



THE DECK REFEREE AND STARTER TEAM



Their Roles, Responsibilities, AND Routines



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GOALS FOR TODAY'S CLINIC:

- You will learn about the essential communication between the DR and SR
- You will learn about the Deck Referee Routine and New DR Protocols
- You will become familiar with the various Roles and Responsibilities of Starters
- You will begin to develop your Starter Routine.



DR/SR Team – Communication is the Key

- DR/SR Partnership – “Best Teams Work as One for the Athletes” (see *USA Officials Newsletter April 2024*)
 - Start early to talk with your DR(s); DQ process, additional commands for swimmers, backstroke protocol;
 - Where will you stand for starting events; DR position?; The “hand-off” – SR should be able to see the DR hand without actually having to look at it
 - Any anticipated situations, any “unique starts”, protocols (backstroke ledges, disabled swimmer, delayed start protocol, fall-ins, etc.)
 - Will the DR be giving you directions (clear the pool, step swimmers down, etc.)
 - Full heat; Empty Lane #; No comments; Fly-overs, Etc.



The Deck Referee and Starter Team; It's All About Communication

by Kathleen Scandary, USA Swimming Program & Events Coordinator
and Denice Wepasnick, 2020 Olympic Starter *Revised April 2024*

- No matter the size or level of the meet, the deck referee and starter must be a team that communicates. The teamwork begins when you are assigned to one of these two roles, whether it is for the entire session or a few events within a session. Even before starting your pre-session checks, you both should have a conversation regarding potential circumstances that might come up, such as how false starts are to be handled, should the SR communicate empty lanes/full heat, etc. While the athletes are in the pool for warm-ups, the SR can check the integrity of the start system as the DR inspects the blocks. While the DR is inspecting blocks, he/she can also listen to the voice of the SR projecting through the speakers, checking for clarity. To avoid repeatedly saying TYM, the SR should practice it in the manner that they perform for the athletes by mixing the TYM with, "Lane 1, 2, 3..." The DR's feedback allows for the necessary adjustments to be made before the athletes are even on the block or in the water, and possibly on the ledge. During this time, or in the minutes before the event, the SR is the first to pick their spot for the best view of all lanes. The goal for the DR in choosing their position is the same: an unobstructed visual gaze over the lanes. However, the DR must also keep in mind that their outstretched arm, signifying the heat has been given to the SR, must be easily and peripherally visible. This is another example of the teamwork necessary to ensure the SR, as well as the DR, maintains sight of all athletes at the blocks before the start.



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- The SR may report to the DR when the anticipated number of athletes are all present, or only when there is an empty lane, depending on what is established in the pre-session dialogue. For the forward start, the short whistles are blown and are followed within seconds by the long whistle to initiate the athletes' transition onto the blocks. Once the athletes are steady, meaning there is no evidence of imbalance on the blocks, the DR hands over the heat to the SR. It is now up to the SR to decide when to give the start command and the start signal. If all is well, the two watch the swimmers enter the water before going into their distinctly different roles. The SR, who is aware of the amount of time the DR is spending processing calls, can be very helpful by providing information on which swimmer is trailing behind and anything of importance regarding athletes in the next heat. The DR can help the SR by their own demeanor and walking away to take calls. This allows the SR to calmly observe the behavior of the swimmers in the next heat.

Prior to the start, any issue that has the potential to create inequity may require the DR to retract their arm. The outstretched arm does not relieve the DR from full control of the heat. The DR can direct the SR to issue commands for the athletes other than the TYM and "Stand, please." commands that are specific to the SR.



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- If need be, the DR may ask the SR to “Stand”, “Relax”, or have the athletes “Step down carefully.” The field has been returned to the DR, at this point. The team may spend a moment in conference, take action (i.e. false starts, fall-ins) if needed, and bring the heat back onto the blocks with the DR blowing the long whistle. The SR is equally responsible for making sure that the athletes are settling and are not distracted. In some instances, the command to stand is used at the discretion of the SR if the starter feels that there may be the possibility of inequity at the start while the arm of the DR remains extended.

