



**Starter
Certification Clinic**

Philosophy

- The primary responsibility of the starter is to ensure that *all* swimmers receive a *fair* start
- The starter does not “command” the swimmers to start, rather the starter *invites* the swimmers to swim
- Always speak in a calm voice; *never* raise your voice or yell

Philosophy (Cont)

- Do not penalize the swimmers because *you* gave them a bad start
 - A bad start is not the same as a false start
 - Stand the heat and recompose yourself if necessary
 - Recall the heat if necessary (rare)
- Do not worry about the timeline after you have assumed control of the swimmers

Timing System

- Colorado Starting Systems are used at most meets (NOVA uses Daktronics)
- Connections
 - Charger
 - Microphone
 - Speakers
 - Timing harness
 - N.O.= Normally Open = Not Omega=Colorado
 - N.C.= Normally Closed = Not Colorado=Omega

Timing System (cont)

- In conjunction with the Timing Equipment Operator, a complete electronic timing system check should be done prior to the start of every session
 - Microphone
 - Start button
 - Speakers
 - Pads
 - Buttons
 - CTS or Daktronics timing system
 - Printer
 - Scoreboard

Timing System (cont)

- A test start should be performed when switching connections from one end of the pool to the other to ensure that a starting signal is being received by the timing equipment
- The starting unit should be switched off and connected to the charger between sessions

Timing System (cont)

- The electronic strobe needs to be positioned such that it can be seen by the timers
- The speakers should be located such that the starting commands and signals can clearly be heard by the swimmers
- Well before the start of the session, check the starting blocks for stability

Preparation

- The Starter shall stand within ten feet of the starting end of the pool
- The Starter assumes full control of the swimmers upon signal from the Referee (an outstretched arm) and maintains control until a fair start has been achieved
 - On occasion, the referee may drop his/her arm to stop the start from proceeding

Focus Between Heats

- Ordinarily, the Starter should not perform double duty as a Stroke & Turn official
- Maintain a relaxed composure
- Starting no later than the 4-5 whistle blasts, scan behind the lanes for problems (missing swimmers, confusion, crowd blocking access to the blocks)

Focus Between Heats (Cont)

- Know which blocks should have swimmers and let the Referee know which lane's missing and where there's a potential problem
- Many scoreboards will display a dot following the lane number when the timing system has been reset for the next race; consult with the referee for who will have responsibility for watching for this signal

Crowded Conditions Behind and Between the Blocks

- This is your dominion; protecting it helps you and the swimmers
- With permission of the Referee
 - Request Timers and Officials to step back to chairs
 - Swimmers not on the blocks should remain behind the chairs
 - After the heat goes off, the next heat of swimmers can come forward
- Marshal should help enforce

Required and Optional Instructions

- In the absence of an announcer, the Starter may announce the event
- The Starter may advise the heat when a swimmer will be attempting to achieve a time at an initial distance
- “Take your mark”
- “Stand”, “Stand up”, or “Relax”

Whistle Start Protocol

- In use at all VSI sanctioned competition
- 4-5 short whistle blasts by the Referee signals upcoming heat of swimmers that their start is coming up
- 1 long whistle blast by the Referee signals the swimmers to step on the blocks or into the water (as appropriate)
- For backstroke starts, an additional whistle blast signals “place your feet”

Whistle Starts (cont)

- The timing of the whistles is by judgment of the Referee, and is determined by the level of swimmers, the time line, and whether or not dive-over starts are being used

Announcing Events

- Referee: 4-5 whistle blasts
- Starter: “Event 1, Women’s 13-14 100 Yard Freestyle, Heat 1”
- Referee: 1 long whistle blast
- Starter: “Take your mark”
- Starter: Starting signal
- Swimmers swim
- Referee: 4-5 whistle blasts
- Starter: “Heat 2”
- Continue as above

Announcing Guidelines

- State complete event, not abbreviation
 - Butterfly, not fly
 - Backstroke, not back
 - Breaststroke, not breast
 - Freestyle, not free
 - Individual Medley, not IM

Announcing Guidelines (cont)

- Singular, not plural
 - 100 Yard, not 100 Yards or 100
 - 100 Meter, not 100 Meters or 100
- Do **not** ask if:
 - There is a swimmer for lane X
 - If John Smith is present

