

Star Pass

Most anyone in derby can explain the basics of a star pass: “it’s when the jammer passes the star to the pivot,” but that doesn’t include which circumstances might lead to a star pass or what the officials do in response when a team is attempting a star pass or why it’s important.

Let’s see some of what the *WFTDA Rules* say about star passes.

The act of transferring Jammer status, which is accomplished by the Jammer handing their helmet cover (the Star) to the Pivot. [*WFTDA Rules Glossary*]

A team’s Jammer may transfer their position to their team’s Pivot by successfully completing a legal Star Pass. A legal Star Pass requires the Jammer to hand the Star to their team’s Pivot while both Skaters are upright, in bounds, and in play; and while neither Skater is en route to, or in queue for, the Penalty Box. [*WFTDA Rules 2.2.4.*]

The initiator of an illegal Star Pass (or Star recovery) that impacts the game should be penalized. [*WFTDA Rules 2.2.4. Passing the Star*]

See how the rules use the vocabulary words we discussed before, like helmet cover, in play and initiator? To understand these sentences, we already have to have a basic understanding of the structure of the game and a variety of concepts. My goal is to give you that understanding to help you make better use of the *WFTDA Rules* and other published material.

I think the star pass concept starts with understanding the basic player roles. Each team is allowed one jammer and one pivot per jam. The jammers are the most interesting person on the track because they are the ones who score points. Among some other special abilities (discussed later in this chapter), jammers can attempt to transfer their status to the pivot. If successful, the person who started the jam as the jammer becomes a non-pivot blocker and the pivot becomes the new jammer. A team can make as many attempts as needed to complete a star pass, but there can only be one successful star pass per team per jam.

Teams might do this for a variety of reasons

1. Strategically to surprise the other team

2. Strategically to transfer the status to someone who is in a better track position to score additional points
3. Defensively in case the original jammer is simply too tired to continue as a jammer in the jam
4. And there's probably more. Your league skaters can offer additional reasons why they do it (or don't do it).

Officials must understand what the proper procedure is for a star pass, and we must understand what common situations make the star pass incomplete or illegal. Sometimes those illegal star passes will earn a penalty to the star pass initiator. The jammer's JR is typically the person who is most closely watching for all of these specific requirements and determines if a star pass is legal and complete. It's an exciting and stressful part of officiating due to the technical details involved. One relief to remember is that when the star is off the jammer's head, they're no longer earning passes/points, so that frees up a little bandwidth for the JR to watch the helmet cover action.

The other officials, the teams, and the NSOs all want to know when a star pass is complete, because it affects team strategy, pack definition, and penalty box procedures. It is also tracked on the game paperwork. We make it very obvious when a star pass is successful via verbal cues and a hand signal.

There's a good chance you may encounter situations where the specific sequence and events in a star pass attempt don't exactly fit any of the available guidance. If that happens in a game, officials should do their best to adjudicate the star pass attempt fairly based on the existing guidance. I've included suggestions for this in [Chapter "Jam 9: IPR at a game"](#).

Published guidance can be found in the *WFTDA Rules* and *Casebook*. More information is located in the *WFTDA Cues* document, which discusses the hand signals and verbal cues used when a star pass is attempted or completed. A very excellent flowchart of star passes is located in the resources in the "My Derby Resources" section on the website *Rules Colored Glasses*. Links to that site and more have been included [in the Appendix](#).

Some questions we ask ourselves during a star pass attempt:

1. **Who initiated?** – only the jammer can legally initiate a star pass

2. ***Are they currently allowed to initiate a star pass?*** – jammers may not initiate a star pass if they're down or out of bounds. They also may not have committed a penalty and are thus en route to the box.
3. ***Were they legally located on the track at the moment of transfer?*** – star passes can only occur in the EZ (hint: if there's no pack, then there's no EZ)
4. ***Who received the attempt?*** – the jammer can pass the star only to a pivot wearing the stripe
5. ***Was the pivot allowed to receive the pass?*** – For a star pass to be legal, pivots cannot receive the pass if they are in queue or en route to the box.
6. ***Was the pivot legally located on the track?*** – During a star pass, the pivot must be upright, in bounds, and within the EZ.
7. ***Was there a pack?*** – If there is no pack, there is no EZ. During a No-Pack, every blocker must stop playing derby and attempt to reform the pack, including the pivot. Pivots cannot initiate new derby actions instead of reforming the pack. Attempting to participate in a star pass attempt during a No-Pack is potentially an Illegal Position penalty.
8. ***Was the physical exchange itself legal?*** – The jammer may not throw or toss the star to initiate a legal transfer. If the jammer drops the cover, the pivot can touch the star to pick it up, but the role of jammer won't transfer in that case. The pivot cannot remove the cover from the jammer's helmet to initiate a legal transfer. The jammer cannot place the cover on the pivot's head. For a legal star pass, the jammer must remove their own jammer cover and physically hand it to the pivot's hand. In the moment when both skaters are touching the cover, jammer status has not yet transferred. If at that point the pivot lets go before the jammer lets go, the original jammer is still jammer and there is no star pass. The pivot does not become jammer unless during that simultaneous grasping of the cover, the jammer is the first person to let go.
9. ***What happened after the transfer*** –
 - a. If everything above has occurred legally, what happens next is the status of jammer transfers immediately to the former pivot, and the former jammer is now a non-pivot blocker. The former pivot does not have to put the cover on to be the jammer — as soon as they legally are the sole person in possession of the jammer helmet cover, they ARE the jammer and the JR begins to track their actions on the track. However, they don't start earning points until they are wearing the cover with the high contrast star showing. Only the new jammer can