Should a false start or fall-in occur, both the SR and DR mark their sheet independent of one another. The SR initiates the call by approaching the DR, observing first whether radio communication is taking place. The SR uses a phrase that will get the DR’s attention, like, “I have a potential...” The two show their sheet with the markings on the lane of the swimmer who committed the false start, thus solidifying the independence of their calls.

The goal of effective communication between the SR and DR is to develop a team approach to ensure the best possible outcome for the athletes we serve.



■ Position on Deck in the Starter Area

- Ask Starter to establish their position before every heat & before short whistles
- Communication with SR; maybe even Console – everyone ready?

■ World Aquatics and USA Swimming - New Whistle Protocol

- **Preliminaries** – short whistles are blown when swimmers are behind their blocks, followed by a long whistle within 3-5 seconds
- **Finals** - Short whistles are blown after all swimmers have paraded onto deck, removed all extraneous gear, and been announced. Long Whistle is blown approximately 5 seconds after short whistles

■ Style of Whistles

- 4 or 5 sharp, crisp short whistles; any more are unnecessary noise.
- 1 long whistle (same volume as shorts)



■ USA Swimming - New Hand Off Protocol

● Old Protocol

- Forward Start – this has typically been when the DR sees that the number of athletes in the heat begin to step up onto the blocks after the long whistle
- Backstroke Start – this has typically been when the last swimmer in the heat has begun to take their starting position with/without the use of backstroke ledges

● New Protocol

- Forward Start – after all the swimmers have stepped onto the blocks and all are steady in their position
- Backstroke Starts – after all swimmers are steady in their starting position [with or without backstroke ledges]



Establishing a Deck Referee Routine

■ Before the Start

- Get into your position and remain stationary throughout whistle protocol; no wiggling, jiggling, or shuffling around
- Project calm and confident
- Check readiness of Team
- Be aware of your proximity to your Starter
 - Starter Hand Signals being used; don't overlap arms!
- Deck Referee hand-off – where and how?
 - Abrupt or Slow-motion

■ What about an Interrupted Start?

- SR issues “Stand, please” – allow SR to re-set heat if no one has stepped down from blocks; DR blows long whistle if step-down has occurred
- Retract arm (DR regains control of heat); Communication with SR is critical here!
 - Long whistle to re-set heat
 - Other DR commands to SR



Establishing a Deck Referee Routine

■ After the Start

- Observe head-ups on all swimmers
- Check Scoreboard
- Check Start End Judges, then Stroke Judges
- Check Heat Sheet; mark False Starts
- Radio in No Shows, Declared False Starts, False Starts

■ While the Swimmers are Racing

- Scan the venue for safety issues (wires, cords, ledges in the water)
- Return to check judges
- Timers



Establishing a Deck Referee Routine

■ As the Swimmers are Finishing

- Complete processing of paperwork – DQs
- Be cognizant of your last swimmer
 - Count heads again

■ After the Last swimmer has Touched

- Depends on Fly-over vs Clearing pool
- May need to instruct Starter to clear the pool
 - Used judiciously
 - Always “Thank you, Ladies/Gentlemen”, or if mixed events, then “ Thank you, Swimmers”

■ Repeat Sequence



DR on 4 and 5 Star meets; televised or not

- **These additional responsibilities are yours and demand your attention:**
- Omega console person will be waiting for you to give them a “thumbs up”, indicating that the heat is clear and complete (no pending DQs, etc.). This includes RJP clearing for relays.
- Listening for Omega staff to confirm False Starts and timing issues from review of their Overhead Cameras.
- Be prepared to wait for scrolling of finalists; A, B, and C (maybe even a D heat).
- Timeline – “Red-hat” controls this while meet is being televised
- Broadcast issues - “Red-hat” directions for whistles and proceeding with the start of each heat.
- All Jr. Natl Champs, Natl Championships, US Open, and Olympic Trials meets (4 + 5 Star meets) will have a Head Deck Referee that oversees the Deck Referees



