

CHAPTER 4

STARTER

Starter

The starter has the responsibility to ensure that all swimmers receive a fair and equitable start. It is important that each competitor be given the opportunity to achieve the best start possible within the confines of the rules. The starter must know the rules governing starting procedures.

Starter Preparation

Personal Preparation - The starter should review the rules and schedule of events and establish protocol procedures with the meet referee. In addition, the starter should be familiar with the guidelines for officiating swimmers with a disability.

Competition Course - Preparation begins long before the start of the first heat in the meet. The starter should become familiar with the competition course and determine the location where the starter and recall starter will be positioned. This position shall be within 10 feet of the starting end of the pool and should be free from any obstruction that might block or restrict the view of the athletes on the blocks. This position should also be coordinated with the referee. Each block should be examined for proper position and ability to support the starting action of an athlete. The location and operation of the recall rope should be reviewed and tested.

Equipment - The starter must become familiar with the type of equipment that will be used. If a pistol is to be used for either starting or recall starting, the starter must be certain it is in working order, that there are enough shells to finish the meet, and that a backup starting pistol is available. The starter must check that the pistol is loaded prior to each heat and double check that there are enough shells in the pistol to recall the heat if there is a false start.

When a horn start system is used, the starter should check the system at least one-half hour before the first race so that any needed repairs or modifications can be made. The system should be retested with the timers in place just before the start of the meet. Since horn start systems are electrically operated, it is important for the starter to know how to prevent common malfunctions and how to repair the simple problems that may occur. The starter should also test the functioning of the recall system verifying that the microphone works properly. The number of speakers and their placement and proper operation should be checked verifying that there is proper volume to be clearly audible to all starting positions. The strobe light for the starting signal should be located such that it is clearly visible to all swimmers and timers (including backstroke events).

Recall Starter

The recall starter will stand on the opposite side of the pool from the starter and shall be within 10 feet from the starting end of the pool. For the forward start on the referee's whistle, the recall starter will raise the pistol no higher than waist level and aim it toward the pool away from the swimmers. During backstroke starts, the recall starter will not raise the pistol until the swimmers on their side of the pool have their feet in the proper position. It is important to be aware of safety in firing the pistol. Be careful where you hold the pistol so that if you must fire it, it will not injure anyone. If the starter recalls the heat or if the recall starter observes a false start, the pistol should be fired once.

Starting Procedures

USA Swimming Championship Meets and Other Meets as Designated-USA Swimming Rules and Regulations state that the National Championship starting procedures shall be used. At the commencement of each heat, the referee shall signal to the swimmers by a short series of whistles to remove all clothing except for swimwear, followed by a long whistle indicating that they should take their positions on the starting platform and remain there. This procedure allows the athlete to take any position desired on the starting platform. In backstroke and medley relay events, at the referee's first long whistle the swimmers shall immediately enter the water and at the second long whistle shall place their hands and feet in preparation for the start. When the swimmers and officials are ready, the referee shall signal with an outstretched arm to the starter that the swimmers are under the starter's control.

On the starter's command "take your mark", the swimmers shall immediately assume their starting position with at least one foot at the front of the block or, in backstroke and medley relay events, assume the backstroke starting position. When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal.

All Other Meets- USA Swimming Rules and Regulations state that, the starter, upon receiving clearance from the referee (for all events except backstroke and medley relay) directs swimmers to step on to the starting platform and remain there. For backstroke and medley relay events the starter directs swimmers to step into the pool. These commands should be "ladies or gentlemen, step up or step in please". The referee shall blow a whistle after the swimmers have stepped onto the starting platform or when the backstroke swimmers are at the wall with their heads above water. This whistle indicates that the competition course is ready, officials are in place, and the field is turned over to the starter. When the starter determines the field is ready the swimmers shall be notified of the distance and event. After an appropriate pause the starter shall direct the swimmers to "take your mark" to which the swimmers shall immediately assume their starting position with at least one foot at the front of the block or, in backstroke and medley relay events, assume the backstroke starting position. When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal.

Backstroke Starts-The backstroke requires different starting conditions, since the swimmers start the race in the water. The swimmers line up in the water facing the starting end with both hands placed on the gutter or on the starting grips. The feet, including the toes, must be entirely under the surface of the water until the starting signal is given. The swimmer may not stand in or on the gutter nor curl the toes over the

lip of the gutter prior to the start. It is the duty of the starter to ensure that these requirements are met prior to giving the starting signal.

False Starts

The starter and the recall starter will recall all false starts. This means the horn and the pistol are to be heard on all false starts. The pistol should be fired once on a recall unless an additional shot is required to assure the swimmers stop. The starter, recall starter, and referee will independently write down the lane they observed to false start. If no lane is observed simply write (zero). If the referee and starter concur, there is no need for the referee to confer with the recall starter unless the referee chooses. This procedure may vary depending on the level of meet. If the recall starter has information that might assist in determining if a false start occurred the recall starter should get the attention of the referee.

When it becomes apparent, because of uneven motion or delay of the swimmers in assuming their positions, that a fair start will be difficult to achieve, the starter should give the command "stand up" or for backstroke starts, "stand down". Upon hearing this command, the swimmers should stand up on the starting platform; backstrokers may relax. 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. This, however, does not relieve any swimmer from disqualification for deliberate delay if he intentionally enters the water.

USA Swimming rules state that any swimmers leaving their marks prior to the starting signal shall be disqualified. This disqualification may be relieved if, in the opinion of the referee, the swimmer moved as a result of the action or movement of another competitor.

National Championship Starting Procedures

With the National Championship starting procedure, the referee will give a series of short whistles to have the swimmers disrobe to their suits and approach the platform. When all swimmers are at the step, the referee then gives a long whistle blast to have the swimmers step onto the platform and assume any foot position. When the swimmers appear ready, the referee will signal with an outstretched arm to the starter for the start to commence. The starter only says "TAKE-YOUR-MARK" and when all are motionless, gives the starting signal.

When "TAKE-YOUR-MARK" is the only command, the pause, after the referee's whistle, should be long enough for the swimmers to step onto the starting block and settle into their ready position, keeping in mind that every swimmer may have a different position. As in all levels of forward starts, if a swimmer assumes a position with at least one foot at the front edge of the platform before the "TAKE-YOUR-MARK" command, the other foot does not need to move forward on the command. If neither foot is at the front edge of the platform before the command, one foot must move forward to the edge

of the platform. When all swimmers are motionless, the starter needs to activate the start signal. The philosophy as to when to activate the signal is discussed in detail in an earlier part of this manual."

Philosophy

Starters are charged with a great amount of responsibility in seeing that one swimmer does not gain an advantage over the others during the start. This responsibility requires concentration, quick reactions and fair decisions. It takes practice to become a good starter. With experience, the starter will be able to accurately judge when the field is ready to race. This will help to prevent the false starts caused by the swimmers being jumpy or in a hurry because they aren't ready.

Starters should speak in a conversational tone, avoiding rapid instructions and sharp commands. The voice of a good starter will lead the swimmers into their starting positions, not break their concentration with unexpected orders or remarks. At the same time, the starter must protect all of the competitors by not allowing any one swimmer to gain an unfair advantage.