



# STARTER

## INTRODUCTION

The Starter is, undoubtedly, one of the most important officials on the deck. The Starter is the **only** official who is in direct contact with the swimmers in such a manner that his/her actions can clearly affect the swimmer's performance. Accordingly, this is a position that cannot be taken casually. It **must** be constantly practiced and, whenever possible, improved.

The Starter is also the “next in command” in a swim meet. That does not mean that the starter has any authority over the other officials on the deck. It does mean that, if the Referee becomes incapacitated, the Starter will have to assume the Referee’s job. Consequently, in the NVSL, individuals who wish to be trained as starters are encouraged first to be familiar with the other positions.

Moreover, the Starter’s authority to call a “false start,” with the Referee’s concurrence, disqualifying a competitor, is unique. This is one of the few instances when an external provocation may cause a competitor to be disqualified (e.g., movement by another swimmer; poor starting techniques, etc.). Accordingly, starters are reminded of the dominant principle that must guide **all** officials: ***fairness to all competitors, giving the benefit of the doubt in every instance to the swimmer.*** This does not mean that you should give any competitor “a second chance!” (That sort of rationale leads to sloppy officiating.) It does mean, however, that the Starter must be willing to assume the responsibility, each and every

time he/she starts a race, of doing everything possible to ensure that the start is absolutely fair to all the competitors. Thereafter, if a clear violation has been observed (not inferred), the false start should be called without hesitation. Remember, though, that the Starter must have concurrence from the Referee before a false start is confirmed and subsequently announced.

## PREPARATION

- Review the “Basic Concepts of Officiating.”
  - Take officiating seriously and work hard at it.
  - Work regularly at the job.
  - Be professional in manner.
  - Be in the proper uniform.
- Equipment: Shall be provided with either a sound-starting device—usually with a strobe light. (Most pools in the league use the portable Colorado starting system.)
- General Procedures
  - Shall ***stand within 10 feet of the starting end of the pool*** at a point where the visual starting signal is clearly visible to the timers and the horn will be easily heard by the starting swimmers.
  - The Referee blows 4-5 short whistles (chirps),
  - The announcer names the event and announces the swimmers,
  - The Referee gives one long whistle blast for the swimmers to step up or step in; he/she then extends an arm giving full control of the swimmers to the Starter until a fair start has been achieved.

- For backstroke starts only, the Referee will give a second-long whistle to tell the swimmers to place their feet.
- The starter notifies swimmers of distance and stroke.
- Optional instructions:
  - “Step up” or “step in” if swimmers have failed to respond to the referee’s whistle.
  - Notifying relay swimmers that all but the last swimmer must leave the pool immediately upon completion of their leg.
- Referee may modify the starting rules to adapt them for swimmers with a disability.

## STARTING

### *Forward Start*

Starting blocks may NOT be used in NVSL meets. The forward start will be executed from the pool deck without the aid of devices that are intended to elevate any part of the swimmer's feet. A single, flat towel may be placed at the edge of the pool for the start but must be removed before the swimmer returns to the starting end.

On receiving clearance from the Referee (for all events except the backstroke and the medley relay), *if necessary*, direct the swimmers to assume a position near the front edge of the deck before further instructions are given. There is no need for the swimmers to have both feet equal distant from the pool edge. There is also no requirement for the swimmers to remain upright. They may bend over from the waist, etc. before the starting command.

There is no need to say anything else except to give the mandatory information prior to the start unless one or more swimmers do not assume an initial ready position.

Notify swimmers of distance and event (e.g., “50-yard freestyle”).

Direct swimmers to “Take your marks,” to which they must immediately respond by assuming a starting position by moving at least one foot to the front of the deck, unless the swimmer already has one foot at the starting edge of the pool. **(Pause)** Sufficient time should follow, “Take your marks,” 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 competitors are stationary in a starting position, give the starting signal.

### *Backstroke Start*

Starting blocks may NOT be used. If swimmers have not entered the water upon the referee’s first long whistle, simply command, “Step in.” (In response, the swimmers are expected to step, feet first, into the pool, NOT to dive into it.)

Swimmers must line up in the water, facing the starting end, and **may** secure a handhold only below the knees of the legs of another person to prepare for the start. The heels of the person providing such assistance shall not extend over the vertical plane of the end of the pool. Only one other person may assist the person whose legs are grasped by the backstroker. Head coaches, timers, or anyone officiating at the meet may not provide the assistance described in this paragraph.

