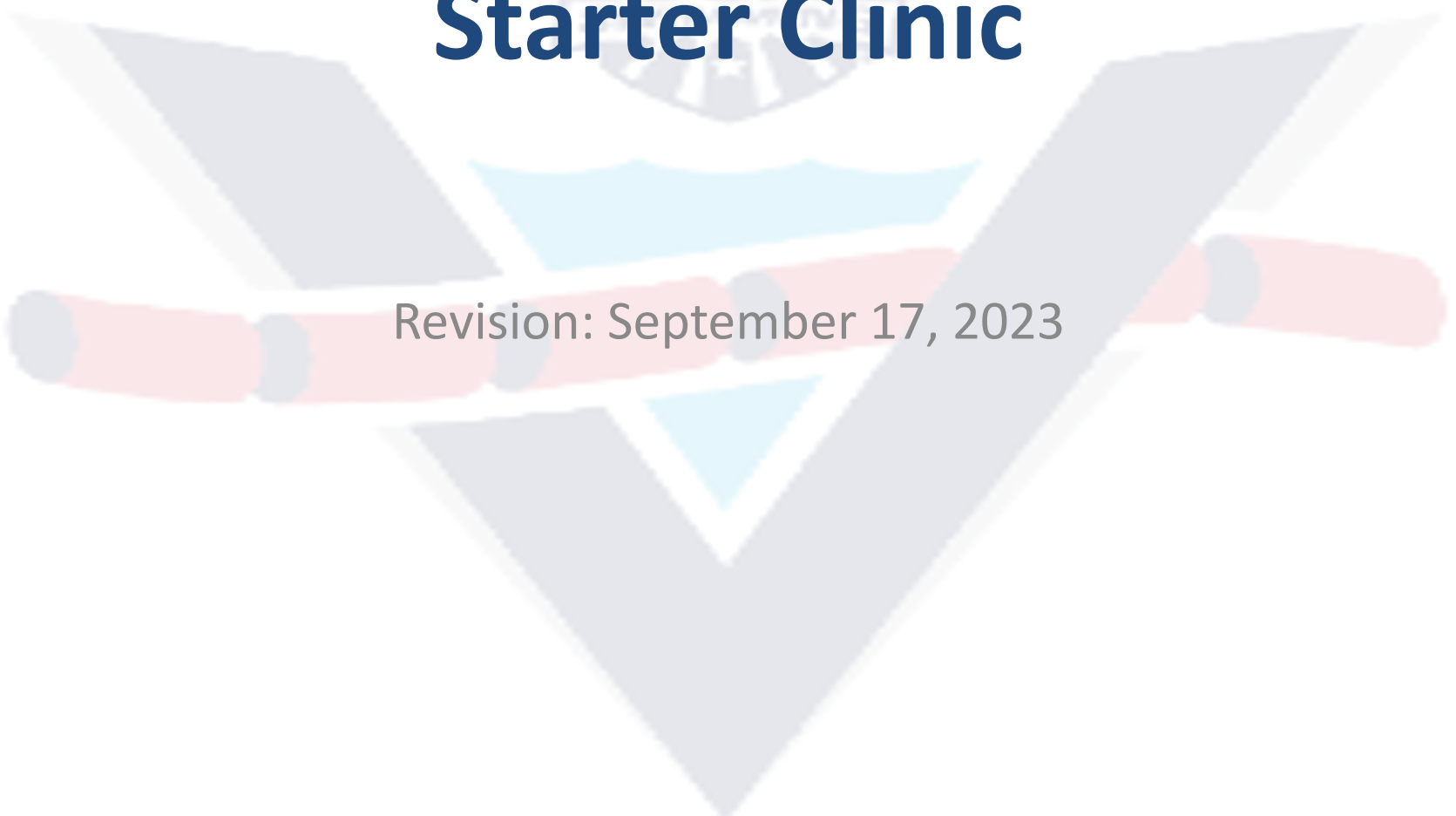


VIRGINIA

SWIMMING

Virginia Swimming Starter Clinic

Revision: September 17, 2023



Clinic Overview

- Certification Requirements
- Starting Rules – Articles 101, 101.4, and 105
- Equipment
- Checks Before Each Session
- The Start
- Philosophy of Starting and Starting Guidance
- False Starts
- Warning Signals (do I hear bells ringing?)
- Guidelines for Starting Swimmers with Disabilities
- What to Say & Not Say
- TIPS
- Questions