Announcing Guidelines (cont)

- Do **not** use commands such as:
 - Stroke(s) to be used and/or the order of swimming them
 - Number of lengths
 - Any other language unless specifically requested to by the Referee

Announcing Guidelines (cont)

- Dealing with a noisy venue — Do's
 - Wait for the noise level to drop, the crowd will generally become quiet if you wait
 - If no Announcer is available, announce “Quiet for the start, please”
 - If an Announcer is available, have a general announcement made requesting “quiet for the start, please”
 - With concurrence of the Referee, step the swimmers off the blocks

Announcing Guidelines (cont)

- Dealing with a noisy venue — Don'ts
 - Do not attempt to “talk over” the noise
 - Do not raise your voice or yell, it is generally ineffective and only makes you look bad
 - Do not proceed with “take your mark”, hoping that the swimmers will hear you

Forward Start

- 4-5 short whistle blasts will signal the next heat of swimmers to be prepared to step up
- 1 long whistle blast signals the swimmers to step onto the blocks
 - Swimmers stepping up before the long whistle need not be stepped down, particularly if they will have to immediately step back up
 - If the swimmer steps up “way early” you might indicate to the swimmer how early they are
 - Different Referees have different preferences for handling this situation—do as requested

Forward Start (cont)

- When the swimmers and officials are ready, the Referee will signal with an outstretched arm that the swimmers are in the Starter's control
 - Do not ask swimmers to step up, or call for missing swimmers unless directed to do so by the Referee
 - Act as a second set of eyes for the Referee; if there are problems behind the blocks, let the Referee know
 - Know which lanes should be empty/full

Forward Start (cont)

- When the swimmers have “settled”, say “Take your mark”
 - Said in a conversational tone, as in “close the door”
 - Prior to the “take your mark” command, the swimmer’s feet may be placed anywhere on the starting platform
 - After the “take your mark” command, the swimmer must have at least one foot to the front of the starting platform
 - Prior to the command, the feet may be anywhere on the block--both forward, both back, one forward and one back

Forward Start (Cont)

- Swimmers only have to become stationary, they do not need to crouch down or assume any particular position
- Some swimmers will remain standing, while other swimmers will achieve a set position before the “take your mark” command is given
- Stationary is a relative term when used with young swimmers

Forward Start (cont)

- When all of the swimmers are stationary, the Starter gives the starting signal
 - The rules state that the swimmer must “immediately assume their starting position”, they do not state that the swimmers must “come down together”
 - Making sure that there is no motion can be difficult as some swimmers continue to change position after a point at which you might have thought they would have stopped
 - Want to learn to see the whole field simultaneously, without focusing unduly on individual swimmers

Forward Start (cont)

- When a swimmer does not promptly respond to the command “take your mark”
 - Release the swimmers with the command “stand up” or “stand” which allows the swimmers to stand up or step off the blocks (the latter almost never happens)

Backstroke Start

- 4-5 short whistle blasts will signal the next heat of swimmers to be prepared to step up
- 1 long whistle blast signals the swimmers to step into the pool
- A second long whistle blast signals the swimmers to return to the wall without delay
- The optional command “place your feet” is not ordinarily used in VSI sanctioned meets

Backstroke Start (cont)

- The swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands placed on the gutter or on the starting grips. Standing in or on the gutter, placing the toes above the lip of the gutter, or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter, before or after the start, is prohibited.
- All other aspects of the start are the same as the forward start

Relay Starts

- Starts for the lead swimmer are the same as the individual events
- The starts of subsequent swimmers are the responsibility of the Relay Take-Off Judges

Dealing With Swimmers Not Getting Set

- 1st instance—stand the heat
- 2nd instance—stand the heat and issue generic warning such as “please respond promptly to my command”
- 3rd instance—stand the heat, step it down, and issue specific warning to the problem lane such as “lane 3, please respond promptly to my command”
- 4th instance—recommend to the Referee a DQ for “deliberate delay” (extraordinarily rare)

Deliberate Delay or Misconduct

- When a swimmer delays the start by entering the water or by willfully or deliberately disobeying a command to step on the blocks or to take a starting position, or for any other misconduct taking place at the start, may be disqualified from the event by the Starter with the concurrence of the Referee

