

# STARTER CLINIC

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## A. INTRODUCTION

**Advice:** Before every meet where you are a starter, review swimming rules **SW 2.3** (Starter) and **SW 4** (The Start)

The Starter position is critical in the running of a successful meet. The Starter and the Referee must function as an effective team to ensure that fair starts are achieved consistently throughout the session. The central point of the Starter's role is to ensure a fair start for all swimmers. To exercise your function as a Starter, you:

- a) must have a good working knowledge of the rules;
- b) must be **consistent** and exercise good judgment;
- c) must earn the confidence of the swimmers; and
- d) must respect the swimmers and enjoy the sport.

Only by practice, can a Starter achieve these goals. Many people are initially nervous about starting; New starters should begin at introductory meets such as a club time trial, working higher level meets as confidence grows.

## B. EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES

- Starter Pistol, shells, ear plugs
- or*
- Electronic starting device, start amplifier, if available.
- Heat sheet or meet program

## **C. STARTER'S ROLE & LOCATION**

### **1. The Role**

**SW 2.3.1** *The starter shall have full control of the swimmers from the time the referee turns the swimmers over to him (SW 2.1.5) until the race has commenced. The start shall be given in accordance with SW 4.*

**SW 2.3.2** *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.*

**SW 2.3.3** *The starter shall have power to decide whether the start is fair, subject only to the decision of the Referee.*

**SW 2.3.4** *When starting an event, the starter shall stand on the side of the pool within approximately five meters of the starting edge of the pool where the timekeepers can see and/or hear the starting signal and the swimmers can hear the signal.*

### **2. The Location**

- 1) On the side of the pool;
- 2) About 5 meters from the starting edge so that timekeepers can see and hear the starting signal and so that swimmers can hear the signal;
- 3) Have a good view of the referee, and watch for the arm raised.

## **D. PERFORMANCE OF THE POSITION**

### **1. Before The Meet**

- 1) Arrive early at least one hour before the start.
- 2) Check the starting equipment and become familiar with the pool layout.
- 3) Is a gun or electronic starting equipment to be used?
- 4) Have the electronics been set up and operating? TEST the equipment.
- 5) Are all loudspeakers, horns, and strobe lights working?
- 6) Set and test the volume levels.
- 7) Is there a standby gun and ammunition available? If so check the operation of the gun, ammunition supply, ear plugs.
- 8) Are any races to be started from the turn end of the pool?
  - If so, is the starting equipment to be moved and how? **Or**
  - Is there equipment set up at both ends? TEST all equipment
- 9) Check the Starter's Platform:
  - Is it in the correct position / location?
  - Adjust to suit your location, preference or style.

### **2. Briefing with the Referee**

1. The meet shall be run under FINA start rules (SW 4)..
2. Check out what type of meet it is: Age Group, Masters, SWAD. Ensure you have reviewed and are familiar with the appropriate rules.
3. Be aware of any duties the Referee may like you to perform besides being the Starter.
4. Discuss with the referee whistle protocol (SW 2.1.5).
5. Clarify the process to handle equipment problems, or movement of equipment.
6. Are there different Starters and/or Referees for male & female, or only one for all?
7. How have other sessions gone in regards to starting? Any DQ's or other problems?

**Establish the Procedure for Normal Starts:**

- 1) Does the Referee want you to advise swimmers to adjust their position on the blocks or in the water?
- 2) Will you be advising swimmers to leave the pool or stay in the water when the races finish?
- 3) Will the Starter be announcing the event number and heats during the sessions?

**Establish the Procedure for False Starts**

- 1) Referee and Starter to confer & agree on any false starts before any disqualifications are made.
- 2) Ensure rules, tolerances etc. are understood, to ensure consistency.
- 3) If the Referee and the Starter cannot agree on the swimmer that caused the false start, you should not disqualify anyone when there is doubt.

**Test Start**

Check to see if the Chief Timekeeper and/or the Electronics wish a test start.

**Meet Flow:**

Discuss any time problems and solutions with the referee (need to speed up or slow the meet down).

