

# **THE STARTER**

# **PHILOSOPHY AND PROTOCOL**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTION - THE STARTER
- II. PHILOSOPHY OF STARTING
- III. BASIC PROTOCOL
- IV. THE STARTER - PROTOCOL WITH WHISTLE STARTS
- V. THE STARTER AND SWIMMERS WITH DISABILITIES
- VI. THE STARTER - PROTOCOL WITHOUT WHISTLE STARTS
- VII. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS
- VIII. APPENDIX
  - A. Guidelines for the "No Recall" procedure
  - B. Whistle Start Clarification
  - C. Head Starter Responsibilities
  - D. Sample Observation Form
  - E. Becoming a Skilled Starter (Jeannine Dennis)

## **Preface**

The intent and purpose of this document is to offer detailed information as a supplement to the video, STARTING: PHILOSOPHY & PROTOCOL. Using the video and booklet will provide an in-depth and comprehensive study on what it takes to become a skilled starter.

## **Acknowledgments**

**The information in this booklet is a compilation of ideas, thoughts, and excerpts of previous documents on the art of starting. It is an ever-changing practice in which all good starters are willing to adapt. Many thanks to starters, both present and past, that have helped mold the current and effective protocol and philosophy that is presented in this document.**

# I. INTRODUCTION

## THE STARTER

The information being presented will provide a clear set of guidelines in which someone interested in becoming a starter or improving on their skills as a practicing starter will be able to refer. Starting is an art that can be perfected as long as someone is willing to accept and understand the philosophy and protocol of the position based on current practices and standards. Once the philosophy and protocol are accepted and a solid understanding of the position of starter is clear, skill can be developed through hours of practice and observing other starters while they perform their duties. It takes many hours of practice in order to understand what occurs in a very short period of time during a start. Those occurrences can have a major impact on the outcome of a race, an event, or a final team score. Knowing what to say, when and how to say it, and what to look for are the first steps in becoming a starter. Proficiency only comes after many meets (and years) of learning and practice. First, an overview of the philosophy of starting will be presented. This is followed by the detailed protocol using WHISTLE STARTS and NO RECALL for USA Swimming including suggestions when neither is used.

## II. PHILOSOPHY OF STARTING

The lengthy description to follow on the protocol that a person needs to be familiar with when performing the duties of a starter is sometimes hard to put in proper perspective when you consider that most of what is mentioned occurs in a time frame of several seconds. Only experience will allow you to think of most, if not all, of what must be done on each and every start. Once experienced, are you also good? Those wishing to become **good** and **experienced** must understand and absorb all information and put it to practice.

The definition of an experienced starter is very complex. To be **good** and **experienced** only adds to the complexity. Determination of the definition will depend on whom you talk to. To some, a good starter is one who has been starting for a long time. As a result, being good is associated with longevity in their minds. This may be possible but only with numerous strings attached. For an experienced starter to be good, she/he must consider the following characteristics:

1. **The purpose of the starter at any level is to *ensure a fair start* for all competitors.** This is the sole purpose – it is not a forum for the starter to show who is in charge or to entertain the crowd. If the starter has ensured fair starts for all competitors, she/he will experience the satisfaction of doing a good job that, in and of itself, is a boost to the ego.
2. **Experience at all levels is a necessity.** To become a good starter at a senior level, one must become proficient at the novice level and progress upward. Once proficiency has been achieved, the good starter should continue to work all levels so as to gain additional experience.
3. **Proficiency comes with experience.** All starters are going to make mistakes. A good starter knows that mistakes will happen but will learn from them. An experienced starter who does not admit to mistakes, boasts of accomplishments, or passes the blame onto someone else is a long way from becoming good. When a person has learned the basic procedures of the art of starting and continually works to improve her/his performance, the mistakes will become minimal. When mistakes are reduced to a minimum and of very little consequence, proficiency has been achieved. Add the characteristic of consistency to the starter that has become proficient and you now have what is known as a good starter.
4. **Patience is a virtue, not only with the swimmers on the block, but also is paramount in developing a strong foundation at each level of starting.** Too many starters, having only worked a level once, expect to proceed to the next level immediately. This will occasionally occur, but in most cases, proficiency must be achieved at each level before moving up. Being patient with the swimmers on the block is critical in becoming a good starter. Often, a starter is told after a meet, "Great job, you didn't have any false starts". It would be a great job and the starter should be commended if, in fact, all swimmers were stationary and had ample time to achieve their starting positions throughout the meet. Unfortunately this does not occur very often. This does not mean that you must have false starts to be successful. It simply means that all swimmers must be given time to assume their positions and become stationary. Too often, a starter will rush the start so that a decision does not have to be made giving the appearance that it was a good start. Many times, a swimmer is left on the block because they were not yet set. Patience will allow for all swimmers to get set and experience will dictate when to stand up the heat and try again. It is

important to understand that all situations cannot be stood up. If you were too patient and held the swimmers too long, admit your mistake and start again. An error on the slow side is not only possible, but also easy to correct. An error on the fast side is not correctable.

