President.
- Belayers should be assigned according to their strengths.
- Belayers may be assigned with consideration to weight differences between the belayer and climbers in a given category.
- Belayers should not normally be assigned to belay a category that contains their relative or

someone they coach. The Head Belayer should inform the Jury President of any exceptions.

- At some events, like Youth Nationals, assigning the same belayers to a given category for all rounds (if practical) may allow athletes who advance beyond qualifies to have familiarity with their belayers. The Head Belayer may or may not take this into consideration.

Belayers are to be reassigned, or removed from the belay team if it is determined that they are unable or unwilling to safely and effectively perform their duties:

- As determined by the Head Belayer, or the Chief Routesetter, or the Jury President, or
- As determined by the Event Organizer, or
- At the request of the Host Facility

The Head Belayer should, as soon as reasonably possible, brief a reassigned or removed belayer with the reason(s) for their reassignment or removal.

5 Recommendations for Competition Belaying Practices (Lead and Top Rope)

A belayer's top priority and responsibility is safety.

A belayer should also be impartial. A belayer should avoid conversations with competitors and spectators. Likewise, spectators (including coaches) should never engage belayers in conversation. A belayer should avoid any action that hinders or helps the competitor, unless that action is for the safety of the competitor.

A belayer must perform a full equipment check every climb: harnesses (climber & belayer); belay device; carabiners; Figure-8 and safety knots; The equipment check should be conducted verbally, showing the competitor what checks are being performed. Along with showing the climber the belay device setup, the belayer should squeeze the locking carabiner to demonstrate that it is indeed locked. A belayer should perform these checks before every climb.

A belayer is strongly advised to avoid physically contacting a competitor. Where possible, ask for consent before touching a climber or approaching their personal space. (e.g. to help them untie the knot from their harness.) If a climber is swinging in a dangerous manner, a belayer should attempt to grab the rope or a utility loop on the harness, unless a safety issue dictates more direct contact with the climber.

If a belayer becomes physically or mentally tired, or otherwise needs a rest, the belayer must inform the Head Belayer immediately. In no case should a belayer continue to belay if they feel they cannot perform the belaying job appropriately and safely.

A belayer must recognize the roles of the competition officials, including the Jury President, the Chief Routesetter, and the Head Belayer. Where and when possible, all feedback (rope control, slack, footwork) for the belayer will be channeled through the Head Belayer.

A belayer should not take this feedback personally, as the Head Belayer (and others) may be able to see things the belayer cannot see, and it is the Head Belayer's role to help the belayer and to keep the competitors safe. Any feedback that one belayer has for another belayer should generally be channeled through the Head Belayer when possible.

All belayers must recognize and remember that spectators are watching their belaying, either in-person or often on an event broadcast. Safe, professional, impartial and fair belaying, and behavior, is a critical part of these events.

For clarity and economy of language, the remaining text of this Recommendations section is structured as instructions and suggestions to the belayer.

5.1 Manufacturer Specifications and Host Facility Policies

All climbing and safety equipment used during any USA Climbing competition or event, including

but not limited to harnesses and belay devices, must be used in full compliance with manufacturers' specifications. Nothing in this Handbook is intended to conflict with the manufacturers' specifications. However, to the extent there is a conflict between this Handbook and any manufacturers' specifications, the manufacturers' specifications shall govern regarding the use of all climbing and safety equipment.

At USA Climbing competitions or events, all belay practices must be in accordance with (and in compliance with) the Host Facility's policies and standards. To the extent that there is a conflict between this Handbook and a Host Facility's policies and standards, the Host Facility's policies and standards shall govern all belay practices.

The Head Belay, in coordination with the Event Organizer, should, as early as possible, review the policies and standards for the Host Facility. To the extent that the Head Belay and/or Event Organizer have questions or concerns about the policies and standards, they should discuss these concerns with the Host Facility representative to determine if event-specific policies can be established that provide a more appropriate environment for USA Climbing competition belaying at the event. However, the Host Facility has the final authority over the policies and standards for belaying.