Towels draped over the pool edge to facilitate swimmer traction on the pool walls are permissible. Towels must be removed from the pool edge before the swimmer returns to the starting end. In Relays the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> swimmer may use a single layered towel that does not extend beyond the edge of the pool.

The Referee’s second long blast directs the swimmers to place their feet. The referee will then turn control over to the starter for announcement of stroke and distance and the command, “Take your marks.” Until the feet leave the wall at the starting signal, the swimmer's heels must be in contact with the water. (NOTE: NVSL rules specify that it must

be the “heels”—not just some portion of the body—that must be in contact with the water!) Standing in or on the gutter is not permitted before or during the start. Because of the configuration of some NVSL pools, curling of the toes over the gutter is permitted; however, *backstrokers may not use a “standing” start.*

### ***Relay Starts***

In relay events, the first swimmer must conform to the rules for the respective start. Succeeding swimmers may place their feet in any desired position, provided they do not lose touch with the deck before the preceding teammate touches the wall or pad.

Relay swimmers are NOT permitted to run when making a relay takeoff but may be in motion (one step forward is permitted) as long as they have one foot in contact with the deck.

(REMINDER: During the Starter’s preliminary instructions, *may* notify the swimmers that all but the last swimmer should leave the water after finishing their leg. This, however, is *not mandatory*; and should only be used when the circumstances clearly warrant it – e.g., when it is apparent, after several relay heats, that the swimmers are getting out of the water so slowly that it may affect the next take-off.)

### ***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, willfully or deliberately disobeying the command to take a starting position, or for any other misconduct taking place at the start.

The Referee shall disqualify a swimmer who fails to appear at the starting area, ready to swim, in time for the initial start of his/her heat. No heat/event will be delayed pending the late arrival of a competitor. Such a disqualification is *not* charged as a false start.

### ***False Starts***

When a swimmer does not respond promptly to the command, “Take your marks,” or starts before the starting signal is given, the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with the command, “Stand,” upon which the swimmers may stand up (down) or relax, but are not required to. 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.

All swimmers leaving their marks before the starting signal is given must be charged with a false start. **Note: in this case the swimmer(s) charged with a false start shall not be allowed to swim.** (Exception: If the starter or referee confirms some other noise, light or other event may have caused the swimmer to be distracted, the swimmer may be relieved of the responsibility for the false start and a false start may be charged only to the offender. Also 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 his feet and/or hands in a legal position after the first warning.

When the starting signal is given and one or more swimmers have obtained an unfair advantage, swimmers shall not be recalled by a second signal. Rather the race shall proceed, the Starter and the Referee shall confer, and if they are in agreement the offending swimmer shall be disqualified.

The Starter may charge a swimmer with a false start only if the Referee has observed the violation and confirms that the violation occurred. A Referee *may* call a false start alone; however, such a unilateral ruling should only be made when a truly blatant violation occurs. In that case, the Referee should clearly take

corrective action with the Starter to ensure there is not a recurrence of the incident.

If the Starter believes there has been a false he/she should write down which lane(s) are in question, and **then** approach the referee and indicate he/she has an issue. If the Referee has written down the same lane(s), the false start is confirmed. If the lanes are different, a false start is not confirmed. The Referee must confirm all false starts

In the event of a false start before the starting device sounds, the swimmer who is charged with committing or causing a false start shall be disqualified and shall not be permitted to swim the event.

If after a false start occurs and the swimmers are in the water, the Starter inadvertently recalls the swimmers, no false start shall be charged.

A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start. Enforcement of the correct starting position *prior to the start* is the Starter's responsibility.

### **STARTING SWIMMERS WITH A DISABILITY**

Starters need to become familiar with the procedures for starting athletes who have disabilities. USA Swimming has a special section in the rulebook (Article 105) that addresses how to officiate swimmers with disabilities. Both referees and starters need to become familiar with this section of the rulebook and to conform to its guidelines.

*It is critical that the Starter meets with any deaf or hearing-impaired swimmers or their coach, before the meet to go over the starting procedure very carefully.*

## *HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS*

### **Equipment and Facilities**

- Have a second starting system. (Ask visiting team to bring theirs.)
- If using a portable electronic horn starting system (e.g., Colorado's), have some means of keeping the system dry in the event of rain. (i.e. clear trash bags)
- Have a clear view of field and timers; should be on the side of the pool where the timers and swimmers can best see the flash of the strobe at the start.
- Some means of voice amplification. (The Colorado horn systems come with at least one external speaker and can accommodate more. Often, 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 far end of the starting line. In any event, know, before you get to the meet, what system you will have and practice using it, if possible.)
- Copy of events to be swum (program) and a pencil.
- Disqualification slips (for false starts).
- Knife or similar tool (to cut tape after attaching speakers to handrails, etc.).

