



STARTING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES VIRGINIA SWIMMING

29 October 1999

BACKGROUND

At the 1999 USA Swimming Convention, two significant changes were made to the starting procedures to bring USA Swimming more closely into conformance with the rules of FINA, the international governing body for swimming. The first change fully implements the so-called "whistle-start" procedure that had been known as the "National Championship" procedure throughout all levels of competition in USA Swimming. The second change requires the use of the "No Recall" procedure at USA Swimming Championship meets and authorizes its use at all meets.

On 3 October 1999, upon the recommendation of the Officials Committee, the Virginia Swimming House of Delegates voted to implement both of the new procedures simultaneously. All senior level meets and any A+ or better meet (e.g.: AA, A+, Senior Invitational) sanctioned by Virginia Swimming and competed after 1 December 1999 shall use the new procedures and notice to this effect shall be contained in the meet invitation. All other levels of meets (e.g.: A/BB, BB/B/C, Mini B/C) shall use the revised procedures commencing 1 January 2000.

PROCEDURE

The rules provide the following guidance:

WHISTLE START (102.14.2)

At the commencement of each heat, the Referee shall signal to the swimmers by a short series of whistles to remove all clothing except swimwear, followed by a long whistle indicating that they should take their positions on the starting platform and remain there. 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 return without undue delay to the starting position.

When the swimmers and officials are ready, the Referee shall signal with an out-stretched 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. When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal.

NO RECALL (not currently in rules; will be 102.14.4H in 2000 Rulebook)

Virginia Swimming Starting Policies and Procedures

Any swimmer starting before the starting signal has been given shall be disqualified. If the starting signal sounds before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue and the swimmer or swimmers shall be disqualified upon completion of the race. If the disqualification is declared before the starting signal, the signal shall not be given, the remaining swimmers shall be called back, be reminded by the starter of the penalties, and start again.

In addition, the position of Recall Starter is eliminated from meets using the no recall false start.

IMPLEMENTATION POLICIES:

- From initiation of the procedures through 1 February 2000, swimmers who miss their events entirely or substantially because of confusion over the use of the whistle start, including errors by announcers and timers **will** be given an opportunity to swim the event, even if additional heats are required. As has always been the case, swimmers must have been appropriately proximate to the blocks and ready to swim for them to receive the benefit of doubt.
- From 1 February 2000 to 1 March 2000, swimmers who miss their events entirely or substantially because of confusion over the use of the whistle start may at the Referee's discretion be given an opportunity to swim the event, however additional heats will only be added in exceptional circumstances. Events missed because of errors by officials, including timers and announcers, will be swum and additional heats added if needed.
- After 1 March 2000, only errors by meet officials, including timers and announcers, will be corrected.
- From initiation through 1 February 2000, the Referee may charge a false start to a swimmer committing an obvious and dually confirmed false start even when the starter instinctively recalled the heat.
- After 1 February 2000, except in very unusual cases, all swimmers in recalled heats shall be relieved of a false start.
- At the start, any starting infraction observed by either the starter or referee shall be independently noted in writing and then compared to determine if dual confirmation on a false start exists.
- All meets during the 1999-2000 short course season using the whistle start procedure shall have a certified clerk of course available for all sessions, whether pre-seeded or not to assist with ensuring proper flow of swimmers to the blocks.
- For Mini events (25's for the 8 & Y), the Referee and Starter will provide appropriate directions/instructions from the Starter and Referee to minimize confusion for the 8 & Younger swimmers. This may include omitting the three short whistles since most 8 & younger swimmers will already be behind the blocks/gutter with other than swimsuits removed.

GUIDANCE:

- TRAINING:
 - The new Starter video is available from each of the Regional Referees and contains information about the whistle starts.
 - The USA Swimming web site (www.usa-swimming.org/officials) contains textual information about both procedures.
 - The Regional Referees will emphasize the starting procedures at pre-meet officials and coaches meetings.