**False Start Rope**

- 1) Who will operate it?
- 2) How is it operated?
- 3) Who will move it for 50 meter races if required?

**Distance Events**

- 1) Are bells being used?
- 2) Will you be expected to count or track the lead swimmer's laps, to ensure a bell is rung or a starting device is sounded at the correct time?

Note: You may be asked to remind the Lane Timekeepers to ring the bell for the bell lap, and may have to provide a pistol shot if there are no bells.

### 3. *During the Meet*

#### **Preparing for the start of the race**

At the commencement of each event, the Referee shall signal to the swimmers to the blocks (SW 2.1.5). When the swimmers and officials are ready for the start, the Referee shall signal such with an outstretched arm, indicating that the swimmers are now under the Starter's control. The stretched out arm shall stay in that position until the start is given.

**SW 2.3.1** *The starter shall have full control of the swimmers from the time the referee turns the swimmers over to him (SW 2.1.5) until the race has commenced. The start shall be given in accordance with SW 4.*

1. Ensure all timekeepers can see the starting device (gun or flash).
2. Comply with all the rules for the Start as stated in SW 4.
3. Give the command “**Take Your Marks**” in a slow, steady, non-military voice. A starter must establish an even, consistent cadence with his/her starting commands.
4. Activate the starting device when all competitors are **stationary** and complying with the starting rules. (SW 4.1 and SW 4.2).
5. If requested to do so by the Referee, serve as a Turn Judge.
6. It is a good practice for the Starter to keep the heat sheets of the session just worked for a reasonable amount of time, in case any questions arise later.

#### **Delaying the Start**

**SW 2.3.2** *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.*

The Starter cannot disqualify a swimmer for undue delay of the start. If, for example, a swimmer suddenly mounts the blocks in an empty lane after the race has been turned over to the Starter, or if a swimmer has no intention of holding on the start and dives into the water, the Starter shall ask the swimmers to step back and then confer with the Referee. It must be the Referee who makes the disqualification. Such disqualification shall not be counted as a false start.

## **False Starts**

**SW 2.3.3** *The starter shall have power to decide whether the start is fair, subject only to the decision of the Referee.*

### False Start Exceptions:

1. If loud noises or camera flashes from other parts of the building affected the start, **or**
2. If the Starter held the swimmers for an unreasonable amount of time while waiting for all swimmers to come down and hold, causing a ragged and unfair start,

**Then the race should be recalled and another fair start attempted with no disqualifications assigned.**

1. Prior to each subsequent attempt to start, the race shall revert back to the Referee who shall again signal the swimmers to the blocks, and with an outstretched arm pass the race over to the starter for the command "Take your marks".
2. Do not call back a race on an official's error and also disqualify a swimmer for starting early (GR 7.5).

Your attention is drawn to the following rule interpretation published on the SNC website:

### **False Starts**

*(by Bill Hogan, SNC Rules Coordinator)*

False Starts: A False Start is declared when a swimmer "**starts**" before the starting signal is given. In SW 4.4 there is no mention of:

- "**re-introduction of movement** on the blocks after taking a motionless stance";
- "**flinching**, then settling back to a motionless stance"
- "**reflex movements**, nervous twitches, etc."

These were listed in our old rulebook under the heading "types of false starts" in the Canadian rule CSW 4.7.2 ff. (it was never in FINA rules)

Question: Do any of these movements constitute a False Start?

Answer: NO.

Interpretation: A false start occurs when a swimmer **starts** before the Starting Signal.

(This of course confirms our reasoning for deleting these old CSW rules from the new rulebook.)

