

STARTER

Potomac Valley starting procedures involve both the “whistle protocol” for having swimmers step onto the blocks (into the water for backstroke) and the “no false start” protocol. All PVS Referees and Starters must be familiar with these procedures

INTRODUCTION

The Starter is one of the most important officials on the deck. He is in direct contact with the swimmers during a critical phase of the race—the start. His actions can clearly affect the swimmer's performance. Therefore, this position cannot be taken casually. Starting should be constantly practiced and improved.

The Starter is also the "next in command." That does not mean that the Starter has any authority over the other officials on the deck. It does mean, however, that if the Referee cannot continue to officiate, the Starter will have to assume the Referee's job. Consequently, Starters in Potomac Valley should be familiar with the duties of the Referee.

The Referee may also request the Starter to assist in various ways prior to the meet. Typical assignments may include making sure that a Chief Timer is appointed, sufficient timers have been recruited, and that they are properly briefed.

PREPARATION

Review the "Basic Concepts of Officiating" cited in the Stroke and Turn handout:

- M Take officiating seriously and work hard at it.
- M Work regularly at the job.
- M Be professional in manner.
- M Be in the proper attire for an official.

The Starter may also be asked to make sure that warm-ups are being properly marshaled while the Referee meets with the Stroke and Turns Judges. Therefore, it is important for the Starter to be familiar with PVS warm-up procedures (see Marshaling) and to be ready to either conduct a Timers briefing or to assure the Chief Timer briefs the Timers on all the essential points.

Starters must be guided by one dominant principle *be fair to all competitors and give the benefit of the doubt always to the swimmer*. This does not mean giving a competitor "a second chance" That rationale leads to sloppy officiating.

The ability of a Starter to determine when all swimmers in a heat are set is an unique one. For every start, the Starter must assume responsibility for doing everything possible to ensure that the start is fair for all the competitors. If the starter believes one or more swimmers left early he does not recall the heat. Rather he should note the lane(s) of the offending swimmers(s). The Referee will initiate a dialogue if he/she observed anything. Remember, a False Start is only charged when the Referee confirms the call.

A swimmer should not be disqualified if a false start may have been caused by some external provocation such a sudden noise, a photo flash by a spectator or even poor starting technique. In the rare decision to recall a heat no swimmer is charged with a false start.

Equipment:

- M Starting Device—an Electronic Timing System (ETS) starting device (with a horn starting signal and a strobe light) A Starter's pistol is not used unless that is the only starting device available. The starting device should be located so that the strobe light is clearly visible to the timers. The speakers should be located so the starting command and signal can be easily heard by the swimmers.
- M Recall Devices —For the starter, it is the recall signal (a warbling sound) produced by the ETS. It is activated by releasing and then depressing the starting button on the starter's microphone. The referee will signal a recall with his whistle.

General Procedures:

The Starter shall:

- M Stand within 10 feet of the starting end of the pool at a point and have a clear view of the starting swimmers.
- M Be in a position where the strobe flash is clearly visible to the timers.
- M Upon signal from the Referee (an outstretched arm following the long whistle), assume full control of the swimmers until a fair start has been achieved.
- M Notify swimmers of the event and heat to be swum only if no announcer is used or the referee requests it.
- M Follow the attached PVS starters script. One should use the minimal commands necessary so that the swimmers always experience standard, predictable starting commands.
- M Do **not** use optional instructions such as :
 - a. Stroke(s) to be used and the order of swimming them;
 - b. Number of pool lengths to be swum;
 - c. Notifying relay swimmers that all but the last swimmer must leave the pool immediately upon completion of their leg.
- M If necessary, use supplementary commands, such as "Place your feet" for backstroke starts; or to advise the heat when a swimmer is attempting to achieve an initial distance time.
- M The Referee may modify the starting rules to adapt them for handicapped swimmers.

STARTING

Forward Start.

On receiving clearance from the Referee (for all events except the backstroke and the medley relay), check to see that the swimmers are on the blocks or in the water and that they are ready. Then pause and say "Take your mark" in a conversational tone. If the swimmers have failed to respond to the referee's whistle, the starter may direct the swimmers to step onto the starting block or platform with a simple command "Ladies/Gentlemen, Step Up Please."