5.2 Equipment

5.2.1 Climbing Rope

- The use of any climbing rope must meet the manufacturer's specifications and recommendations. See section 5.1.
- The length of the rope must be confirmed with the Host Facility and Chief Routesetter to be sufficient for safe climbing on all the competition routes, taking into account the wall topology and possible belay positions.
- When the event organizer or host facility provides climbing ropes, those ropes should be run through the hands of the Head Belay or their designee(s) (e.g. members of the belay team) prior to the competition, and periodically during the competition as necessary. These checks may include "bend tests" in the 10 meters on each end.
- When the event requires or allows competitors to provide the climbing rope they use, the Head Belay and the Event Organizer must determine the policies and process regarding accepting such ropes for use, including determining suitability of a rope, and how to provide a substitute rope (e.g., event rope) if necessary.
- The climbing rope must be flaked prior to the start of the competition, and between each climb that uses the rope.
- During flaking, the rope should be visually and physically checked each time, looking for obvious damage.
- If a rope is moved or if someone disrupts a flaked/staked rope, that rope must be reflaked/restacked prior to belaying a competitor.
- The rope should also be checked for blood, especially if a climber has an open wound.
- If concerned about the condition of the rope leading to a safety issue, the rope must be immediately taken out of service and marked with bright tape (e.g., red, pink, orange).
- Consult the Head Belay or Chief Routesetter when taking the rope out of service.
- If this would result in a climbing rope not being available, the Jury President should be immediately notified, along with the Chief Routesetter.
- Pre-flaked backup rope(s) should be available to replace ropes pulled from service.

5.2.2 Top Rope Attachment to Competitors

- The use of any carabiner must meet the manufacturer's specifications and recommendations. See section 5.1.
- The Host Facility, Event Organizer, and Head Belay will agree on a method of

connecting the Top Rope competitors to the belay rope. This will be done via one of two different methods: figure-8 follow-through (see 5.3.1), or a pre-tied rope.

- If using a pre-tied rope, it is recommended that a captive-eye, triple-action auto-locking carabiner be used at the tie-in point, or alternatively two opposite-facing auto-locking carabiners be used at the tie-in point, subject to full compliance with both host facility policies and manufacturer specifications:
 - The rope is to be tied to the carabiner in a manner approved by the Host Facility.
 - Typically, each carabiner is tied into the rope with a figure-8 follow-through (figure-8 on a bight) knot, with at least a 6" tail of rope that is taped (with climber's tape, or route setting gaffers' tape) to the standing end (live end) of the knot. (The standing end of the rope is the rope going to the anchor at the top.) Again, the manner in which the carabiner is tied to the rope must be approved by the Host Facility.

5.2.3 Climbing Harness

- The use of any climbing harness must meet the manufacturer's specifications and recommendations. See section 5.1.
- The belayer's climbing harness should be in good and safe condition, with no visible defects.
- The harness must be worn over all clothing, and fully visible to competition officials, other belayers and competitors.

5.2.4 Belay Device

- The use of any belay device must meet the manufacturer's specifications and recommendations. See section 5.1.
- The belayer's belay device must be in good condition, and the operation of that device must be known and familiar to the Head Belayer.
- The Head Belayer and the route belayer should evaluate the belay device and its suitability to the climber safety, the particular route that was set, as well as other factors (e.g., density of routes and belayers, weight differential, etc.).
- For Championship, IFSC, or major Elite events, tube/manual style belaying devices (e.g., ATC) are the strong preference. This is consistent with the international competition belaying standard and IFSC rule.

5.2.5 Belay Gloves

- The use of belay gloves must meet the manufacturer's specifications and recommendations, if any. See section 5.1.
- The use of belay gloves is strongly encouraged, but only if the belayer is comfortable with belay gloves and has good experience using them while belaying.

5.2.6 Belay Glasses

- The use of belay glasses must meet the manufacturer's specifications and recommendations. See section 5.1.
- Belay glasses are a tool that a competition belayer may choose to use. As with any tool or technique, experienced and educated judgment must be applied and the Head Belayer may instruct a belayer not to use belay glasses if it is deemed to present more risks than benefits in a particular setting, or if it is judged that the belayer lacks experience with them. If a belayer is so instructed, the belayer may elect not to belay without belay glasses, in which case they would be replaced.
- The use of belay glasses impacts the field of view and depth of field and it takes time and experience to adjust to the lack of peripheral vision when looking through the glasses. Once adjusted, an experienced belayer may appreciate the narrower field of

vision which allows a better focus on the climber and the magnification that allows to see the climber's actions in greater detail. An experienced belayer will also be able to quickly switch from looking through the glasses to under or on the sides when appropriate.