put the cover on their helmet. Once on the helmet, the cover must have the full star visible.

- b. If even one of the previous eight requirements isn't met, the transfer is not complete. The original jammer remains the jammer no matter where the star itself is currently located. The pivot remains the pivot, even if they are solely in possession of the star, and the pivot is not allowed to start acting like the jammer.

Many pivots at this point would hand the cover back to the jammer, so the jammer is now once again for a moment solely in possession of the cover. Once the jammer is the only person holding the helmet cover, the jammer can initiate another star pass attempt.

Even if they're not the jammer, the pivot can still legally hold the jammer helmet cover. They can keep acting like a pivot while holding the jammer cover. That's fine. They just still have the responsibilities of a blocker to remain in the EZ and reform the pack.

For instance, if a no-pack is called while the pivot is holding the jammer's cover, the pivot cannot hand the cover back to the jammer instead of reforming the pack, unless the pack otherwise immediately reforms. The pivot must wait until they are in play to hand or throw it to the jammer — though the jammer could snatch it out of the pivot's hand if it doesn't impede the pivot from pack reformation. If the pivot drops the cover while attempting to reform, this should typically not be penalized if it in no way delayed or interfered with their reforming the pack. Pivots and jammers exiting the track briefly to pick up the helmet cover do not earn penalties — but the pivot cannot attempt to retrieve the cover during a no-pack or leave the EZ to do it instead of attempting to reform the pack, unless the pack otherwise immediately reforms.

- c. There's additional penalty concerns depending on whether a non-pivot blocker was involved in the action instead of the pivot. The most important things to remember are:
 - If a blocker comes into possession of the star through any means, they must immediately relinquish it

- If the jammer hands the star to the blocker, and the blocker doesn't immediately relinquish it and/or the blocker puts the star on their helmet, this is a penalty to the jammer
- If a blocker initiates a star transfer, this is a penalty to the blocker

Once you can answer the bolded question above, hopefully all guidance about star passes you'll read in those WFTDA documents will make sense and you can apply all that knowledge in a live game to decide what to do — including using the correct verbal cues and hand signals at the appropriate time.

If you're the JR in a game and you're unsure whether or not the star pass occurred, there's likely officials around you who are calling out "star pass complete" if they see the action completed legally. Call or no-call the attempt as best you can. Then after the jam or after the period ends, ask questions. Re-read the *WFTDA Rules* and *Casebook*.

The points earned in a scoring trip are transferred with the cover and the new jammer is on the same scoring trip as the original jammer and is considered as having earned passes on the opposing blockers the initial jammer passed legally. If white jammer earns points on blockers red 6 and 21, and then transfers the star to white pivot, the new jammer now has already earned those passes and thus the team has still earned at least those two points for the scoring trip. If the new white jammer puts the star on and subsequently legally passes blockers red 10 and 55, they've earned a total of four points for that trip for their team. NOTE: the total for the trip is still only a maximum of four in this case, even if the former pivot ends up re-passing all four opposing blockers.

The opposing team may NOT attempt to prevent a star pass by

- Removing an opponent's helmet cover
- Picking up an opponent's helmet cover
- Trying to intentionally grab an opponent's helmet cover
- Destroying the pack via illegal actions to prevent a star pass

The opposing team CAN attempt to prevent a star pass by

- Blocking the pivot and jammer legally, including positional blocks and legal blocks to the arms/hands. When a helmet cover is in a jammer's hands, those hands are still legal target zones
- Engaging in normal play which results in the pivot or jammer being rendered down or OOP, including **legally** causing a No-Pack situation
- Ending the jam early, if their team has Lead

CORE CONCEPT SUMMARY

Jammers can attempt to transfer their status via a star pass, which occurs when they hand the star to their pivot. On the track, this looks like one skater handing their helmet cover to another person. If performed properly, we consider the attempt successful, and the transfer of status is complete. If an illegal attempt has game impact, the Officials will issue a penalty to the initiator. Teams employ star passes for both offensive and defensive goals. The opposing team can use legal means to prevent or block a star pass.