Certification Requirements

Initial Education & Training

- USA-S Membership: Required.
- Previous Certifications: Certified as a Stroke & Turn Judge for a minimum of one year, with satisfactory performance during that time.
- Clinic: VSI-approved training clinic required.
- Test: Prior to final session, must pass Starter test with a minimal passing grade of 80% or better.

On-the-Job Training & Initial Certification

- Complete a minimum of six sessions of training at VSI sanctioned swim meets with positive recommendations from the Trainer and Meet Referee. Sessions must include a variety of meet classifications and at least one session must include 500 Y events or longer. A minimum of one session must be worked at a B/C meet.
- Prior to one of the first six training sessions, do a complete set-up and check of the starting equipment. Upon satisfactory completion of the six initial training sessions, work an additional session as the primary Starter, under the observation of an assigned Trainer. Receive positive recommendations from the Trainer and Referee.
- No training may occur at Age Group or Senior Championship meets.

Starting Rules

- 101.1.1: Equipment
- 101.1.2: The Start
- 101.1.3: False Starts
- 101.1.4: Warning Signal
- 101.1.5: Deliberate Delay or Misconduct
- 101.4.1: Backstroke Start
- 105: Guidelines for Officiating Swimmers with a Disability

[For clarity, all rules in this presentation are shown in a *blue italic font* and on a *boxed light-blue background*]

VIRGINIA SWIMMING

101.1.1 Equipment

A loudspeaker start system conforming to 103.18, with or without an underwater recall device, and an electronic strobe signal visible to all manual timers for forward and backstroke starts, shall be the preferred starting device.

Checks Before Each Session

Which one are you using?



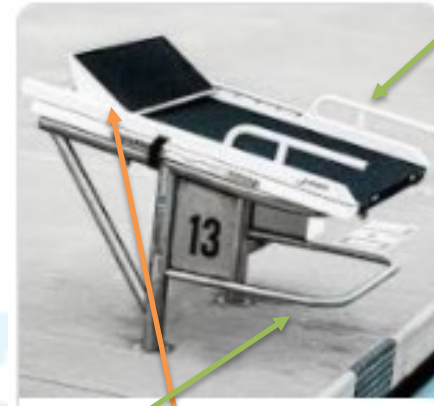
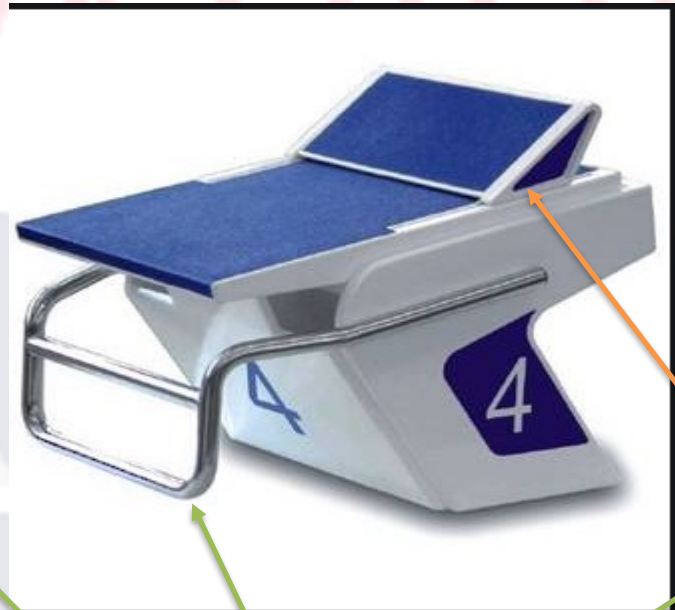
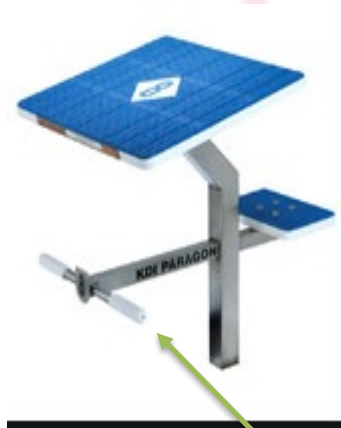
Checks Before Each Session

