

Midlakes Referee/Starter Guidelines

Pre-Meet Preparation Checklist

- Be sure the deck is set up correctly, the equipment works, and the blocks are safe and solid.
- Heat Sheet/Event Listing – ensure that all information is up to date, and everybody is receiving the same data. Consolidate heats at your discretion. Decide on any break and shift change points.
- Be sure all clipboards and forms are prepared, and that stopwatches (for either timing or backup times depending on your system) are available. Remember, both Swimmingly and touchpad systems require two backup watch times in case of mishaps.
- Coaches Meeting – be certain to talk to coaches about any special needs, medical issues, or anything else you need to know about.
- Officials Meeting – Introduce officials, be sure you have everyone you need, and assign jurisdictions. Be sure to address shift change and relay exchange times. If there is no time for a stroke briefing, make sure all stroke & turn officials have a copy for reference during the meet.
- Timers Meeting – Account for all timers, and check that they have experience. If they don't, give them the necessary directions for your system.
- Stagers – make sure you have everything organized so swimmers get to their events in a timely fashion.
- Announcer – be sure they have a heat sheet marked up with all the announcements they need to make (upcoming shift changes, event consolidations, timer moves, etc.)
- The meet referee has the discretion to delegate preparation jobs to qualified deputies. Just make sure it all comes together!

Meet Operations Checklist

- At the beginning of the meet, check that all officials are in place, timers are ready, and the first swimmers are staged before signaling the start. Note the start time. At the end, note the finish time.
- Observe the deck to make sure everyone is observing safety rules.
- Observe the officials to make sure they are performing their jobs correctly, including raising hands for observed violations. Always take the order of finish of swimmers in case there is any issue with the race timing. The right swimmer should win!
- For relays, be certain that relay exchange teams are in place before proceeding.
- All disqualifications require the approval of the starter/referee before they may be submitted to the scorekeeper. If you have any questions, speak to the official who made the call. You have the discretion to overturn a call when the benefit of the doubt goes to the swimmer.
- For 25 yard/meter events, wait for the timers to be in place before continuing. Be certain they can see the starter strobe light, and make sure there is somebody at the far side of the pool to take Order of Finish.
- Officiating Complaints: Swimmers and parents should talk to their coaches, and coaches should talk to the referee if there is a call protest or an issue (or starter, if there is no referee). Be sure nobody is talking to, or interfering with the stroke & turn and relay takeoff officials! It is not their job to discuss calls with anyone except the starter/referee or the chief judge.
- Disciplinary issues: If there is a problem which needs to be addressed, remember to use the Midlakes protocols, and be certain to involve an equitable number of qualified members of both teams before coming to any decisions. In these instances, the referee should step off deck to confer. If you only have a starter, try to find an alternate starter or wait until your shift is finished

Starter Protocols

First and foremost, as a starter, always remember to stay calm. You want the swimmers to have the best, fairest start possible. Many of them are excited or nervous, so do your best to settle them down. It is important to keep the timeline moving as quickly as is reasonable, but always defer to the needs of the swimmers preparing to race.