Starters Role, Protocol, & Responsibilities

■ Starter Essentials to Know:

- • Know your Starting Equipment – Colorado (Infinity, Championship), Daktronics, Omega and how to recall a heat (if needed)
- • Test the system (check the speakers and blocks) prior to the beginning of each session
- • Practice your TYM as you intend to use it during the session. **Do not repeatedly say** “TYM, TYM, TYM...” as this tends to interfere with your starting routine; **Practice the way you expect to Perform!**
- • Communication with DR! Assist in checking starting field for correct number of athletes in proper lanes (Tell DR?)
- • Note all empty lanes on starter's record (NS, DFS, Admin SCR, ...)

1



2



3



Timing Systems:

- 1) Colorado Infinity Start System; there is a newer version of this
- 2) Colorado Championship Start System
- 3) Omega Start System
- 4) Daktronics Start System; no longer being manufactured

4





Starters Role, Protocol, & Responsibilities

- Administrative Roles of Starters (you didn't think it was as easy as just three little words, did you??)
 - Head Starter – writes SR protocol (with input from HDR+MR) and develops DR.SR pairings for meet events
 - Order Of Finish (OOF)
 - Fair Start (on your heat sheet)
 - Fly-overs vs Clearing the pool
 - False Starts
 - Distance Bell
 - Counting Laps (lap counting sheet)
 - Check Scoreboard
 - No Show (NS)
 - Declared False Start (DFS)
 - Session timeline (Event Start Times)
 - Timer's Briefing (USA website)
 - Invigilating-what is this?
 - Check Starter System
 - Checking the Blocks
 - Keeping track of lag swimmer



Patience, Practice, and “The Voice”

- Conversational tone with a slight drop in pitch; remember it's a COMMAND; use **YOUR NATURAL VOICE!**

- Remember to BREATHE!!! 

- **PRACTICE** before the meet is **ESSENTIAL!!** You will improve your delivery in both consistency and tone by practicing your TYM before you ever get near the pool deck. Put “Take Your Marks” at the end of a short sentence

- AVOID: Sing-song voice

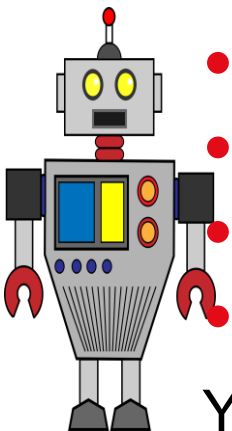
- Sounding like a robot

- False accents

- Rushing your TYM

- Making TYM a question

NO Soft Voices Allowed!



You shall not suffer a swimmer because they can't hear you!



- Everything you do is entirely dependent on the swimmers in your heat. Being able to “read” your swimmers is a crucial part of becoming a good Starter.
 - Let’s talk about “reading the swimmers”
 - Can you tell the difference between settling vs set?
- Remember the language of the rule stationary does not mean motionless – think about the 10+U swimmer vs the elite swimmer (what comes to mind?)



■ **After TYM....**(*my Wizard of Oz hourglass analogy)

- You will always do **1** of **3** things for each Start: (always with a Purposeful Pause)
 1. Send the swimmers into the pool with the starting signal because they “told” you that they’re all ready, **OR**
 2. Allow the swimmers to settle into their final set position; Add more sand to your hourglass*, **OR**
 3. Stand the heat due to circumstances
(after the 1 thing, you may follow it up with 1 other thing; certain situations will have you do all 3 things. Hopefully not repeatedly!)