Learn how to hook up/check the connections

- ✓ Power, microphone, timer start, external strobe, external speaker
- ✓ Power on
 - Strobe on for Championship starter
- ✓ Test your voice with the microphone
 - All microphones are different, adjust volume if needed
- ✓ Test volume at each block
- ✓ Perform a test start with TEO
- ✓ Perform recall test

Checks Before Each Session

Different Types of Blocks



Forward
Start grips

Wedge

Backstroke
start grips

Checks Before Each Session

Different Types of Backstroke Ledges



- Omega and Myrtha Brands
- Installed on top of block
 - Must be removed manually following start



- Colorado Timing Systems Brand
- Installed at base of block
 - Automatically retracts following start

VIRGINIA SWIMMING

101.1.2 The Start

A. At the commencement of each heat, 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 and maintain their positions on the starting platform, the deck, or in the water. In backstroke and medley relay events, at the Referee's first long whistle, the swimmers shall immediately enter the water and at the second long whistle shall return without undue delay to the starting position.

B. When the swimmers and officials are ready, the Referee shall signal with an out-stretched arm to the Starter that the swimmers are under the Starter's control.

VIRGINIA SWIMMING

101.1.2 The Start

C. On the Starter's command "take your marks," the swimmers shall immediately assume their starting position, in the forward start, with at least one foot at the front of the starting platform or the deck. Swimmers starting in the water must have at least one hand in contact with the wall or starting platform. When all swimmers are stationary, the Starter shall give the starting signal.

D. When a swimmer does not respond promptly to the command "take your marks," the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with the command "stand up" upon which the swimmers may stand up or step off the blocks.

E. 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.

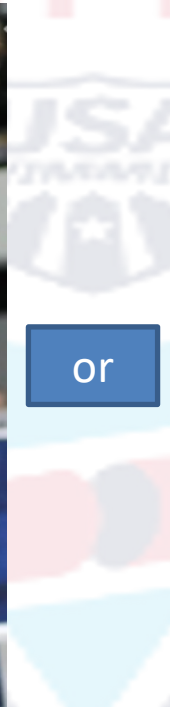
VIRGINIA SWIMMING

101.4.1 Backstroke Start

Start — 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. When using a backstroke ledge at the start, at least one toe of both feet must be in contact with the end wall or face of the touchpad. Bending the toes over the top of the touchpad is prohibited.

Starting Rules

Legal Forward Starting Position



or



At least one
foot forward on
the block

Starting Rules

Legal Backstroke Start

Flat wall vs Gutters



Hand position (101.4.1)

- Both hands on the gutter or starting grips

Foot position (101.4.1)

- No standing in or on gutter
- No toes above the lip of the gutter or pad
- May be above the surface of the water

Starting Rules

Use of the Backstroke Ledge



Backstroke Ledge Use Requirements

- Set no more than 4 cm above or 4 cm below the water level (103.15.1)
- At least one toe of both feet must be in contact with the endwall or pad (101.4.1)



Starter's Routine Before Each Heat

Focus On the Next Heat of Swimmers

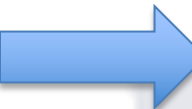
- ✓ Stay focused on the swimmers behind the blocks
 - Full heat or missing swimmers?
 - Any issues with swimmers? Goggles break, caps rip
 - Timers waving their arms madly?
 - Is there any confusion behind the blocks?
 - Crowd blocking access to the blocks?
 - If any of the above, make sure the DR is informed.
- ✓ Listen for the whistles- Short & Long
- ✓ Be in position and ready to go at the short whistles

Philosophy of Starting

- GOAL: A fair start for all swimmers
- Three key aspects to understand
 1. **Knowing when the field is ready to assume the starting position – It is NOT when the DR puts out their arm and hands the race to you!**
 2. **Knowing when the field is ready to be sent**
 3. **Knowing when to intervene so the first two can be achieved**

