



# Take Your Mark!

Potomac Valley Swimming  
Parents Newsletter

February, 2019

## Timing is Easy!

You hear it at nearly every swim meet: the announcement that “We need timers in order to start the meet!” I was one of those people who avoided eye contact when the officials were looking for volunteer timers. After all, I’d never done this before at a real swim meet, and it looked complicated. All the other folks seemed to be experienced timers who already knew how everything worked. What if I messed up—that would really be embarrassing.

Well, it turns out that it’s not that difficult, and there’s always a bunch of veteran timers who are happy to help a newbie!

Timers are handed a digital stop watch with two or more buttons. One button starts and stops the watch; another button clears the watch and resets it to zero. I had plenty of time before the first heat to play with the watch and get used to operating it. The other piece of timing equipment used at most meets is the plunger button, attached to each lane. Timers are typically asked to operate a watch and a button, one for each hand.

One timer in each lane is given a clipboard with a list of swimmers who will be swimming in that particular lane. This person is something of a traffic cop, who tries to ensure that the correct swimmer is swimming in the correct lane and heat. He/she also records the watch times for each heat.

At the start of each heat, the timers watch for the strobe light on the starting box, and they start watch at the flash. Strobes do fail occasionally, so in that case, start the watch on the sound. If the timer misses the start or if the watch malfunctions, there is always a head-timer who has extra stop watches; signal to this person and he/she will make sure you have one of those extra watches.

At the finish of the race, the timers stand at the edge of the deck to clearly see the finish touch. When any part of the swimmer touches the wall, the timers stop the watch; they also push the plunger button at the finish. While the watch is important, the plunger button is critical. The watch time is recorded by the timer with the clipboard, the watch is cleared, and we’re ready for the next heat. And that’s pretty much it—timing is easy and very rewarding!



## What is a False Start?

“My child was disqualified for a false start. But he didn’t go into the pool before the others. I don’t understand!”

The false start rule can be confusing. The rulebook says, “Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.” Let’s see how this rule is applied.

When the starter says, “Take your mark,” the swimmers are required to assume a stationary starting position without delay. If swimmers are taking too long to assume their starting positions and to become set, the Starter may tell the heat to “Stand,” and begin the sequence again. But once a set position is attained, any further movement may be considered a start. And if the movement occurs prior to the starting signal, it’s a false start.

The Referee and Starter must be in agreement that a false start has occurred. Each must independently mark the violation on their heat sheets; one official cannot “talk the other” into agreement. A false start is one of the rare violations that requires independent dual confirmation.

There are, however, a few things that can occur that are not considered false starts. For instance, if the swimmer has not yet become set in a starting position and loses balance in the process of getting into the position, a false start is not charged. If the Referee and Starter agree that the swimmer started in response to the “Stand” command, a false start is similarly not charged.

The starting signal consists of a light and a sound. For that reason, if there is an extraneous flash of light (flash photography) or a sudden loud sound at the start, a false start is not charged. But the starting signal does not move—if the swimmer starts in response to a movement (in the water, on another starting block), a false start can be charged.

If the false start is confirmed by both officials before the starting signal is given, the swimmer is immediately disqualified and does not swim the race. If the starting signal has been given before the false start can be confirmed, the race continues and the swimmer is disqualified upon completion of the heat.



## Links to some intriguing articles for swim parents:

### How to Help Your Swimmer Have a Great Mindset

<https://www.usaswimming.org/news-landing-page/2019/01/30/parents----how-to-help-your-swimmer-have-a-great-mindset>

### Goal Setting Tips for Children: Parent’s Role

<https://www.momsteam.com/sports/goal-setting-tips-for-children-parents-role>

### Less Is More in Swim Parenting

<https://swimswam.com/less-is-more-in-swim-parenting/>