- The belayer should look directly at the climber through the first two clips.
- Belayers should not use belay glasses for the first time at a competition. Before using belay glasses at a USA Climbing competition, a belayer should have experience with belay glasses while catching competition climbers pushing themselves, including climbing well past their last clip. (A climber climbing past a legitimate position needs to be safely caught.)
- Different models of belay glasses have different fields of vision and a belayer should use only a model that they are experienced with.
- A belayer using belay glasses should recognize that competition belaying has characteristics that are significantly different than gym, recreation, project, or outdoor climbing.

5.2.7 Shoes

- All belayers must wear closed-toe shoes while belaying in a USA Climbing competition.

5.2.8 Uniform

- All belayers at USA Climbing events must wear the selected (uniform) t-shirt, badge, or other belaying designation, if available.
- Some events, including all USA Climbing National-level events, may require that all clothing and equipment display only USA Climbing logos or USA Climbing sponsor logos. In those situations, the belayers must abide by those requirements.
- At events with video broadcast or streaming (or where video is recorded for later broadcast), belayers should wear dark, solid color clothes (or as indicated by the Head Belayer).

5.3 General Recommendations for Practices – Lead and Top rope

5.3.1 Safety

- **All equipment use and belay practices are subject to the Host Facility's policies and standards, and the use of any equipment must be in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications and recommendations.** See sections 5.1 and 5.2.
- Belayers must perform a full safety check for every belay. Check the climber's harness, climber's knot and finishing knot (if any), your harness, your belay device, etc.
 - Small harnesses with one tie-in loop are allowed by the USA Climbing Rulebook. (Check with Host Facility to determine if such are allowed.)
 - Other harnesses require the tie-in through both points of protection (aka "hard points").
 - Show the climber that your belay device is properly fed/loaded and the carabiner is locked.
 - All checks should be done, verbally, such that the climber can hear.
 - Never allow the climber to start climbing until the belay device is loaded properly, and all checks (both belayer and climber) are completed.
 - Never unload (unthread) the rope from the belay device once the climber has started climbing.
- USA Climbing requires a Figure-8 follow-through knot, with a "safety knot."

- Subject to the policy of the Host Facility, the “safety knot” can be an overhand, or a double-fisherman. The Head Belayer will include this information in the pre-competition briefings.
 - Neither a Figure-9 finish nor a Yosemite finish is a “safety knot.”
 - Inspect all knots. If you don’t recognize the knot, ask the Head Belayer to examine the knot or ask the climber to re-tie the knot.
- The Belayer can assist with untying of the knot, but only after requested by the climber or given permission by the climber, while on the field of play. The same applies to assisting with locking carabiners on a Top Rope route. Avoid touching the climber, unless a safety issue dictates otherwise.
- Belay in a safe manner, with approved techniques.
- Belay only with techniques that you are experienced with, comfortable with, and competent to perform.
- All taking in of slack (mostly Top Rope, but occasionally with Lead) must be done using the PBUS (Pull, Brake, Under, Slide) method. Important characteristics of PBUS:
 - When taking in slack, only slide your brake hand when the rope is held in the brake position – held down, not up.
 - When taking in slack, only slide your brake hand up when your other hand is holding the rope under your brake hand.
- **Always maintain proper brake-hand control of the brake-side of the rope coming out of the belay device.**

5.3.2 Focus

- Pay attention. Your best belay will be when you are completely focused on your climber. Take it seriously because it shows when you do, and especially shows when you don’t.
- Don’t talk with other people while you’re belaying. Always be looking at your climber (except maybe immediately after they’ve made a clip, and you are inspecting your rope for flaking issues).
- Your climber wants to know that you are paying full attention to them. If the climber looks down at you, they want to see you looking at them. If the climber hears you talking with someone, they will think you’re not paying attention.
- Ideally, you should be able to see both hands and feet of your climber.
- Pay attention during your belay like you would want another belayer paying attention to your climb.

5.3.3 Professionalism

- The belayer should perform their function in a professional, fair, and relaxed manner.
- Do not engage a climber in conversation, or joke around with the climber. Each climber should receive the same professional, but courteous, belay.

5.3.4 Logistics

- Have the climber tie in during transition, so you have time to deal with any tie-in issues.
- Where/when appropriate, attempt to confirm and remember climber’s name -- use that if you have to give instructions while they are on the wall.
- Simple, short pre-climb communication to confirm tie-in -- say the same thing to all climbers.
 - e.g., “Hello, my name is [name] and I will belay you. *Your harness looks good,*

your rope is through two points on the harness, your knot looks good, with a good finish.” Possibly add “I’ll belay starting on your right [or left] as you face the wall.”