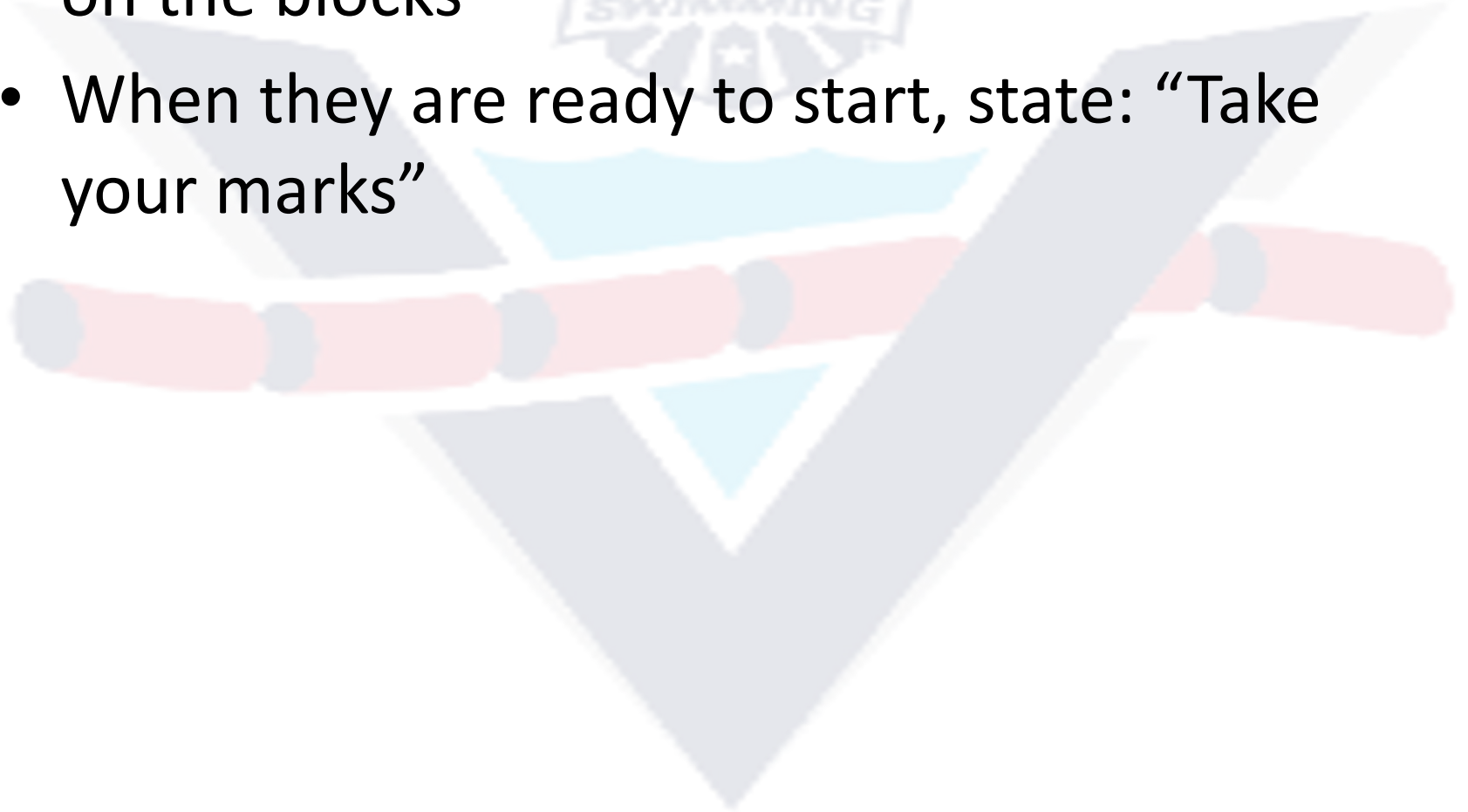
Philosophy of Starting

The Mindset of Every Starter

- The **STARTER** reads the field, to determine when **THE FIELD** is ready to start—Not the other way around!
- **PATIENCE, PATIENCE, PATIENCE**
 If you practice patience, 95-98% of the time you will not have to stand the field
- Ensure you are relaxed – take a deep breath