Starting Swimmers with Disabilities

105.3 DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

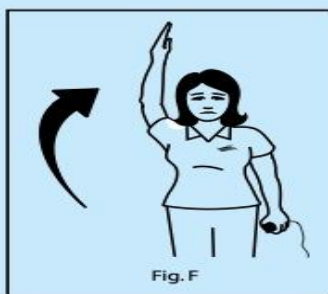
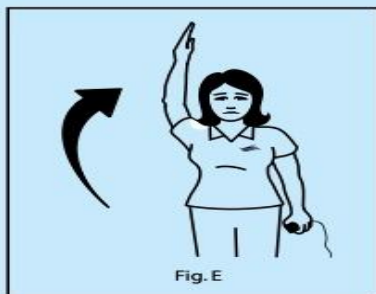
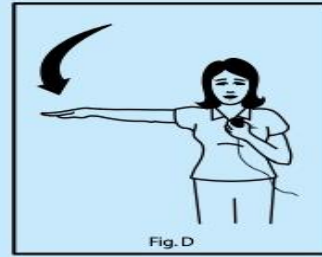
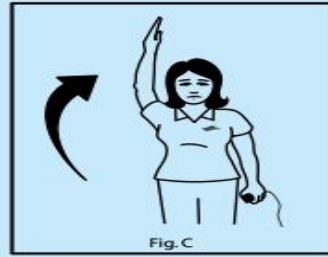
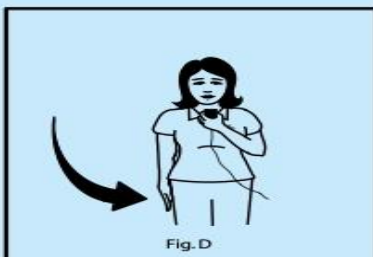
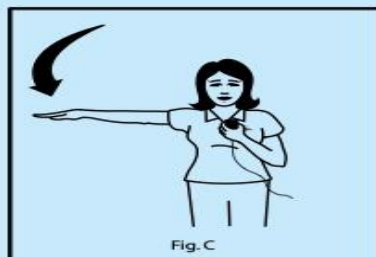
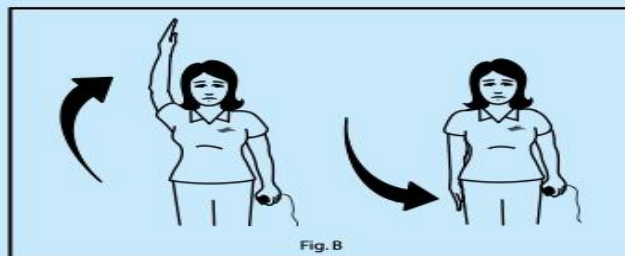
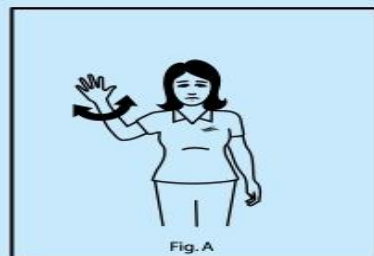
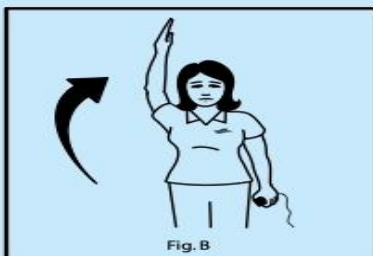
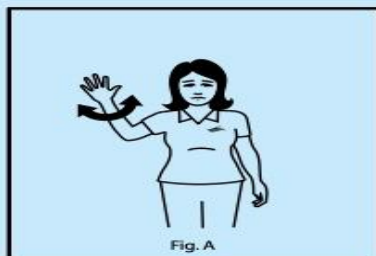