### ***Things to Think About Before the Meet Starts***

- ⇒ Discuss the procedures that will be used to get the swimmers to the starting line with the Referee and ensure you know the procedure to be followed. If they are not responding to the short whistles, know when he/she wants you to say "Step forward."
- ⇒ Will the swimmers be allowed to enter the water for warm up before the relays? (This is strictly the *Referee's* decision; however, make sure you know what will happen)
- ⇒ What is your "go" signal from the Referee? (arm extended)
- ⇒ How will you and the Referee confirm a false start?
- ⇒ Where will the referee be positioned during the starts?
- ⇒ Are there relays in this meet? Does the Referee expect you to participate in dual confirmation of early takeoffs? If so, how?
- ⇒ Does the Referee expect you to handle any additional duties (e.g., Stroke and Turn Judge)?

### **Starting**

- Keep track of the event (and, when applicable, the heat) number.
- Look for Chief Timer's signal after each heat. Be sure all swimmers are present, but do NOT delay the start of an event to wait for a swimmer unless the Referee authorizes this. (It is the swimmer's job to report to the Clerk of Course area in time for the proper lane assignment. Swimmers who are absent after the Clerk of Course has seeded an event may be disqualified for "delay of meet"—a Referee's call.)
- If you move the Colorado starting system to the opposite end of the pool from the timers, ensure no one obstructs the timers' view of the strobe light (often Stroke and Turn Judges forget this and have to be asked to move for the start). Try to place it so that the swimmers can see it too—usually by placing it along the side of the pool. This is especially important if one of your swimmers is hearing impaired. Remember, the timers can move. They only must be over their lanes at the finish.
- Be prepared to give hand signals with your voice commands for hearing impaired swimmers.

- ❑ Give your instructions. A calm manner and voice inflection is *critical*. Say your words CLEARLY and DISTINCTLY. Do NOT shout or “bark” commands.
- ❑ Do NOT preface “Take your marks” with other words or phrases, such as “Swimmers” “Swimmers ready” or “Ladies” “Gentlemen”!
- ❑ If one or more swimmers enter the pool, after coming set, before the starting device sounds or before the command to “Stand,” all such swimmers should normally be charged with a false start.
- ❑ The Starter can relieve a swimmer of a false start if, in his/her judgment, it resulted from some extraneous noise or as a reaction to the Starter's “Stand” release instruction. It is the swimmers’ responsibility, however, not to start before the signal is given.
- ❑ Do NOT attempt to compete with spectator noise during the start. Insist on *reasonable* quiet. (Referee must enforce this!)
- ❑ Avoid using a fixed timing pattern to your starting routine. You are waiting for the field to settle and each one may be different.
- ❑ Be sure the preceding race is complete before doing anything yourself that would encourage swimmers in the next event to enter the water too soon.

### ***Common Starting Problems***

- ⇒ Swimmer not paying attention to commands takes his/her mark late.
- ⇒ Swimmer who continues to move towards a starting position but never makes it; and eventually falls off balance.
- ⇒ Swimmer who intends to jump the start, thinking they have your “pattern” figured out. You MAY see THIS occasionally with the less experienced swimmers.
- ⇒ Swimmer who assumes a starting position by bending over very slowly, hoping to start a recoil just as the starting device is activated and, thereby, gaining a split-second advantage. (Solution: Stand swimmers up—stand backstrokers down—and caution the offenders.)
- ⇒ Novice swimmer who takes no position at all. (NOTE: The rules do NOT specify what the final position should be, only that the swimmer must be stationary after attaining it. A swimmer does NOT have to crouch!)
- ⇒ Starter uncomfortable because swimmer(s) are looking at him/her. (NOTE: There is NO rule that the swimmer must look ahead. In fact, this would really make it difficult for a hearing-impaired swimmer. A swimmer may look at the Starter or anywhere else prior to the start!)

**One final note: The Referee now has more responsibility for the timing of the starting procedure. It is still up to the Starter, however, to ensure the swimmers have sufficient time to assume starting positions and to ensure that no swimmer is in motion immediately before the starting signal is given**