The First Part of the Start

- Practice patience as the swimmers get settled on the blocks
- When they are ready to start, state: “Take your marks”



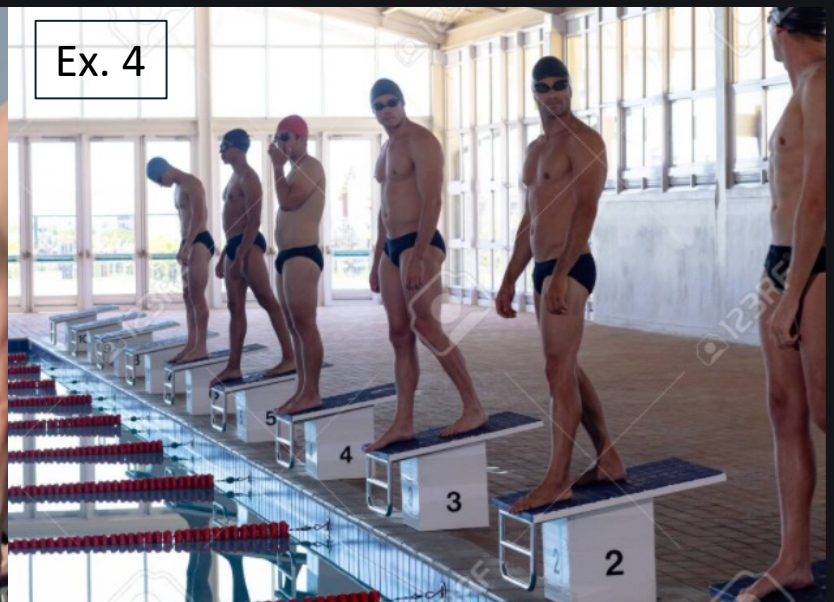
The First Part of the Start

How to Say, “Take Your Marks” -TYM

- Conversational tone
- *Inviting (not screaming)* at the swimmers
- Slightly descending tone
- TYM is a statement, not a question
- Delivered in a relaxed, but confident manner
- Say TYM Like - “Close the door”, “Pass the Salt”

The First Part of the Start

Picture Quiz - Who is Ready for TYM?



The Second Part of the Start

- Wait for the swimmers to become stationary (set)
- Stationary (set) does NOT necessarily mean motionless
- Stationary (set) = imagine a glass plane running down the blocks and each swimmer's head is on the glass (this works for some Starters)
- Send the swimmers once all are stationary (set)

The Second Part of the Start

“Pane of Glass” for the Auditory Challenged



The Second Part of the Start

If Things Don't Go As Planned....(For ANY Reason!)

- If for some reason one or more swimmers do not within a reasonable amount of time assume their starting positions after your TYM, say “Stand, please.”
- “Stand, please,” can be used for both forward and backstroke starts.
- “Relax, please,” should only be used if there will be a protracted delay or pause.
- “Stand, please” or “relax, please,” is delivered *softly and calmly* versus **LOUD AND SHARP**.
- Let the swimmers relax, gain composure & refocus, before giving the TYM command. **Do not rush them.**
- Note on Backstroke: if you issue a stand command, let them relax their arms/legs/body. A lot of energy is expended holding onto those backstroke grips!
- The DR can blow an extra long whistle for an excessive delays.

The Second Part of the Start

Once The Heat Has Started....

- Hold microphone open and in position until their heads are on surface (in case a recall is needed)
- Once they are off swimming, mark any empty lanes on your heat sheet, advise the TEO if they cannot see the lanes
- Get ready for the next heat, your focus should be behind the blocks

The Second Part of the Start

Recall

- **EITHER the Starter or Deck Referee can recall a heat for any reason that caused swimmers not to have a fair start**
- Some examples of when a recall might happen
 - Extraneous light flash or noise at the start
 - Start system gives an unexpected type of start signal (double beep) that might confuse or did confuse the field
 - Observing that some swimmers did not hear the start signal based on their response to the start signal
 - Interference by timers
 - Interference by a swimmer from the previous or next heat
 - You started the heat before they were set
- Recall = No Swimmers Charged with False Start (101.3D)

VIRGINIA

101.3 Definition of a False Start

SWIMMING

A. Any swimmer initiating a start before the signal may 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.

B. 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.

VIRGINIA SWIMMING

101.3 Definition of a False Start

C. If the recall signal is activated, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start and the Starter shall restart the race upon signal by the Referee.