Once the command "Take Your Mark" is given, the swimmer must have at least one foot on the forward edge. While almost all swimmers will move to assume a starting position upon the command, there is no requirement to do so if at least one foot is already at the forward edge.

Say only the mandatory wording unless one or more swimmers is in an improper starting position. If there is a need to make a correction, say e.g., "Lane 5, feet or, if needed, feet must be below the surface." Use concise terminology whenever possible.

Sufficient time should follow, "Take your mark," to enable the swimmers to assume starting positions and to ensure that no swimmer is in motion immediately before the starting signal is given. When all swimmers are motionless in a starting position, give the starting signal.

Backstroke Start:

The swimmers should enter the water on the referee's whistle. If they have not done so, say "Ladies/Gentlemen Step In Please." The swimmers shall line up in the water, facing the starting end, with both hands placed on the gutter or on the starting grips. Upon the referee's second long whistle, the swimmers should place their feet. If they have not done so, say "Place your feet."

Prior to the command, "Take your mark" and until the feet leave the wall at the starting signal, the swimmer's feet, including the toes, must be in the proper position. The swimmers are not permitted to stand in or on the gutter or to curl their toes over the lip of the gutter even if the top of the gutter is below the surface of the water. If a swimmer assumes an illegal position **after** the starting signal is given, it is a stroke violation, **not** a starting violation, and therefore it is the responsibility of a Stroke and Turn Judge.

Relay Starts:

Relay starts for the lead-off swimmer are the same as all other starts. The starts of subsequent legs of the relay are the responsibility of the Relay Take-off Judge.

Deliberate Delay or Misconduct:

The Starter, with the Referee's concurrence, may disqualify any swimmer from the event who delays the start by entering the water or by willfully or deliberately disobeying a starter's command to step up on the blocks, assume a legal

starting position, or for any other misconduct taking place at the start. Such disqualifications shall **not** be charged as a false start.

A record shall be kept of swimmers scheduled to swim who fail to report. It is the Referee's responsibility to determine if they should be barred from either their next event or the remainder of the meet, based on the meet announcement and PVS policy.

False Starts:

When a swimmer does not respond promptly to the command, "Take your mark," or false starts before the starting signal is given, the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with the command, "Stand up" (or, for backstrokers, "Stand down"), upon which the swimmers may stand up (down) or step off the blocks. Any swimmer who enters the water or backstroker who leaves the starting area shall be charged with a false start, except that a swimmer who would otherwise be charged with a false start may be relieved of the charge if the false start was caused by the swimmer's reaction to the command "Stand."

All swimmers leaving their marks before the starting signal is given shall be charged with a false start. (Note exception for deliberate delay or misconduct.)

In backstroke or medley relay events a false start may be charged to any swimmer who fails to maintain feet and/or hands in a legal position after the first warning.

A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the Starter's responsibility. If not corrected *before* the starting signal is given, no penalty may be assessed.

The Starter may charge a swimmer with a false start only if the Referee or an officially designated Deck Referee has observed the violation and confirms that the violation occurred. A Referee *may* call a false start without an independent confirmation, however, a such a unilateral ruling should only be made when a truly blatant violation occurs.

A heat is not recalled except for a bad start by the Starter, or something has happened that the Starter/Referee feels caused an unfair start. In this case, call the heat back and start again. If a heat is recalled, then there is no false start, no matter why the heat was called back.

If there is movement at the start, the heat is allowed to proceed, and any involved swimmers disqualified at the conclusion of the race. This includes swimmers who may have been drawn off by the offending swimmer. However, if you accidentally recall the heat, there is no false start. Starters need to consider how to prevent themselves from recalling on a false start. Recommendations are to not let go of the start button, or immediately open your hand so you cannot do the recall.

Once the race has started, the Referee, and the Starter should independently record the lane(s) they observed having committed a false start or record a "0" if no false start was seen. The Referee will compare this information and will determine what lanes (if any) should be charged with a False Start. The Starter or Referee should also directly notify any swimmer or his coach of a disqualification after the race.

