



# Starter Clinic

May 2024

# Clinic Overview

- Philosophy of Starting
- Starting Rules
- The Process
- The Start
- Other Stuff

# Philosophy of Starting

- Starting is “different” than other positions
  - Less rules-based, more technique-based
  - Zen, Good Cop, Team
- GOAL: A fair start for all swimmers
  - Not the timeline, not any particular athlete
- Three main aspects to understand
  - Knowing when the field is ready for TYM
  - Knowing when the field is ready for Start
  - Knowing when it is necessary to intervene so that these two goals may be realized



# Philosophy of Starting

- The STARTER reads the field, to determine when THE FIELD\* is ready to start—Not the other way around!
- PATIENCE, PATIENCE, PATIENCE
- Control your emotions so that the swimmers can control theirs!

\*“The Field” vs. eight individuals



# Starting Rules

- According to the 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



# The Process – General/Prep

- Be familiar with the equipment
  - Always test microphone, they are all different!
  - Test volume, be sure you can be heard from all lanes!
- May be responsible for briefing timers
- Where to stand
  - Within 5 meters from start end of pool
  - Able to observe entire field but also distinguish between individual lanes
  - Starter chooses first, referee adjusts to starter
  - Be in position and ready to go at long whistle



# The Process - Before

- Before the Start:
  - Looking at swimmers behind the blocks, check the starting field for correct swimmers, possibly update DR
  - Short whistles, announce, long whistle, step up
  - DR turns over the heat to the starter

# The Process - During

- The Start:
  - Determine when The Field is ready for TYM
  - “Take Your Marks”
  - Determine when The Field is ready to start
  - START!
  
- More on this later...



# The Process - After

- After the Start:
  - Watch for the swimmers to surface and check the blocks for any issues
  - Mark your heat sheet, resolve any FS or NS, mark event start times
  - May need to signal (ring the bell) for distance events\*
  - May need to lap count for distance events\*
  - Be ready to do Order of Finish if necessary\*

\*This can overlap with “Before the Start” duties of the next heat. Know your priorities. *OOF is typically your lowest priority.*

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# Let's Focus on the Actual Start

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# Two Parts of the Start

#1 - Knowing when the field is ready to assume the starting position

#2 - Knowing when the field is ready to receive the starting signal

# #1 - Knowing when the field is ready to assume the starting position

- Patience as the swimmers settle into position
- Forward Start—One foot at front of block
- Backstroke Start—Toes not curled over gutter
- Once all swimmers are in position, ready for the TYM command
- If the swimmers looked “surprised” or “rushed” at TYM, you probably aren’t waiting for them to settle.
- If the swimmers are starting to turn and look at you before TYM, you are probably waiting too long.



# “Take Your Marks”

- Conversational tone
- *Inviting* the swimmers to swim
- Slightly descending tone
- Statement, not a question
- Delivered in a relaxed, but confident way
- “Close the door” “Pass the Salt” “Eat your lunch”

## #2 - Knowing when the field is ready to receive the starting signal

- Wait for the swimmers to become stationary
- Stationary does NOT necessarily mean motionless
- Stationary = Establishes vertical plane at front of block
- Send the swimmers once all are stationary



# If Things Don't Go As Planned.... (for ANY reason)



- Starter can Stand the Field
  - “stand, please”
  - To be delivered more softly and *extremely calmly*
  - PATIENCE to allow swimmers to refocus before giving the TYM command again
  - It’s often better to *wait* than to Stand, especially with younger athletes
  
- Deck Referee can take the field back
- Review the DR/SR “situations” posted by USA-S  
<https://www.usaswimming.org/docs/default-source/officialsdocuments/officials-training-resources/situations-and-resolutions/starter-and-deck-referee-situations-and-resolutions-revised-10-20-2018.pdf>

# Once The Heat Has Started....

- Hold microphone in position until heads surface, in case necessary to recall
- Starter can recall a heat for any reason that caused swimmers to not have a fair start
- Recall = No Swimmers Charged with False Start



# The False Start



- A Swimmer **STARTING** early—breaking his/her stationary position before the start
- If one or more swimmers has entered the water, and you Started yet, release the other swimmers with “Stand, please”
- Discreetly and promptly record the violation by notating on heat sheet *even if it was “obvious to everyone”*
- Dual confirmation procedures
- Review the false start “situations” posted by USA-S  
[https://www.usaswimming.org/docs/default-source/officialdocuments/national-certification-and-evaluation/request-mentoring-and-evaluation/false-start-scenarios.pdf?sfvrsn=92af5c32\\_11](https://www.usaswimming.org/docs/default-source/officialdocuments/national-certification-and-evaluation/request-mentoring-and-evaluation/false-start-scenarios.pdf?sfvrsn=92af5c32_11)

# Other Commands

## Things to Say (And Not Say!)

- Refer to the swimmers as “ladies” or “gentlemen” or “swimmers”
- NEVER deviate the language of “Take your marks,” and “Stand, please”
- “Relax, please” or “Swimmers, relax” for prolonged delay (never in place of Stand)
- “Lane \_\_, toes, please,” if necessary to lower toes in backstroke
- “Thank you, ladies/gentlemen/swimmers,” to clear pool
- “Please clear the pool” if “Thank you” doesn’t work
- Additional instructions only as directed by referee

# Practice, Practice, Practice!

- The more experience you gain, the more comfortable you will be!

Take Your Marks  
Take Your Marks  
Take Your Marks  
Stand please

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# Other Stuff

# 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 the 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
- Safe Sport reminders... Pay attention to your job, not your phone. No cameras/pics behind the blocks.
- Head timer have anything to add?
- Thanks (again).



# 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, being ready to next heat).
- OOF has **little** 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.

# Lap Counting

- For any event 500 yards and longer, the Starter typically serves as a backup lap counter. This is to help assure that each swimmer completes the prescribed distance (even if touch pads don't register each touch, even if their lap counter at the far end makes mistakes).
- Even if the timing system, the lap counter and/or the Starter make mistakes in lap counting, it is still ultimately the swimmer's responsibility to complete the prescribed distance. (102.6.E)
- Note on a lap counting sheet the order in which the swimmers touch each intermediate distance, each touch at the start end of the pool.
- It's just like taking order of finish...except for every intermediate distance.

500 Yard Freestyle		
Event #: _____		
Laps	Yards	Heat #: _____
2	50	
4	100	
6	150	
8	200	
10	250	
12	300	
14	350	
16	400	
18	450	Bell
20	500	

# Ring the Bell



- Bells are used to signal the last lap for any event 500 yards and longer (101.1.4).
- At larger meets, there may be an official assigned to ring a bell for each lane, but more commonly the Starter rings the bell for the last lap of only *the fastest athlete*. The “bell lap” is usually noted on the lap counting sheet.
- Note, in a combined heat (not just a mixed heat), there might be more than one fastest athlete. Each deserves a bell.
- Making sure the bell gets rung is the Starters job, but the Starter may ask for help, e.g. “Hey DR, can you ring the bell on the next touch for lane 6, while I lap count?”
- Start ringing when the swimmer crosses under the flags inbound. Stop when they cross under the flags outbound.
- Good practice to keep slightly to the side of the swimmer, so a dropped bell doesn’t hit anyone.
- Keep it simple, no fancy “ring up high, ring down low” is necessary. The attention should be on the athletes, not on you.