D. 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.

E. 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 207.11.6D(1).

Recognizing a False Start

- You must observe a swimmer *initiate* a start before the starting signal is given
 - Moving forward, pulling down on the block, even moving backwards are examples of what is probably the initiation of a start
 - The twitch of a muscle or turning the head to the side are examples of what is probably not the initiation of a start
- Some Starters envision the swimmer breaking his/her stationary position (they broke the glass plane) before the start

False Start Mechanics

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

False Start Scenarios

Yes or No?

1. Swimmer leaves the set or stationary position prior to the starting signal. The starting signal is then given. The race proceeds and, assuming the Starter observed the early start and the Deck Referee independently observes the early start and confirms the Starter's observation.

False Start Scenarios

Yes or No?

2. Swimmer leaves the set or stationary position prior to the starting signal. The swimmer realizes the early starting motion attempts to catch himself/herself. Starter says absolutely nothing, and the swimmer's forward motion causes them to go into the pool.

False Start Scenarios

Yes or No?

3. Exactly the same facts as #2, but this time the Starter says “stand please” after the swimmer leaves the set or stationary position. The seven other swimmers stand but the offending swimmer struggles and is unable to halt the forward motion and falls into the pool.

False Start Scenarios

Yes or No?

4. Exactly the same facts as scenarios #2 and #3 above. However, this time when the command “stand please” is issued, the offending swimmer struggles, but is able to stand.

False Start Scenarios

Yes or No?

5. Exactly the same facts as scenarios #2 and #3 above. However, when the Starter gives the “stand please” command a swimmer other than the offending swimmer instantly bolts from the blocks and enters the water.

False Start Scenarios

Yes or No?

6. The swimmer, upon hearing the command “take your marks” starts down to take a set or stationary position. The swimmer loses his/her balance before coming set and falls into the pool.

101.1.4 Warning Signal

With the exception of relays, in events 500 yards or longer, the Starter or a designee shall sound a warning signal over the water at the finish end of the lane of the leading swimmer when that swimmer has two lengths plus five yards or five meters to swim. As an alternative, a bell warning signal may be given over each lane by a lane judge or timer for that lane.

- In non-championship-level meets, the starter typically rings the bell over the lane of the fastest swimmer
- In championship-level meets, a timer in each lane typically rings a bell for the swimmer in their own lane

101.1.5 Deliberate Delay or Misconduct

A. The Starter shall report a swimmer to the Referee for delaying the start, for willfully disobeying an order or for any other misconduct taking place at the start, but only the Referee may disqualify a swimmer for such delay, willful disobedience or misconduct.

- With the introduction of the declared false start, deliberately delaying the start or disobeying an order [ex, step up, please] is largely an issue of the past
- Nonetheless, a swimmer might report late to the blocks and disrupt the starting cadence in which this call may be warranted

105 Guidelines for Officiating Swimmers with a Disability

105.1 GENERAL

B. Referee—The Referee's responsibilities include: (1) Determining if the requested modifications are appropriate and can be met; (2) Instructing the Starter and the Stroke & Turn Officials as to the accommodations to be made for that swimmer.

105.2 BLIND AND VISION LOSS

.1 Start—With an audible starting system, no modification is usually required for a swimmer who is blind or has vision loss. A swimmer may, however, require assistance getting to and on the block. Should the swimmer feel insecure starting from the block or deck, an in-the water start is allowed.

105 Guidelines Continued

105.3 DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

.1 Deaf and hard of hearing swimmers require a visual starting signal, i.e., a strobe light and/or Starter's arm signals. The Referee may reassign lanes within the swimmer's heat, i.e., exchanging one lane for another, so that the strobe light or Starter's arm signal can more readily be seen by the deaf or hard of hearing swimmer.