FIGURE 1: FORWARD START

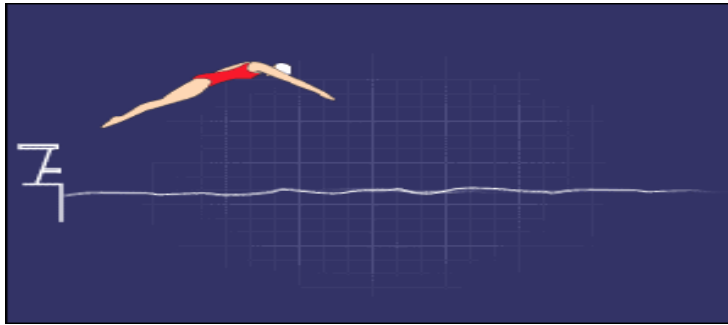
- A. Twist hand at chin level — short whistles
- B. Arm overhead — long whistle — swimmer steps onto starting block
- C. Arm moves to shoulder level — signal to "Take Your Marks"
- D. Arm moves to side of body — starting signal
- E. Arm raised overhead with palm up (at any time after C. ["Take Your Marks"]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



Let's talk about some...



False Start Situations



WHAT IS A FALSE START?

- The rules state... “When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal” (101.1.2C), and,
- “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 a "stand" command and may step off the blocks.”(101.1.3A).
- So, what constitutes a false start? These scenarios should help you paint the picture.

FALSE START SCENARIO #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 and confirms the Starter's observation, the offending swimmer is disqualified at the conclusion of the race.
- Rule 101.1.3B applies. This is a false start.

FALSE START SCENARIO #2

- Swimmer leaves the set or stationary position prior to the starting signal. The swimmer upon realizing the early starting motion attempts to catch himself/herself. Starter says absolutely nothing, and the swimmer fails to halt the forward motion and goes into the pool.
- Rule 101.1.3A applies. This is a false start.

FALSE START SCENARIO #3

- Exactly the same facts as #2 above, but this time the Starter says “Stand, please” after the swimmer leaves the set or stationary position. The seven other swimmers stand or step down from the blocks. The offending swimmer struggles, but once again is unable to halt the forward motion and falls into the pool.
- Unlike scenario #2 , here the starter said “Stand, please”, but that does not change the false start result. The rule is clear that the "stand" command is for the benefit of the other swimmers on the starting blocks. When the stand command is issued, the athletes have the option of standing or stepping off the blocks. The offending swimmer did neither. He fell into the pool just like the swimmer in scenario #2.
- Rule 101.1.3A applies. This is a false start.

FALSE START SCENARIO #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 or step off the blocks.
- Rule 101.1.3A applies. **This is NOT a false start.** Why? Because the swimmer remained on the blocks or deck like everyone else in the heat, and no starting signal ever sounded.

FALSE START SCENARIO #5

- Exactly the same facts as scenarios #2 and #3 above. However, when the Starter gives the “Stand, please” command a swimmer(s) other than the offending swimmer instantly bolts from the blocks and enters the water.
- Rule 101.1.3D applies, “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 a “stand” command.”
- The swimmer(s) clearly started in reaction to the “stand” command. **This is NOT a false start.**

FALSE START SCENARIO #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.
- Rule 101.1.2C applies. The swimmer should be given the opportunity to come to his/her set or stationary position prior to the start. A loss of balance prevented that, and clearly this swimmer never engaged in any starting action. **This is NOT a false start.**

FALSE START SCENARIO #7

- During the race start, the referee whistles the swimmers up onto the blocks, then hands over the heat to the Starter. Upon the "Take your marks" command, the swimmers come down and become stationary, but before the starter starts the race, one swimmer moves forward, but does not leave the block. Rather than asking the swimmers to "Stand Please," the Starter chooses to wait and the swimmer becomes stationary again along with the rest of the heat. The starter then starts the race which runs to completion and no disqualification was made.
- Rule 101.1.2C applies. The swimmer should be given the opportunity to come to his/her set or stationary position prior to the start. The swimmer regained their set position prior to the starting signal. This demonstrates the patience that is required for a Starter to have for each heat of swimmers. **This is NOT a false start.** A great example of a PATIENT+PURPOSEFUL PAUSE!!!



The newest DR.SR Protocol

- We just finished a review of the the False Start Scenarios that are posted on the USA Swimming website ([False Start Scenarios](#)). Even though these were developed a while ago, they are still valid guidelines and continue to be used in Starter Clinics offered across the country.