Delay or Deliberate Misconduct (cont)

- The Referee shall disqualify a swimmer who fails to appear at the starting platform ready to swim in time for the initial start of his/her heat
 - Example: Stepping up after the Referee has closed the heat by extending his/her arm

False Starts

- 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
- Swimmers remaining on the starting blocks shall be relieved from their starting positions with the "stand up" command and may step off the blocks
- The Starter shall restart the race upon signal by the Referee

False Starts (cont)

- If the starting signal has been given before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue without recall. If the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation that a violation occurred, the swimmer or swimmers who have false started shall be disqualified upon completion of the race.

False Starts (cont)

- If the recall signal is activated inadvertently, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start and the Starter shall restart the race upon signal by the Referee.
- 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 "stand up" command.

False Starts (cont)

- A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the race is permitted to proceed. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter

Declared False Start

- Declared false start: swimmers reporting to the Referee prior to the start of their race and declaring their intent not to compete will be disqualified except as noted in 207.12.10D

False Start Mechanics

- Upon observing a false start, both the Starter and Referee should independently record the offending lane(s)
- The Starter should then initiate contact with the Referee and report “I have a false start in lane X”
- With confirmation by the Referee, the swimmer is charged with a false start

Warning Signal

- In individual events 500 yards or longer, a signal shall be sounded (most often 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/meters to swim
- Ring the bell from the time the swimmer swims under the flags until the swimmer returns to the flags
- If events have been combined (age, sex) into a single heat, the bell should be rung for the lead swimmer of each event in the combined heat

Starting Swimmers on the Deck or in the Pool

- Referee can allow swimmers to start from the deck or in the water
- If starting from the deck, the swimmer must have at least one foot at the front edge of the deck following “take your mark” and then remain stationary until the start
- If starting in the water, the swimmer must “grab” the wall with at least one hand following “take your mark” and then remain stationary until the start

Starting Disabled Swimmers

- Specific guidelines are set-out in the rule book with which the Starter should be familiar
- Deaf athletes are most often seen
 - Strobe needs to be positioned such that it can be seen by the swimmer at the start
 - Hand signals are given in the rule book, but it is advisable to speak with the coach about the athlete's particular needs

Other Duties as Assigned

- Brief Timers prior to start of session
- Stroke & Turn Judge for lanes adjacent to the starting unit
- Relay Take-Off Judge
- Order of finish (off Starter)
- Trainer for Apprentices

Communications

- Does the Referee have any special instructions or preferences
- Most Referees will let the Starter have the first choice of where to stand, with the Referee then having second choice
 - For forward starts, some Starters prefer to have the Referee between them and the blocks as it is easier to see the outstretched arm

Paperwork

- Keep track of the current heat/event on a heat sheet
- Mark any no-shows for each heat
- Mark confirmed false starts
- Have DQ slips available for writing false start violations

Miscellaneous

- Do not fall into a fixed timing pattern for your starting routine
- Continue watching the swimmers for 10-15 yards to make sure that there are no problems
- After starting the race, slowly lower the microphone while remaining ready for a recall if necessary
- Alert the timing equipment operator of any empty lanes

Miscellaneous (cont)

- New Starters often feel they can do a session with no help or breaks
- Seasoned Starters welcome breaks as a means of remaining focused

Training Opportunities

- In general, all training sessions must be performed at VSI/USA Swimming sanctioned meets. Approval to train at non-VSI LSC meets requires prior approval of the apprentice's District Officials Chair, or the Officials Committee Chairperson
- To sign up for training contact your team official's chairman

Training Opportunities Cont'd

- LSC Championship Meets (Senior Championships, Age Group Championships and similar meets) may not be used for Starter training.
- District/Regional Championship Meets (District Champs, Regional Champs, Summer Awards) may be used for limited training of apprentices subject to the discretion of the meet referee as follows:
 - Starter apprentices must have completed at least five (5) training sessions with positive ratings. Final sessions and certification may occur if all other requirements are met.
- Other championship-format meets run by individual host clubs provide additional opportunities for Starter training, including initial sessions

The Start

Philosophy and Protocol

A USA Swimming Officials
Training Video