.2 Strobe Light Location — The Starter shall advise the swimmers about the location of the strobe light and the light shall be located where the swimmers can clearly see it for the start. For backstroke starts, the light should be positioned so that the swimmers don't have to turn their heads to look backwards.

Standard Starter's Arm Signals

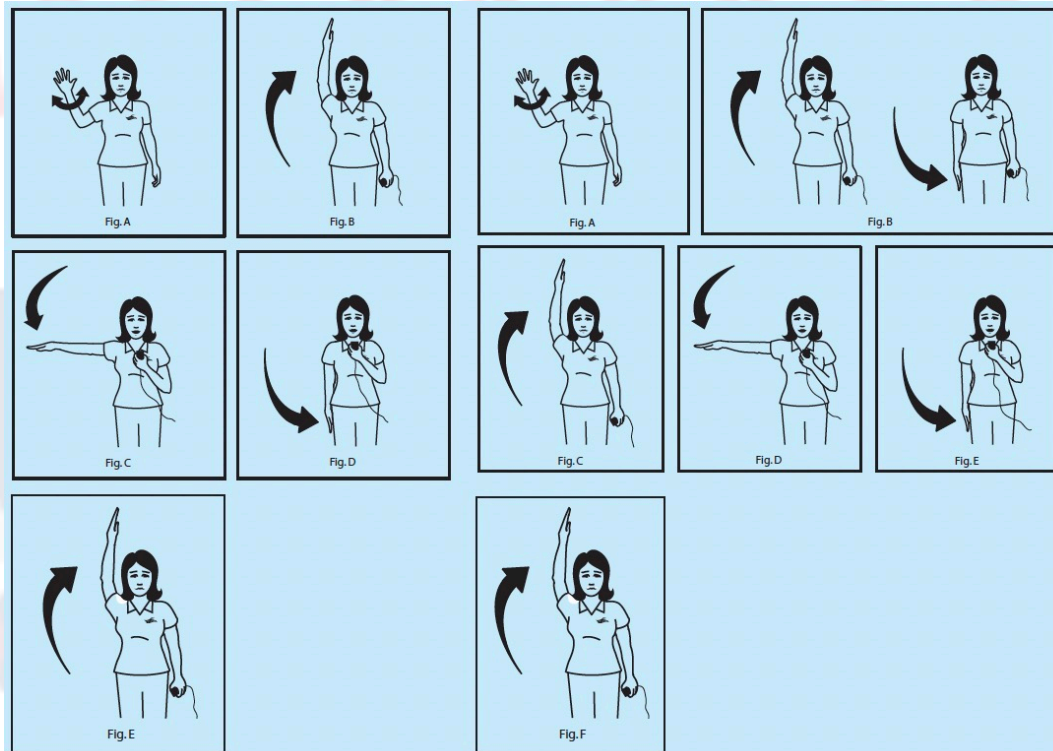


FIGURE 1: FORWARD START

- A. Twist hand at chin level — short whistles
- B. Arm overhead — “long whistle” — swimmer steps onto starting block
- C. Arm moves to shoulder level — signal to “take your mark”
- D. Arm moves to side of body — starting signal
- E. Arm raised overhead with palm up (at any time after C. [“Take Your Mark”] and prior to D. [starting signal] — swimmer released from “Take Your Mark” command)

FIGURE 2: BACKSTROKE START

- A. Twist hand at chin level — short whistles
- B. Arm overhead — “long whistle” — swimmer enters water; drop arm to side while swimmer enters water
- C. Arm overhead — swimmer returns to backstroke start position
- D. Arm moves to shoulder level — signal to “take your mark”
- E. Arm moves to side of body — starting signal
- F. Arm raised overhead with palm up (at any time after D. [“Take Your Mark”] and prior to E. [starting signal] — swimmer released from “Take Your Mark” command)

105 Guidelines Continued

105.4 COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

A swimmer may be permitted to have an assistant on the deck when necessary. No other specific rule modifications are required other than patience and clarity in communicating instructions.