- Use clear hand signals during safety check (e.g., point to knot, harness, and belayer set-up)
- Minimize talking with climbers. Some may be nervous, some may be focused on their climb. Less talk from the belayer is better.
- Give the competitor personal space.
- Avoid physical contact with the climbers.
- In most cases, once the climber has reached the top, the belayer will not take tight so as to allow the climber to always have sufficient slack, even though this may allow the climber to fall into a few feet of slack. This minimizes any interference or perception of interference at tops (blind or visible).
- After lowering climbers, direct them to a spot safe from falling rope or other hazards, and get them untied right away (before or as they talk with the judge) in order to get the next climber tied in and ready to climb.
- All lead belayers should be ready to belay Top Rope routes if asked by the Head Belayer.
- Only those authorized by Head Belayer, and, where required or recommended by the Host Facility, are belay certified by the Host Facility, are allowed to belay at the event.
- No one is allowed to simultaneously belay and judge. A belayer must be focused on the safety of the competitor, along with providing consistent and fair belaying.

5.3.5 Paraclimbing

- Obtain familiarity with the method and process of belaying required for your belay assignment.
- Prior to the competition, practice the belay method in a controlled, monitored, and safe manner, with a non-competitor acting as a climber.
- Given the wide variation of weight distribution of Paraclimbing athletes, there may be specific catching and lowering considerations that the Head Belayer will provide.

5.4 Recommendations for Top Rope Belaying Practices

Top Rope Belaying in a competition requires a watchful eye and constant rope control, much more than typical recreational belaying.

5.4.1 Tying in / Clipping in

- As outlined above in 5.2.2, the competitors might be connected to the belay rope via opposite and opposed carabiners.
- The belayer must inspect these carabiners every time they are attached to the climber’s harness.
- The carabiners must only be connected to a climber’s belay loop.
 - If the climber is using a harness with a single tie-in point, that tie-in point is used to connect the carabiners to the harness.
- Regardless of the tie-in / clip-in method, the belayer must inspect the rope-harness connection every climb.
- If climber asks “On belay?”, the belayer should reply “Belay on” when ready.

5.4.2 Belayer Side Rope Management

- A Top Rope Belayer must properly manage their side of the rope: the rope going from the belayer's belay device up to the anchor (pipe, quick draws, quick clips) at the top of the wall.
- Proper Top Rope Belaying will often require moving around the area, to avoid the belayer side of the rope being in the swing/fall path of a falling climber. Moving 10 feet or more, left/right, during a climb is not uncommon. A climber swinging or falling into the belayer side of the rope can cause injury.
- Before the competition starts, read the sequence of the route and pay attention to swing/fall paths – i.e., how a climber might move if they fall at various points along the route. Think about where you will need to stand in order to keep the belayer side of the rope out of the way of their swing or fall.
- During the climbing, continuously thinking “What if my climber fell now” will help you analyze where a fall would take the climber and improve your ability to keep the rope in a safe position, out of the way of the climber's swing/fall.

5.4.3 Slack Management

- The slack in the system includes:
 - Climber-side slack: between the climber's harness and the top anchor.
 - Belayer-side slack: between the belayer's harness and the top anchor.
- There must never be enough slack in the system that would allow a dangerous ground fall.
- Once the climber is high enough off the ground, there should be enough slack in the system for the climbers to down-climb or traverse as needed, to catch themselves on the wall in case of short falls (foot slip), and to make a dynamic move. This allows the judges to definitively detect falls.
- Try to limit climber-side slack and keep the slack on the belayer-side.
 - Slack should not get in the way of the climber.
- Before the competition starts, read the sequence of the route and pay attention to traverses and down-climbs, in order to better anticipate the need to provide slack to the climber.

5.4.4 Communication

- Belayers should communicate with other belayers and judges as needed by the logistics of their route relative to other routes on the wall.
- When the climber controls the top hold, do not take tight until after the judge has confirmed to you that the climber has “topped”.

5.4.5 Safety

- Safety is paramount.
- Only use PBUS (Pull, Brake, Under, Slide).
- Always maintain proper brake-hand control of the brake-side of the rope coming out of the belay device.

5.5 Recommendations for Lead Belaying Practices

5.5.1 Route review

- Try to determine clipping stances and holds that competitors will use.
- Identify potential difficult to belay falls.

