

Chief Judge's Report: Advanced + Glider Unlimited 2025 US National Aerobatic Championships



DJ Molny, Judges Committee Chair
Oct. 5, 2025

Overview

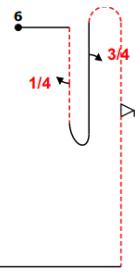
With outstanding teamwork from all parties, we were able to complete all sixty scheduled flights (11 Power + 9 Glider times 3 programs) without incident and within the allotted time.

The sole Glider Unlimited competitor flew during the Advanced category.

Sortie 1: Glider & Power Knowns

When the first competitor flew the low lines, several judges and I thought he was lower than 200m. But without any means of verifying the altitude of the aircraft, I elected to proceed with the lines that were flown.

That same competitor began his sequence lower than expected and accumulated numerous LOW calls as the sequence progressed. As he flew Figure 6, a double humpty, I called Break-Break-Break out of concern that he would be dangerously low on the second downline. The competitor immediately levelled off. I asked him to climb before resuming, which he did.



He asked whether he should resume on Figure 6 or 7, and I replied that scoring would resume on Figure 7. If I had it to do over again, I would have asked him to re-fly Figure 6 and instructed the judges to score the second attempt, since it was my decision to call him off. Instead, he received unanimous HZs for Figure 6. During its post-Nationals review, the Rules Committee should discuss what the Chief may or may not do after telling a competitor to break off.

I spoke with that competitor after the sortie was over. He insisted that the low lines were flown at exactly 200m. He said he unintentionally flew his box entry power-off, which led to starting the sequence significantly lower than planned. He also stated that he relies on airspeed to determine when to pull level during the box entry, and that he failed to perceive just how low he really was. He was very apologetic and it was clear that no further counseling was needed.

Later in the sortie, I observed a different competitor near the bottom of the box, headed west, while a towplane/glider package was near the west boundary at roughly the same altitude and headed east. I again called Break-Break-Break followed by, "Turn right, turn right, turn right". The competitor immediately complied and the towplane also turned away from the box. I told Shad what had happened and he counseled the towplane pilot.

Sortie 2: Glider Free & Power Unknown

I assessed Improper Start penalties against two competitors for performing more than one pair of half-rolls during their Safety Checks. Rule 14.3.3 states that the Advanced competitors "*have the option perform no more than two horizontal-flight half-rolls*" (emphasis added).

I also authorized at least one competitor to perform the half-rolls on their base leg, which I later discovered is not allowed under Rule 14.3.3. But because I had agreed to their request, I did not assess a penalty for that infraction.

Some light rain moved in just before the final competitor was ready to fly their Glider Free program. I chose to terminate the category for the day and informed Teri and Mary Beth that that competitor would fly the Free sequence at the start of the third sortie.

Sortie 3: Glider Unknown & Power Free Unknown

In light of the Improper Start penalties during Sortie 2, I reworked the briefing slide that describes the Safety Check, and have supplied that to Shad for use at future contests.

The flying during this sortie was uneventful.

Conclusion

It was a pleasure and an honor to serve as Chief Judge at Nationals.

I am grateful to Shad for his outstanding leadership and organizational skills, and to my fellow volunteers who made this super-sized contest so safe, efficient, and a ton of fun.