



# Starter Clinic November 2023

*With thanks to Ron Zolno for his original document from 2014.*



# The Rules

- According to the USA Swimming rule book . . .
  - **102.12.1 where to stand**
  - **102.12.2 optional instructions**
  - **101.1 the start, especially 101.1.2C**
  - **101.1.3 false starts**
  - **101.1.4 warning signal on distance events**

You can download the current rule book and any rule changes from the USA Swimming Rules & Regulations page ([click here](#)).



# The Key Job

- Key objective is to ensure a fair start for all competitors
  - Take deck position which affords an optimal view of the starting field
  - Raise microphone upon hearing long whistle and await Deck Referee's outstretched arm
  - Be patient -- when the starting field is ready, say *"Take Your Marks"* in a calm, conversational, inviting tone
  - Complete the start only after all swimmers have assumed an observable **"stationary"** position – be patient
  - Start the race when the race is ready to be started – not too soon and not too late
- When your job starts and when it ends
  - You are the swimmers last "protector"
  - Watch the swimmers leaving the blocks
  - Work as a team -- during a heat, check out the swimmers in the next heat to see if there are any issues, and, if so, let deck referee know
- Work as a team, but focus on your job as the Starter – you are not the Deck Referee or swimmer



# The Other Things

- Check out the system ahead of time, so you are comfortable with the set up
- Test system if you are first Starter in session – microphone, volume, speakers
- Brief the timers, if asked to do so in the officials meeting
- Check starting field for correct swimmers in proper lanes
- Note empty lanes on Starter's record
- Indicate start time of event (and maybe heat) on your heat sheet
- If a false start occurs, indicate it IN A WRITTEN MANNER, then show it to the Deck Referee, to see if it is confirmed
- Record order of finish (OOF) on your heat sheet, if there is not a separate official assigned this task
- Help record DQs, if needed
- Ring the bell on distance events or assign this task to another official
- Complete other assignments as defined by Meet and Deck Referees (e.g., Stroke & Turn officiating, relay take-offs)



- Conversational tone – the tone is more important than the actual words
- Flat or slight drop in pitch
- “Open the door” or “1-2-3” or “pet the dog” or “come on in”
- Don’ t ORDER them to swim, INVITE them to swim
- Be pleasant and inviting – set the right tone
- Wait until they are ready, but not too long
- Do not rush your starts – don’t worry about the length of the meet, because you have minimal impact on meet length
- Avoid:
  - Sing-song
  - Rushing
  - Becoming a machine
  - Talking too much – keep it to a minimum



# The Stand Up

- If, as the Starter, you are not comfortable with what is occurring after the starting command, BE PATIENT, then, if need be, say “stand” or “stand please”
- After standing them up, pause to let the swimmers get readjusted, then give the command “take your marks”
  - Remember that you can be ready a lot faster than the swimmers can be, so, be patient
- IF NEED BE, tell swimmers to “step down” (or “relax” for backstroke)
  - Also let the Deck Referee decide when a swimmer should be warned or disqualified for delay of meet
  - Then the Deck Referee will blow a long whistle to have the swimmers step up onto the blocks, so you can proceed with the start – do not use a verbal command unless the Deck Referee asks you to do so
- Remember, frequently patience is better than standing the swimmers up



# The Profession

- You are the most visible official on the deck, therefore, the way you look and act can make a big difference
  - Dress right
  - Be on time
  - Be in position
  - Stay focused
  - Always be calm – or, at least, appear to be calm
  - NEVER cheer for one swimmer or one team
  - Refer to swimmers politely – “ladies” and “gentlemen”
  - Because of your visibility, you will frequently be asked a number of questions – some you can answer, but most should probably be referred to the Meet Referee, Deck Referee, Clerk of Course, Admin Referee/Official, Meet Director, etc., as appropriate



- Philosophy
  - Be patient, responsible, professional and a team player
- Preparation
  - Review rules and event schedule
  - Establish protocol and procedures with Deck Referee – especially where you will stand
  - Pre-meet equipment check and timer meeting
  - Test start
- Starting Procedure
- The Start
  - Equipment problems
  - Distractions during a start
  - Response to the command
  - Starting position
- Starts, False Starts, and Recalls
- Other Circumstances
- Other Common Starting Situations





# Order of Finish

- Taking order of finish (OOF) is a common job assigned to starters. Be prepared because it comes at a high workload time. OOF is important, but it is lower priority than other tasks (e.g. requests from deck ref, managing exits for chase starts).
- OOF has nothing to do with helping decide who wins a heat! OOF is to provide the Admin/Timing staff with additional information for determining times in the event of a possible timing malfunction.
- Write, in any shorthand easily understood by you and others, the order YOU SEE the swimmers finish in.
- It's fine if you only see some of them.
- It's fine if you indicate 'ties' for too-close-to-call finishes.
- Don't guess or infer, just write what you see, even if it's incomplete.
- NEVER EVER cheat off the scoreboard.
- Every place is equally important to note, because we don't know which place the Admin will need clarification on. It's not about "just trying to get the top three". The more the better...Admin would rather see you note the last 4 finishers correctly than only get the first 2.



# Timer Briefing

Cover the basics, but keep it short. Good timers are going to do a good job anyway. No amount of briefing is going to fix a bad timer. During your training, watch certified Starters do their briefings every chance you get.

- Introduce yourself: Thank you so much of volunteering, I'm.... Who's timed before? Who's timed at this pool before?
- Explain the Setup: how many people per lane, watches, buttons, clip boards
  - Introduce the head timer by name
- What to do...
  - Before the race – Check (but don't interfere with) the next swimmer.
  - At the start – Stay behind the blocks (sit if possible), watch the light, start the watch.
  - During the race – Step back, relax.
  - At the end – Step to edge, stop the watch, push the button, record the time(s), record any oddities. *You will get wet.*
  - Then...be ready to go again, it's going to happen fast.
  - NEVER cheat (copy from the scoreboard/neighbor, guess).
  - When in doubt, raise your hand and get help from the head timer
- Head timer have anything to add?
- Thanks (again).



## Some Hints

- Practice, practice, practice
- Work on your voice
- Develop your own mantra – for example, instead of saying “open the door,” I say “one, two, three”
- Develop an eye for the field, so you can really tell when the race is ready to be started
  - Focus on the field, not one swimmer - the last swimmer to get into position
  - Remember that as the Starter, you are the swimmers’ friend and their last line of protection
- Watch other Starters – both good ones and bad ones
- Ask for feedback
- Remember that regardless of the level of the meet, or the capability of the specific swimmer, every swim is important to that swimmer at that time



# Next Steps in South Texas

- Be STSI Stroke & Turn Judge for the designated initial time period before you start your training as a Starter
- Attend a Starters training clinic – this is it
- Read the rule book and pass the online Starter's test
- Send an email to the Officials Chair ([officialschair@stswim.org](mailto:officialschair@stswim.org)) indicating interest in becoming an Apprentice Starter
- Work your sessions as a Starter Trainee for the indicated number of sessions and meets, and with different officials as mentors
- Send an email to the Officials Chair ([officialschair@stswim.org](mailto:officialschair@stswim.org)) indicating that you have completed your training sessions and desire to be certified as a Starter
  - Include the names of at least three active STSI referees who recommend your promotion to Starter