- Look at routes to the left and right and determine possible fall-zone issues with neighboring climbers or belayers.
- Determine if there are any Safety (i.e., “blue cross”) holds and their corresponding clips. (see USA Climbing Rulebook.)
- If you have any questions or concerns, contact the Head Belay, who may contact the Jury President or Chief Routesetter.

5.5.2 Rope Management

- Know the diameter and length of your rope. Ropes feel different depending on the diameter, type, and wear. Determine what diameter rope(s) will be used for any routes you might belay.
- Confirm with the Head Belay that the length of the rope has been checked/confirmed with the Host Facility and Chief Routesetter.
- Pull the rope through from the climber’s side every time to help it wear evenly and avoid kinking. This swaps the climber end of the rope each time. Also, the energy from the fall ends up as heat in the rope and temporarily reduces the elasticity.
- When pulling rope after a competitor's attempt, pull the rope slowly as the end goes through the first three clips, in order to "calm" any swing of those draws for the next competitor.
- Flake your rope out where you want it for your next belay. Don't ever move a rope pile without re-flaking it out. A rope bucket or rope bag alleviates this problem.
- Know where your next 10 feet of rope are coming from. You should have the next 10 feet of rope out on the floor to your side. This way you can see that there are no twists or kinks coming up and you'll get a constant amount of drag on the brake end when you need to quickly feed rope. After the climber clips, that's your chance to look down, check your rope, and pull out another 10 feet if needed.

5.5.3 Pre-Start

- In general, do not spot the climber.
- Review your climb so that you have a good idea what side to start belaying from, which typically is determined by assessing from where the climber will clip the first two bolts. Sometimes you trail the rope behind the climber and sometimes you face the climber as they approach you. Consider asking a setter, or another experienced belayer, if you need advice.
- Before the climber starts, get the rope on the same side of the climber that you're going to belay from. You don't want the rope between the climber's legs because that will either get the rope wrapped around their legs, or they will uncomfortably land on the rope if they fall and you are standing behind them during the first few clips.
- Before the climber starts, hold the rope up off the floor with large (loose) loop of rope in your guide hand, held open. Stand to the side that you want to belay from. That will avoid the rope being in the way of the climber and minimize the chance of the rope being between the climber's legs.
- If the climber, as they approach the wall, moves the rope to between their legs or on the other side of their body, then you should adapt to these cues, and will need to allow them to alter your planned belay location. This could change how much rope they need for the first clip, how you need to hold the rope, or how you move around as they clip.
- Before the climber starts, have more than enough rope paid out. Once they make the first clip (and even as they are moving their hands to make the first clip), start taking back in so that just as the gate closes you have precisely the right amount of rope out. It is bad form to short rope a climber on the first clip. It is also bad form to not have them on belay the moment they make the first clip.

- Belay a cave start from inside the cave. Standing to the side or behind the climber can lead to difficult rope management. In a cave start belay hold the rope right up against the roof to keep it out of the way of the climber's feet, during their first clip(s).

5.5.4 Stance / Belay

- Back clips, Z-clips, skipped clips are addressed in sections 5.5.8, 5.5.9, and 5.5.10 of this Handbook, respectively.
- Keep your brake hand on the brake rope at all times. Resting position is your brake hand down, at your side, guide hand up to demonstrate slack.
- If you need to take rope slack back in while lead belaying, use footwork to move your body in order to reduce slack. If you need to pull slack back in through your belay device, use PBUS; move your non-brake hand back down to brake rope, under your brake hand, like a top-rope belay, taking necessary steps to assist with slack management.
- The belay stance is dynamic and will often shift around, especially in the first 2-4 bolts. Adjust your stance to get a better view of what's going on with the climber. Also, use your legs to quickly take excess slack, or to quickly provide slack if clipping.
- Closely watch the climber, trying to anticipate their movement and their clipping. Be ready for a climber who clips earlier than others, or a climber that makes two clips from one position.
- Guide the rope around the climber's feet as they climb through the first few clips.
- Keep close to the wall, especially for the first few clips.
- Watch the competitor carefully, and anticipate when a climber will make a clip. Step in towards the clip as needed, but try to belay as close to the wall as possible to reduce rope drag. In general, stepping away from the wall will tend to cause more rope drag, and will increase your risk of being pulled off balance in a fall.
- Leaving a lot of slack as a preventative measure against short-roping can be sloppy and simplistic, as well as potentially dangerous. Leaving a lot of slack might also inhibit your ability to making a soft catch in some instances. Learn to pay out rope "just in time". There can be rare cases leaving more slack is appropriate, like long routes with lots of rope drag.
- If climber pulls but fails to clip, the belayer should quickly and carefully take in excess slack once the climber releases the rope. Typically, the safest and most effective way to take in this slack is to move away from the first clip, preferably along the wall. This allows the belayer to quickly give slack by stepping back in, if the climber pulls rope in order to reattempt the clip.
- If a competitor claims there was a technical incident to a short-rope that you (as belayer) caused, hold off any discussion until the Jury President is called to discuss the situation, regardless whether you think there was a short-rope situation or not.