Race Starting Procedure

- Decide in advance if or when you will do fly-over starts, where the swimmers from the previous race stay in the pool until after the start of the next race. It helps the timeline, but may be challenging for the youngest swimmers who can't dive far, or may start from either the deck or in water.
- As much as possible, observe that you have the swimmers you expect for the heat. Excited swimmers may try to jump ahead a heat, or you may be missing someone who is slow getting behind the blocks. When you are satisfied, you may proceed.
- At the start of the meet, at the end of each previous race (or after a break when there is a pause), blow **several short, sharp whistles** to indicate a race is about to begin. This will cue the announcer to call the next event. Depending on their cadence, you may choose to blow these whistles earlier or later, but generally you target the last swimmer passing the flags to the finish. The idea is that the announcing will be over once the swimmers are all stopped at the wall.
- When the swimmers are ready, and the timers are paying attention, blow **one long whistle** to invite the swimmers to step up on the blocks. For the backstroke, there are **two long whistles** – one to jump into the pool, and another to call them back to the hand grips once their heads have broken the surface of the water. For backstroke, you may either clear the previous heat first, asking the swimmers to leave the pool with the microphone, or use the first whistle to get everyone to sort themselves out, and the second whistle to get the next swimmers to the handgrips.
- Observe that all the swimmers are paying attention, that goggles are in place, and toes are correctly placed. On the blocks, one foot must be at the front of the block, toes over the lip; for backstroke, no toes may be in the gutter if there is one – you must ask them to move them before the start.
- When you are ready, say, **“Take your marks”**. This should be done calmly, evenly-paced, in a neutral tone of voice. You don't want to sound harsh or sing-song-y. Think about casually talking to a friend.
- The swimmers should get into position and be (relatively) still. Little kids will always wiggle, and there's not much to do about it, but if someone is slow to respond or struggling, ask the field to **“Stand Please,”** again, in a calm, neutral voice. Then ask them to take their marks again.
- Sound the start when all the swimmers are set. Typically, you should allow a heartbeat or a couple of seconds after having them take their marks. Don't rush them, but don't make them stand forever and get antsy either. Make sure they're ready!
- Once the race has begun, watch the swimmers and be certain that all the heads that went in come up again. You are the front line watching for swimmer safety.
- Always keep track of the length of the race, and where the lagging swimmer is, so you know when to blow the short whistles for the next race.
- Always note the order of finish (OOF) in a race. For example, “2-3-4-1” would mean that lane 2 finished first, 3 second, and so on. If there is a timing issue, this ensures proper placement. If the finish is at the far end of the pool, delegate another official to take the OOF for you.

False Start Protocols

False starts are when a swimmer attempts to start a race before the starter sounds the start. For dual meets, this is forgiven one time. Upon the first false start, the starter announces that “The first false start goes to the field, the second false start will go to the lane.” A second false start for a race will then be a disqualification. There are two ways teams may manage this, depending on staffing. If you only have a starter, then the starter has the sole discretion to call a false start. If you choose to run a deck referee/starter team, then the first disqualification will be called by the starter, and the second will be a dual confirmation between the deck referee and starter. In either case, you do not need to recall the field for the second infraction. Simply write up the disqualification, sign it, and turn it in for processing.

The best visualization for starting positions is to imagine a “glass box” around the swimmers once they take their marks. They can wiggle – young and less-experience swimmers may struggle to be still - but what you don’t want to see is any forward motion past the front “wall” of the glass box. Be sure you stand in a position where you can see all the swimmers. You will probably want to move closer to the blocks for the backstroke.

False Start Situations

- If a swimmer on the blocks falls into the water when directed to take their mark, this is not a false start, as they never got set. Wait for them to climb out, and try again.
- If a swimmer gets really excited and jumps into the water during the whistles, or any time before you say “take your marks”, it is not a false start. There should be a rope line you can drop, and you can have people on deck help you get them to stop – you can sound the recall buzzer, but you may confuse the other swimmers, and may have to reset the system if you have computerized timing. At your discretion, you may disqualify the swimmer for Delay of Meet, but generally, you just let them swim.
- If you stand a heat, and a swimmer falls into the pool in the process, that is not a false start.
- If a swimmer makes a false start motion, but does not leave the blocks, you can ask the field to stand, and that will negate the need to call out a false start. You may proceed with the start.
- If a swimmer takes their mark, then starts before the buzzer, this is a false start. In this instance, ask the other swimmers to “Stand Please,” and recall the departed swimmer. Make the announcement warning the field, and try again.
- If a swimmer starts early, and the starter sounds the start, then sound the recall buzzer by whatever method your starting machine uses (usually holding down the start trigger button). Clear the pool and try again, with the false start announcement. If they swam a fair distance, you may opt to run the race at the end of the event so the swimmers can catch their breath. Make sure the timers and the scorekeeper know if you do this!
- Again, for any second false start in a heat, you do not need to recall the field. Let them swim and disqualify the swimmer in question.