- PROCESS:
 - The series of short whistles should be 3-4 **chirps** of the whistle; they should NOT be whistle blasts. The swimmers should be expecting them and only they and the announcer need to respond to them. These chirps should not disturb swimmers in the pool as blasts might. If the referee observes that all of the swimmers are in place behind the blocks before the whistle chirps, the chirps may be eliminated, however communicating what is intended may take longer than using the chirps and be disruptive of the flow of the session.
 - The position of announcer is critical to this process. When at all possible, the announcer should be physically located near the start end of the pool, preferably in a position to be able to communicate directly with the referee and starter. After the short chirps, the event and heat numbers are announced. The “long event name” is also announced once prior to its first heat. The starter can serve as the announcer if the situation mandates but still follows the same procedure.
 - Timers are also critical to the process. Referees shall brief the head timer prior to the beginning of every session and should assist the head timer in briefing the timers. Since timers frequently change during a session, the head timer and referee will need to ensure that replacement timers are briefed in the procedure before beginning their shift.
 - The referee and starter are to be on the same side of the pool unless the physical arrangement of the venue prevents this. This is the **prescribed** arrangement from FINA/USA Swim and we will conform.
 - These procedures will work with the overhead start techniques—practice is required to get the timing correct. It is imperative; however, that the referee be even more cognizant of timer readiness than is the case today. The starter and referee must act as a team and adjust their timing and cues according to the flow of the meet.
 - The heat is closed when the referee raises the arm and turns the heat over to the starter.

- AVOIDING THE INSTINCTIVE RECALL:
 - Starters now have to unlearn that which they have learned so well. They must now react with a pencil rather than a button. However, they still must be prepared to recall a heat if there is an equipment malfunction,

Virginia Swimming Starting Policies and Procedures

external interference like a flash at the start, or similar occurrence. Moreover, starters still have a responsibility to ensure a fair start and must recall a start on which they, the starter, made a mistake such as not allowing a swimmer to get set before activating the start system.

- Focus, focus, focus and practice, practice, practice are by far the best methods for avoiding the instinctive recall.
- Consciously removing the finger from the button and off of the microphone key are suggested techniques, but each starter will need to develop his or her own methods.
- **FALSE STARTS:**
 - **Every swimmer must be responsible for their own start.** Each swimmer who jumps ahead of the start signal is at risk of being disqualified. No one can be relieved of a false start because of being drawn off by the actions of other swimmers in the heat. The reason is obvious—whether drawn or not, the swimmer got a jump on the field which is unfair to the swimmers who held their position.
 - The referee and starter shall independently write down all observed violations and then compare their written records to determine if both saw the same violation(s). The individual observing the potential false start violation will raise her/his hand as is standard for any observed potential violation.
 - False starts will be recorded on the standard disqualification slip.
- **OTHER TIPS:**
 - Without a recall starter and with the referee and starter on the same side of the pool, noticing toes on backstroke starts is more difficult. Starters and referees should not make a display of leaning out and peering over the edge at toes. Accept that some very minor violations are possible and focus on the obvious.
 - Referees should have a good whistle with an internal ball (e.g.: Acme Thunder) and should keep a spare whistle with their on-deck materials.

These procedures are new to virtually everyone in Virginia Swimming. The phase-in is designed to allow athletes, coaches, and officials to become comfortable with and proficient at the new starting protocols during meets where relatively less rides on the outcome of races and meets and before the championship season. To that end, all starters and referees working any of our championship-level meets will have worked a minimum number of sessions in position.

- **START PROTOCOL:**

The following start procedures are recommended to facilitate reasonable consistency across the LSC.

- The announcer/starter will announce event changes.

Virginia Swimming Starting Policies and Procedures

- The announcer/starter will request all swimmers for an event report behind the blocks prior to the Referee giving the three/four short whistles.
- The announcer/starter will call subsequent heats behind the blocks while the previous heat is in the water, again prior to the Referee giving the three/four short whistles.
- As the last swimmer makes the last turn in the race the Referee will sound the three short whistle blasts.
- As the swimmer touches at the finish the referee sounds the long whistle for the swimmers to step on the blocks.
- When the swimmers are in place the Referee turns the heat over to the Starter by hand signal.
- The Starter issues the “Take Your Mark” command, and when appropriate the start signal.

- **DIVE-OVER START PROTOCOL:**

The following procedures shall be utilized when using dive-over starts.

- The announcer/starter will announce event changes.
- The announcer/starter will request all swimmers for an event report behind the blocks prior to the Referee giving the three/four short whistles.
- The announcer/starter will call subsequent heats behind the blocks while the previous heat is in the water, again prior to the Referee giving the three/four short whistles.
- As the last swimmer makes the last turn in the race the Referee will sound the three short whistle blasts.
- The announcer/starter will announce the heat number/long event name.
- As the swimmer passes under the flags closest to the finish the referee sounds the long whistle for the swimmers to step on the blocks.
- When the swimmers are in place the Referee turns the heat over to the Starter by hand signal.
- The Starter issues the “Take Your Mark” command, and when appropriate the start signal.