Each scenario presents a situation to demonstrate Rule 101.1.3. The common thread in most of these scenarios is related to when one or more swimmers fall into the pool prior to the starting signal, either with or without the Starter issuing a “Stand” command, and whether the swimmer(s) is/is not the initial offending swimmer.

Upon further scrutiny and reflection, a critical practice and/or protocol in False Start Scenario 2, 3, 4, and 5 has not been addressed. The missing information in each of these four scenarios is the specific protocol to resolve the situation and re-set the heat, all the while attending to the existing rule and our current practice.



Resolution and Resetting the Heat after a Fall-In

- 1. The DR and SR should always independently indicate on their Heat Sheet **if they believe** any fall-in swimmer(s) committed a false start. This can be done using a circle or mark on the applicable lane. The rationale for this is based upon our current practice where written observation is shared prior to any conversation.
- 2. If the SR has a possible false start due to a fall-in, they should initiate and approach and show their written observation to the DR (current practice and protocol). If, *“...the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation...”* then the swimmer(s) is disqualified for a false start. Additionally, a coach wanting to advocate for their swimmer should be afforded the opportunity to see the DR and SR sheets with the swimmer/lane noting a false start, if confirmed. After disqualifying the swimmer(s), the DR blows another long whistle to initiate the starting sequence again.



Resolution and Resetting the Heat after a Fall-In

- 3. Once the DR and SR have compared their written observations, conversation may be held to determine if there were any issues surrounding the fall-in that might relieve the swimmer(s) from the disqualification. Consideration is given to the order of incidence, who was the offending swimmer(s), were they set, did another swimmer react to the offending swimmer, did the swimmer(s) react to a sound, etc. If it's mutually determined that there is a violation, then a disqualification is warranted. The heat is told, "Step down, carefully"; the DR informs the violating swimmer(s) of their DQ, and the swimmer(s) is not permitted to swim this event. The DR blows another long whistle to initiate the starting sequence again.

- 4. If the DR and SR do not confirm that a swimmer(s) false started, (i.e. not being set, different offending swimmer, was there a sound, etc.) then no violation has occurred, and the swimmer(s) is relieved of the potential false start, and the DR blows another long whistle to initiate the starting sequence again.