## E. THE START

**SW 4.1** *The start in Freestyle, Breaststroke, Butterfly and Individual Medley races shall be with a dive. On the long whistle (SW 2.1.5) from the referee the swimmers shall step onto the starting platform and remain there. On the starter's command "take your marks", they shall immediately take up a starting position with at least one foot at the front of the starting platforms. The position of the hands is not relevant. When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal.*

1. All swimmers must be STATIONARY before the Starter gives the starting signal. If any swimmers are moving, the Starter must not give the starting signal. If swimmers are moving and the Starter gives the signal, causing a ragged start, the race is recalled with no disqualifications, due to the Starter's error in giving the signal while swimmers were not stationary. If all are stationary, and somebody starts early and the gun sounds, that swimmer is disqualified after the race.
2. There is no definition in the rulebook to identify what constitutes what we know as a "false start". The only thing stated is that starting before the signal is given results in a disqualification at the start.
3. The starter shall not start the race until all swimmers are stationary.
  - Some swimmers will fidget until the referee turns the race over to the starter. This is acceptable.
  - The position of the feet is not defined in rule SW 4.1, so swimmers may stand wherever they wish on the starting platform prior to the Starter's command "Take your marks".
  - Swimmers may also take the starting position with both hands gripping the starting blocks prior to the command.
4. The swimmers are turned over to the Starter by the Referee's outstretched arm pointing down the pool.

**SW 4.2** *The start in Backstroke and Medley Relay races shall be from the water. At the referee's first long whistle (SW 2.1.5), the swimmers shall immediately enter the water. At the Referee's second long whistle the swimmers shall return without undue delay to the starting position (SW 6.1). When all swimmers have assumed their starting positions, the starter shall give the command "take your marks". When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal.*

**SW 6.1** *Prior to the starting signal, the swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands holding the starting grips. Standing in or on the gutter, or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter, is prohibited.*

- Note that there is no longer a requirement for the swimmers to have their toes below the water.

**SW 4.4** *Any swimmer starting before the starting signal has been given, shall be disqualified. If the starting signal sounds before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue and*



*the swimmer or swimmers shall be disqualified upon completion of the race. If the disqualification is declared before the starting signal, the signal shall not be given, but the remaining swimmers shall be called back and start again.*

### **RECALLING A RACE:**

A race may be **recalled** with no **“false start”** declared:

1. when a fair start has not been achieved
2. when there is outside interference at the start
3. when there is an official's error

NB: If a swimmer false starts and the starting signal is given the disqualification is done after the race.

**GR 7.5** *If an error by an official follows a fault by a competitor, the fault by the competitor may be expunged.*

- Any recall for a disqualification under the one-start rule is an official's error. This error nullifies the disqualification. Control of the swimmers will revert back to the Referee, and a fair start shall be attempted again.
- The “rule-of-thumb” for the one-start rule is: “If the gun goes; the race goes” (This applies, of course, only if a fair start was achieved and there was no official's error or outside interference at the start.)

**CSW 4.4.1** *When swimmer(s) are disqualified for a false start under this rule, the swimmer(s) shall not be allowed to swim under protest. If a protest is made and upheld by a Jury of Appeal, the swimmer(s) concerned shall swim on their own at a time determined by the referee and the coach(es) concerned.*

- If there is a protest by a coach on the start, the swimmer is still not allowed to swim in the race under protest. If the protest is upheld by a Jury of Appeal, the swimmer swims on his/her own later at a time determined by the referee.

## F. COMMON SENSE APPLICATIONS

If one swimmer “jumps the gun” because of the movement of another swimmer (drawn-in), and commits a false start, suggest that the referee disqualify only the swimmer causing the false start.

If one swimmer, or more than one swimmer moves as if to start just before the starting signal is given, and the starter cannot avoid activating the starting signal, disqualify after the race. The key here is that jiggling, stride adjustments, and adjustment of the feet on the block do NOT constitute a false start. The movement must be such as to indicate the swimmer’s intent to start. Be alert when swimmers use the “track start”: some will roll backward after grabbing the blocks. A momentary pause before rolling backward is permitted.

- a) At the crucial moment of pressing the starting button (or firing the gun) the Starter must be very attentive. If movement takes place, do not start the race.
- b) If you are working an age group meet with many novice swimmers, the best (positive) solution may be to advise the swimmers to step back and go over to talk with the offending swimmer.
- c) If one or more swimmers initiate movement to start a fraction of a second before the starting signal “sounded”, any and all who moved must be disqualified after the race.
- d) Swimmers can only be disqualified when there is no official’s error

If the Starter errs and starts the race before all the swimmers are stationary, recall the race and advise the Referee that it was your error. There can be no disqualifications in this situation

If the Referee and Starter cannot agree on which swimmer committed a false start (e.g. one saying it was lane 4 and the other saying it was Lane 3), the benefit of the doubt is given to the swimmers and no false start is declared.