105 Guidelines Continued

105.5 PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

.1 Swimmers with physical disabilities:

- A. May take longer to assume their starting position*
- B. May have difficulty holding the starting platform or pool end for a start*
- C. May need assistance from someone on the deck to maintain a starting position.*
- D. May use a modified starting position on the blocks, deck or in the water*
- E. [specifies examples of modifications that can be made by the Referee]**

Examples of Modified Starting Positions

FIGURE 3 — Sitting on block or deck



FIGURE 4 — Kneeling start



Before the Session, Talk with Your DR

- Any info the DR wants you to tell them during the session
 - Missing swimmers
 - Equipment problems (eg, broken goggles, torn suit or cap)
 - Possible false starts
- What is the DR's signal if they want you to stand the heat?
- Let them know where you will be standing for the starts
 - Within approximately 5 meters from start end of the pool
 - You want to be able to observe entire field, but also distinguish between individual lanes
 - Starter chooses first, DR adjusts

More Philosophy with Starting

- As a starter, **you** never penalize a swimmer(s) because **you** gave them a bad start (eg, they never got set)
 - YOUR bad start is not the same as a false start
- TYM should be inviting, never COMMANDING
 - Speak in a calm voice; **never** yell

What to Say & Not to Say

- Refer to the swimmers as “ladies” and “gentlemen” [Note: this may be changing with the use of “swimmers” in place of “ladies” or “gentlemen”—a Meet Referee decision]
- NEVER deviate the language of “Take your marks,” and “Stand, please”
- “Relax, please” is used for a prolonged delay
- “Lane __, toes, please,” if necessary to lower toes in backstroke
- “Thank you, ladies/gentlemen/swimmers” to clear pool
- Any additional instructions as directed by referee

What to Say & Not to Say

- In the absence of an announcer, the Starter may be required to announce the events
- State complete event, not abbreviation
 - Butterfly, not fly
 - Backstroke, not back
 - Breaststroke, not breast
 - Freestyle, not free
 - Individual Medley, not IM
- Singular, not plural
 - 100 Yard, not 100 Yards or 100
 - 100 Meter, not 100 Meters or 100

What to Say & Not to Say

- This is not summer league
 - We do **not** call for missing swimmers
- Swimmers usually never hear what you actual say, rather they react to a cadence (ie, TYM) and a loud horn

TIPS

Noisy Venues - What to **DO**

- **Practice Patience**

- Wait for the noise level to drop, the crowd will eventually become quiet if you wait them out

Reminder- **An outstretched Referee's arm does not mean you have to immediately state TYM**

- 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”

TIPS

Noisy Venues-What **Not to Do**

- Do not attempt to talk over the noise
 - Why?
- Do not proceed with TYM, hoping the swimmers will hear you, they won't
 - More than likely this will lead to a bad start, a false start, and some upset coaches

TIPS

Crowded Conditions Behind and Between the Blocks

- This is your domain; protecting it helps you and the athletes
- With permission of the Referee
 - Request Timers and officials to step back
 - Swimmers not on the blocks should remain behind the chairs
 - After the heat goes off, the next heat of swimmers can come forward
- Ask the Chief Judge or Marshal for help with crowd control

TIPS

- Practice your TYM - Record it on your phone
- Develop a routine and good habits
- With repetition, you will find that swimmers will tell you when they are ready to swim
- Observe other starters
- If you have a bad start (and we all have them), learn from it and then move on, but don't dwell on it
- Your comfort as a Starter will grow the more you work as a starter
- Self-evaluate – Reflect on what you did great and what you can improve on

TIPS

- Be extra patient with new swimmers (those just starting out) , swimmers with disabilities, and Master swimmers
- They all require a little extra time adjusting to the blocks

Other Possible Duties of the Starter

- Timers Briefing
- Recording order of finish/sweeps (OOFs)
- May be assigned as S&T as well as a Starter
- May be assigned as RTO Judge

Final Thoughts

- The last three words a swimmer hears before they hit the water are yours
- Remember Patience, Patience, Patience is the KEY to successful starts
- Lastly, every official is in a fishbowl; coaches, parents, fans, and officials are all observing

**Most of all thank you for all
do for our Sport!**