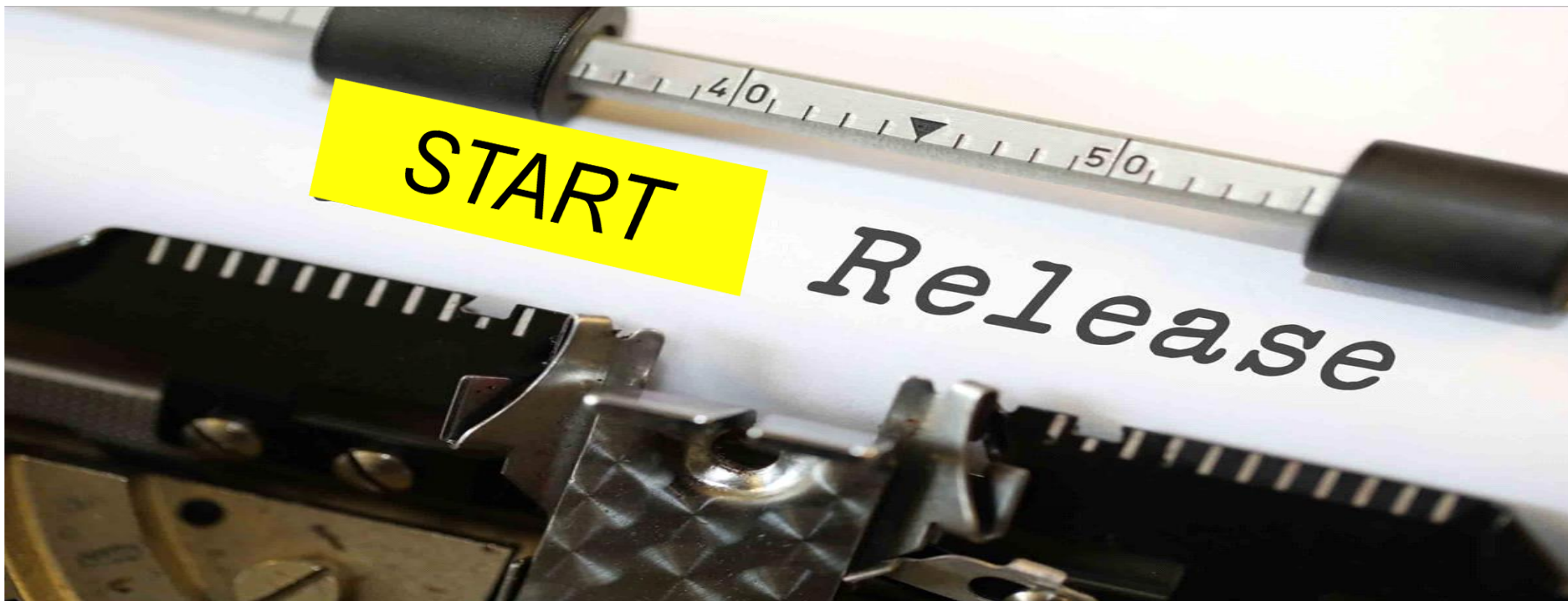


Final Processes for Starters after Every Start



- What was good about that start?
- What changes do I need to make?
- What must I do to make my next start better?
- What must I do to deliver a consistently good start?

REFLECT

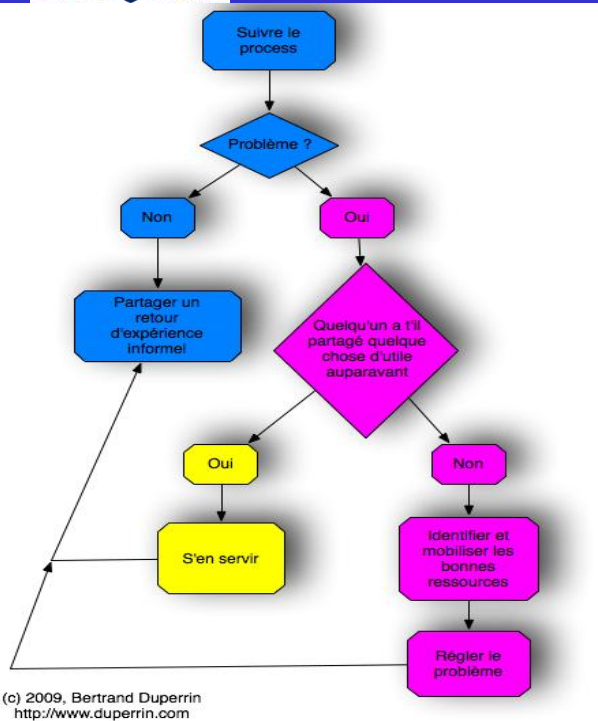


After answering those questions,
RELEASE your previous start
and.....

Re-



- You have another group of swimmers at the blocks
- Give them your undivided attention
- Watch for unusual situations
- Communicate with your Deck Ref
- Prepare for your BEST START!



■ Your **Starter Routine**

- Poise; Position; Breathe; Prepared; Vision; Breathe; Equipment; Voice;; Tone; Patience; “Read” swimmers; Purposeful Pause; Patience



Your Challenge

- We have a lot of history and tradition in our world of officiating; Teaching, Mentoring, Guiding, Learning, Professional Performances
- But think about who was sitting in your chair before you today...?
- Who is going to be sitting in YOUR chair after you leave? Who are you bringing along as your replacement?
- Challenge Coin ... how it works
- Your Challenge!!!
- Thank you for your attention and participation!!
Kathleen and Robert





Questions?

■ What questions can we answer for you?