

STARTER PROTOCOLS

The purpose of setting forth phrases, procedures and protocols for Starters is to standardize starting techniques throughout USA Swimming. The following are currently accepted protocols for officiating USA Swimming meets.

Starting Instructions For All Swimmers:

1. 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. In backstroke and medley relay events there will be 2 long whistles, 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.
2. The swimmer's are now under the Starter's control. Take your time, be calm, speak clearly and after a brief pause, say, "*Take Your Mark*".
3. When all swimmers are stationary, the Starter shall give the starting signal.
4. If necessary, to release swimmers from "their mark": *Stand Please* or *Please Stand Up* (for a forward start) or *Come Down Please* (for a backstroke start).

Other Instructions As Needed:

You may need to modify these instructions for younger or less experienced swimmers.

1. To delay event: *Please Step Down* (for a forward start) or *Please Step Out* (for a backstroke start).
2. To request swimmers take "their mark" quickly: "*Please Respond Without Delay*", "*Please Respond Quickly*", "*Please Respond Promptly*" or "*Please Assume Your Starting Position Without Delay*".
3. On backstroke, if toes are above the surface and curled over the lip of the gutter: *Toes Please*; if there is no response then "*Lane X, Toes Please*", followed by "*Thank You*" when correct position is attained.
4. Do not say "*Place Your Feet*" if the toes are incorrectly positioned for the start.

Warning Procedures:

1. The first warning should be made to the field.
Example;
 - a. "*Please Respond Without Delay*"
 - b. "*Toes Please*"
2. The second warning directed to the individual lane.
Example;
 - a. "*Lane X, Please Respond Without Delay*"
 - b. "*Lane X, Toes Please*"

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False Starts and Recalls:

1. False starts are not recalled. However, there may be circumstances which require recalling the heat because a fair start was not possible. Examples: Flash from a camera or loud noise/whistle at time of start, backstroke flags fall into the pool, lane line breaks, etc.
2. When a false start is observed, identify the lane on your heat sheet. Advise the Referee that you have a call. If the Referee also has a call, show the Referee your record of the false start. If the Referee confirms the false start, the Referee will advise the meet administration of the infraction. The Referee (or designee) will notify the swimmer of the false start.

General Comments:

1. Be brief, poised, professional and assertive. Remember, you are inviting the swimmers to swim, not ordering them. Do not bark commands or become sing-song.
2. All doubts, questions, etc. go in favor of the swimmer. Do not make a swimmer suffer just because you're human.
3. Be very patient. Do not speed up to get a heat off. Treat all heats and all events with the same courtesy and professionalism.
4. Maintain good deck perspective. You are the Referee's 2nd set of eyes and ears.
5. Concentration, cooperation, focus and teamwork are all very important to a good starter.
6. Focus and concentrate on your events. Watch the next heat of swimmers and be aware of unusual activity behind the lanes, such as empty lanes, timers not in position or ready or a swimmer's goggle strap breaking. Don't wait until the heat is stepped up.
7. Minimize unnecessary distractions from outside influences. While performing your duties as a Starter, turn-off your two-way radio and remove the headset. This is to ensure that all swimmers are provided the full attention of the starter and receive a fair start. Off-duty Starters, working in another capacity such as a "Stroke and Turn Official" or recording the "Orders of Finish" may wear a radio and headset.
8. Watch and observe your fellow Starters. Learn as much as you can before the meet - check blocks, flags, guns, starting system, speakers, recall rope, etc. Make sure lap counters and a bell (sounding devise) are available if a distance event is being swum.
9. Most of all - **Be professional and supportive**, do your very best and enjoy yourself.

Remember the Starters job is to start the heats when required. Distractions such as crowd noises, swimmers walking in front of the Starter and equipment failure are some things that are sometimes unavoidable and the Starter must learn to deal with these situations. The Starter must be listening at the start for other sounds and noises that could affect the start and result in an unfair start for the swimmers.