## G. AFTER THE MEET

Attend a debriefing with the Referee or Management Committee. Comment on both strengths and areas of improvement for the next session. This is practiced at National Meets and should be encouraged at local meets.

Ensure that the equipment used is secured:

- Starter’s electronic equipment is shut down.
- Guns and shells are safely put away.
- False start rope is secured.
- Clipboard is returned to the official’s room.

Check the Officials’ schedule for the next session that you work.

## H. SITUATIONS FOR DISCUSSION

How would a Starter handle each of the following situations?

- 1) Following the command “take your marks”, the swimmers assume a starting position, and a swimmer begins to move as if to initiate a start before the start signal (*i.e.* “jumps the gun”):

Answer (SW 4.4)

- *Signal not given:* step swimmers down; disqualify offending swimmer; restart the race with that swimmer’s lane empty.
- *Signal given:* race continues; disqualify offending swimmer after the race.

- 2) A swimmer does not respond to the command “Take your marks” by taking his starting position with one or both feet at the front of the blocks:

Answer (SW 2.3.2)

- Instruct the swimmers to step down.
- Discuss situation the Referee *i.e.* did the swimmer hear the command, etc? The Referee may disqualify the swimmer if it is agreed the swimmer was at fault in not obeying the command. This call is “delay of meet” rather than “false start”.
- If disqualified, the disqualified swimmer’s lane shall remain empty; control of the race reverts to the Referee.

- 3) On the SECOND attempt at starting the same race, a swimmer resumes his starting position and then topples from the blocks before the starting signal is given.

Answer

- The other swimmers are instructed to step back down.
- Did the swimmer slip because of a slippery block?
  - If there is any doubt, the benefit of that doubt would go to the swimmer, and the swimmer shall not be disqualified; the race reverts back to the Referee.
- If it is judged that the swimmer did not hold his mark, but initiated his start:
  - The offending swimmer is disqualified (SW 4.4); the race reverts back to the Referee.

- 4) The swimmers come down in a very uneven disorganized fashion as they take their marks.

Answer

- Ask the swimmers to step down – this is not a false start.
- Race reverts back to the Referee for another start attempt.

**NB:** Ragged starts are often caused by a Referee turning a race over to the Starter before the swimmers are ready. In this situation, the Starter may wait until he feels a fair start can be achieved, or instruct the swimmers to step down.

5) The swimmer in lane 6 comes down “too slowly” to his mark and lane 7 topples into water.

Answer

This is a subjective judgment call. There is nothing in the rules regulating how fast a swimmer must take his/her mark. As long as a swimmer is moving in an attempt to take his mark after the starter’s command, he/she should not be called for an infraction.

However:

- a) Did lane 7 come down very quickly and could not hold his mark? If so, the Referee may make the call to disqualify for delay of meet (SW 2.3.2).
- b) Was there undue delay in obeying the start command by the swimmer in lane 6?
  - Yes: this might indicate that lane 6 “caused” lane 7 to false start. Instruct the swimmers to step down and the Referee may disqualify only the swimmer in lane 6 for delay of meet (SW 2.3.2)
  - No: instruct the swimmers to step down and disqualify the swimmer in lane 7 for starting before the starting signal (SW 4.4).

**NB:** A Starter always has the option to stepping the swimmers down without declaring a false start if he/she feels a fair start might be difficult to achieve.

6) While taking the starting position, the swimmer in lane 3 doesn’t come to a complete stop, but takes his mark and leaves the block in a continuous motion, as the starting signal is given.

Answer

- The race will be recalled for an Official’s error. The Starter should have waited until all swimmers were stationary before activating the starting device (SW4.1 or SW4.2).
- An error by an official (activating the starting signal when swimmers were not stationary) after a fault by a swimmer (not holding his mark) expunges the fault by the swimmer (GR7.5).
- The race reverts back to the referee with no disqualification.