Warning Signal: In all individual events 500 yards or longer, the Starter or a designee shall sound a warning signal (usually a bell) over the water at the finish end of the lane of the leading

swimmer when that swimmer has two lengths plus five yards (or meters) to swim.

STARTING DISABLED SWIMMERS

Starters need to become familiar with the procedures for starting athletes who have disabilities. This is particularly true in this geo-graphic area with the increasing population of deaf or hard of hearing athletes, many of whom wish to "mainstream." USA Swimming's special section in the rulebook—Article 105—addresses officiating swimmers with disabilities. Referees and Starters need to be familiar with the guidelines and become proficient in their use.

For deaf or hard of hearing swimmers Potomac Valley only varies in one regard from the guidelines presented under Article 105. PVS normally uses only the first two arm movements shown in Figure 1 of the Rulebook. The arm is *not* dropped (third movement in Figure 1) when pressing the starting button. Instead, the hearing impaired swimmer should be instructed to watch the strobe and start on the flash of that device at the start. Therefore, it is critical that the Starter meet with any deaf or hearing impaired swimmers before the session and **review and explain to them the starting procedure very carefully**. If the swimmer requests a modification to this procedure, the attempt should be made to do so. It is also important that the strobe be placed so the swimmer can see it easily and that it be kept in the agreed upon position. For backstroke starts, PVS has strobes that have a long cable and can be placed so backstroke swimmers can see it without having to turn their head towards the pool.

HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Equipment and Facilities:

- M Meet management should attempt to have a backup starting system available, particularly for championship level meets. Summer clubs may lend a ETS starting system in an emergency.
- M Some means of voice amplification should be provided. The ETS comes with at least one external speaker and can accommodate more. Usually, because of crowd noise, it is advisable to use, at least two external speakers—one attached to the main system and the other at the opposite side of the pool.
- M Copy of events to be swum (program) and a pencil. If you have a program or heat sheet, mark off the heats as they are swum and note the empty lanes.
- M Disqualification slips (for false starts).
- M Knife or similar tool (to cut tape after attaching speakers to handrails, etc.).

Things to Think About Before the Meet Starts:

- M Does the Referee need your assistance before the meet. Is it your responsibility to appoint the Head Timer, to see that a sufficient number of timers are available, and that they are properly briefed. Do you need to assist with marshaling while the Referee is briefing the officials or dealing with other matters.
- M If the Colorado Timing System is being used, make sure the equipment, including the pads and buttons, is operating properly. The equipment should be checked again when the warm-ups are over.
- M What is the likely traffic flow on the deck. Take steps to make sure swimmers and others cannot walk in front of you and the Referee during a start.
- M What additional instructions should you give?
- M Do the starting blocks need support? If so, how will you handle this problem?
- M What recall procedures will be used? Discuss with the Referee and make sure you know what the procedure will be. It will usually be the Referee's whistle.
- M How will you and the Referee confirm a false start? Where will Referee stand during the starts? Will it be different for backstroke starts? Will he assist you in making sure the feet are in a legal position prior to backstroke starts? How will he signal you if there are problems?
- M Are there relays in this meet? If so, will dual confirmation be used for judging the relay take-offs? Does the Referee expect you to participate in this? If so, how?
- M Does the Referee expect you to handle any extra duties (e.g., act as a Stroke and Turn Judge)?

Starting:

- M Keep track of the event and heat number. Mark each heat off on your heat sheet as it is swum.
- M Obtain a projected "time line" before a session begins. Periodically check to see how the meet's progress compares with the time line and adjust, if necessary. However do **not** rush the starting commands even if the meet is running late. This is not fair to the swimmers and will likely lead to false starts, with an associated delay.
- M Before the meet starts, *if some or all of the events are not pre-seeded*, coordinate with the Computer Operator and/or Administrative Referee and ask to be advised of how many "actual" heats there will be. Then, prior to each event advise the judges over the loudspeaker the number of actual heats.
- M It is the swimmer's job to report to the Clerk of Course (Positive Check-in) area—when used—in time for the proper lane assignment. If there is no Positive Check-in area or lane assignments have been posted following a check-in, the swimmers are responsible for ensuring that they are at their lane, ready to swim, when it is time for their heat.
- M Get the attention of the swimmers. If swimmers get on the blocks or in the water before the referee's whistle, do what the referee directs. (We do not want swimmers commanded off the blocks only to be put back up in quick order.)