5.5.5 Catch

- Do not "sit into" the catch; provide dynamic, soft catch.
- Make a safe catch.
- A "soft" catch reduces the swinging back into the wall.
- Some head-walls or features/volumes require experience to lower the falling climber before weighting the rope so that climber doesn't slam into the wall or feature.
- Catch the climber (stop the climber's fall completely) before lowering. Catch the climber as high (soon) as safely appropriate.

5.5.6 Lowering

- Be aware of the landing zone and dynamics, especially if the climber is swinging

excessively.

- Lower your climber while standing near the wall (not away from the wall) to prevent lowering the climber onto your rope, and to minimize kinking the rope.
- After your climber is lowered to the ground, pay out 1-2 armloads of 'courtesy slack' to allow them to untie the knot easily. Remember, once you land the climber, the stretched rope will begin to recompress, requiring more slack for the competitor to comfortably untie their knot.
- Ask the climber to move out from under the high point clip or anchor.
- If necessary and with the climber's consent, help the climber to untie.
- Pull the climber-side rope down and then move the rope out of the way. Re-flake the rope. Alternate the end of the rope that the climbers tie into.

5.5.7 Back clips

- **Back clips are not disallowed** by USA Climbing rules.
- The belayer should not point out back clips.

5.5.8 Z-Clips

- **Z-clips are disallowed** in USA Climbing Rules. If a climber makes a Z-clip, the Z-clip must be fixed before climber continues climbing.
- Either the belayer or the route judge can call the Z-clip.
- The climber must fix the Z-clip before continuing and can fix the Z-clip in any order:
 - Unclip the most recent (higher) clip, and re-grab the rope correctly and make an appropriate clip.
 - Unclip the lower clip – the climber must then clip the belayer-side rope into the lower clip.
- Tell the climber: "[climber's name], fix your Z-clip". Unless the climber clearly asks for and needs specific advice, avoid any instructions on how to fix the Z-clip. Instructing the climber how to fix the Z-clip could lead to technical incidents due to belayer providing bad, misunderstood, or misleading instructions.
- The rope must be correctly clipped, through all quickdraws to the highest clipped quickdraw, before the climber is allowed to continue.

5.5.9 Skipping Clips / Clipping out of sequence

- As per the USA Climbing Rulebook, climbers must not skip quickdraws/clips, or are subject to being called off-route by the judge.
- In addition, the USA Climbing Rulebook states that "the Judge, or Belayer, shall notify the competitor to clip the quickdraw if it is apparent that a competitor is about to skip a clip and the safety of the competitor is compromised."
 - "[climber's name], make your clip!"
- Do not tell the climber how to move, or how to clip, only that they must make the clip.
 - Be careful with instructions. Avoid technical incidents due to belayer providing bad, misunderstood, or misleading instructions.
- Before any climbing begins, during your route preview, consider which (lower) clips are unsafe to skip.
 - Decide before any climbers attempt the route, and discuss this with the route judge.
 - However, you have the ability to change the decision "in the moment" in the

interest of safety.

- If the climber no longer is in a legitimate position relative to the next unclipped quickdraw (see USA Climbing Rulebook), the judge will call the climber down. However, safety may dictate that the judge should wait until the climber makes the next clip, if possible.
- If a climber clips draws out of sequence, the judge should call them down.

5.5.10 Communication

- Belayers should communicate with other belayers and judges as needed by the logistics of their route relative to other routes on the wall.
- When the climber controls the top hold and makes the final (anchor) clip, do not take slack until after the judge has confirmed to you that the climber has “topped”.

5.5.11 Safety (again)

- Safety is paramount, and the highest responsibility of a belayer.
- Belay in a safe manner, with approved techniques -- in a manner you are comfortable with and competent to perform.
- Always maintain proper brake-hand control of the brake-side of the rope coming out of the belay device.