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- M When moving the Electronic Starting System (ESS) to the opposite end of the pool from the timers for 25 Yard/Meter events (SC) or 50 meter events (LC), ensure no one obstructs the timers' view of the strobe light (often Stroke and Turn Judges forget this). PVS now has strobes which are external to the starting system that can be positioned higher. Two systems can be wired together so that a separate strobe can be provided for the timers and the swimmers. An additional speaker that the timers can hear improves the quality of the watch times.
- M Be prepared to give hand signals with your voice commands for hearing impaired swimmers.
- M A calm conversational tone and voice inflection is *critical*. Speak **clearly, distinctly and slowly**. Do NOT shout or "bark" commands. That only tends to *cause* false starts.
- M Do NOT preface the "Take your mark" command with any other words or phrases, such as "Swimmers" "Swimmers ready" "Ladies" "Gentlemen" or "Shake it out now"!
- M If one or more swimmers enter the pool before the starting device sounds or before the command to "Stand," all such swimmers should normally be charged with a false start.
- M The Starter has authority to relieve a swimmer of the responsibility for a false start if the action might have been caused by a reaction to the Starter's instruction to "Stand." This authority, however, should be used with discretion, to preclude abuse of the main intent of the false start rule.
- M Do NOT attempt to compete with excessive spectator noise during the start. Insist on **reasonable** quiet. (The Referee must enforce this!)
- M Avoid using a fixed timing pattern to your starting routine.
- M Continue to watch the swimmers for 10-15 meters after each start. Observe to make sure there is no doubt it was a fair start.
- M When an Electronic Timing System is being used, inform the operator about empty lanes.
- M Be sure the preceding race is complete before doing anything that would cause swimmers in the next heat to either enter the water or step up on the starting blocks..
- M When using a bell to signal the "bell lap" in a distance event, ring it from the time the swimmer comes under the backstroke flags, turns at the wall and returns to the flags.

Common Starting Problems:

- M Swimmer not paying attention to the Starter, and who, thus, takes his position late or not at all.
- M Swimmer who continues to move towards a starting position, never makes it; and eventually falls off balance.
- M Swimmer who thinks he has the starter's "starting pattern" figured out and is trying to "jump the start." Lately, this is only done occasionally by less experienced swimmers.
- M Swimmer who assumes a starting position very slowly, hoping to start on a recoil just as the starting device is activated and, thereby, gaining a split-second advantage. (Solution: Normally just wait, after last swimmer is still, wait just a little more, then start. If deemed toooooo slow, stand the swimmers up—stand the backstrokers down—and caution the offenders.)
- M Novice swimmer who does not change his position in response to "Take Your Mark.." The rules do NOT specify what the "starting position" should be other than that at least one foot must be at the forward edge of the starting block. A swimmer does NOT have to crouch down. The swimmer is only required to be motionless immediately prior to the start.
- M Starter uncomfortable because swimmer(s) are looking at him. (Swimmer are not required to look straight ahead (this would be very difficult for a hearing impaired swimmer). A swimmer may look at the Starter or anywhere else prior to the start!)
- M Starter getting the laps mixed up in the distance events. If the event requires a warning signal, count the laps yourself. Do NOT depend on the Timer or the Counter at the other end of the pool. USA

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Swimming does NOT require that each swimmer have a lap counter at the opposite end of the pool. Also,, USA Swimming Lap Counters may visually signal laps to their swimmer in either *ascending* or *descending* order, and they may signal from the sides rather than the ends of the pool. PVS has forms for keeping track of the number of lengths swum. Use them. It is best to track each swimmer to make sure you spot a lead change versus lapping. Stay focused. If you don't, you will lose count and run the risk of signaling the bell lap at the wrong time or over the wrong lane.