5. **Admit mistakes and accept all responsibilities associated with them.** The key to being good is to learn from your mistakes and not dwell on them. Too often, a starter will let one mistake overshadow a multitude of good starts. When this happens, the focus is still on the mistake instead of the current heat on the blocks.
6. **Expect the unexpected.** Be proactive – not reactive. We have heard these statements many times while officiating. Proficiency and continued practice at each level will give the starter the experience to instinctively perform with success knowing what could happen and being able to adjust before a potential problem occurs. Don't ever think you have seen and experienced all situations.
7. **Experienced starters will often become familiar and possibly good friends with many swimmers, families, and coaches.** The swimmers habits, and often faults, may be well known. A good starter will not focus on a particular swimmer, but rather the entire field.
8. **A good starter will also be a teacher.** Coaches and swimmers appreciate constructive comments, particularly at the developmental age group level, if they help the swimmer improve on future starts. Another point of view is usually welcome. In all cases, and with the referee's consent, approach the coach first before saying anything to the swimmer. Some coaches will want you to talk to the swimmer, while others will want to handle the situation on their own. Providing this assistance will help in several ways. First, it can improve on the swimmer's performance and technique on future starts. More importantly, it shows an attitude of being in the business to improve the sport and the performance of the athletes which is also the intention of most coaches. This may help eliminate, or at least soften, the "we/they" attitude that sometimes prevails on some decks. As a starter progresses to higher levels of swimming, it is not appropriate to offer such information unless a coach specifically requests suggestions. The reasoning behind this is the stakes become greater for the swimmer and the coach at each progressive level. It is also more difficult to establish a close relationship with a swimmer and coach at an advanced level unless it began in the age group program. Therefore, a starter knowing a swimmer has a potentially illegal technique in starting can be used by a coach in an attempt to overrule

a disqualification, the argument being that the starter knew of the technique and focused on that particular swimmer instead of the entire heat. The coach has a right and an obligation to protect her/his swimmer and having this information may be all that is needed to get a reversal.

9. **Not only teach the athlete and coach; be able to share information and suggestions with other starters.** The more proficient all starters on the deck are, the fairer the competition. A good starter will be willing to share information without fear of being replaced by someone who becomes more proficient. Encourage input from others whom you consider to be accomplished, skilled starters. Input must be requested from a skilled starter for an observation and critique of your performance during a session. If you ask, be willing to listen to all comments without being defensive. Once the critique is completed, you must analyze the information. The more you are observed and critiqued, the more input you have.
10. **Understand philosophies of starting change periodically.** You must be flexible to those changes and conform to the current philosophy. By listening to other comments and observing the proficient starter, you can incorporate what segments you like, discount what you don't feel comfortable with, and develop your own style and personality as a starter. A starter that has her/his own style and personality and can still conform to the current philosophy is well on the way to becoming proficient and experienced.
11. **A good, experienced starter is not a cheerleader.** When you assume the responsibility of being a starter, it is what you must become. If you have children or good friends participating while you are starting, you must give full and undivided attention to your job as a starter. This sounds extremely insensitive but is a necessity if you are to become a good starter. As a starter, you can be extremely visible at a meet, and cheering for a son, daughter, or friend will leave you very vulnerable if a dispute develops and you need to provide an unbiased opinion of what occurred. The perception will be you were cheering instead of paying attention to the race or start.
12. **Courage to do the right thing is critical.** Whether as a starter or a recall starter, one must be able to respond if unfairness has occurred. A good, experienced starter will respond regardless of what it might do to their reputation. If the decision to call a false start was done according to the rules and fairness prevailed, it was the right decision.

13. **Work every session as though it is your last.** In other words, don't start a session with a lackadaisical attitude regardless of the level. You don't know if an accident, an illness, or politics will prevent you from ever starting again. If you perform to the best of your ability at each outing and something tragic happens, you will be remembered for your last performance over all others. You will also remember that last performance as being your best and no one can take that away from you.
14. **Be professional.** Professionalism is a must in all positions on the deck, but because all competitors, coaches, other officials, and parents attention is focused on the start of a race, the starter's calm demeanor and presentation stands out more than any other position. The starter can establish the mood and decorum of the meet by following general rules of professionalism. In conjunction with this thought, the starter needs to give their undivided attention to their performance. Full concentration is a must. The starter must be rested and in the best physical condition as possible, present the sharpest image possible by wearing a neat, clean and appropriate uniform and must perform their duties as if the opportunity will never occur again.

### III. BASIC PROTOCOL

#### **Uniform**

NATIONAL – Preliminaries – White shirt, navy blue pants, shorts, or skirt, white socks and shoes

Finals – Navy blue jacket, white shirt, red or blue tie/scarf, white long pants or skirt, white socks and shoes

LOCAL – Specified by your LSC and the meet you are working

**Assignments** – as assigned by the Meet Referee. In addition to starter, they could be turns, relay take-off judge, strokes, etc.

**Other responsibilities** – attend briefing sessions and marshal as assigned

**Starting commands** – Be brief, poised, professional, conversational and assertive. Remember that you are **INVITING** the swimmers to swim, not ordering them to do so.

## IV. THE STARTER

### PROTOCOL FOR USA SWIMMING MEETS WITH WHISTLE STARTS

As stated in Rule 102.14.4, *The Start of the 2003 USA Swimming Rules and Regulations*

- 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 swimwear, followed by a long whistle indicating that they should take and maintain their positions on the starting platform. 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 (101.3.1).
- B. When the swimmers and officials are ready, the Referee shall signal with an outstretched arm to the Starter that the swimmers are under the Starter's control.
- C. On the Starter's command "take your mark", the swimmers shall immediately assume their starting position, in the forward start, with at least one foot at the front of the block. 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 Mark", the Starter shall immediately release all swimmers with the command "Stand up" upon which the swimmers may stand up or step off the blocks.

To expand on the rule, the following procedures are recommended.

**A. Forward starts –**

1. **The Referee will signal to the swimmers with a short series of whistles to remove all clothing except swimwear and approach the block.**

*Refer to the APPENDIX – WHISTLE START CLARIFICATION section as to what the whistles should be.*

**When these whistles are blown is to be determined by meet management in order to establish the desired flow of the meet.**

2. When all swimmers have approached the starting blocks, a long whistle is blown for the heat to step up and take their preparatory positions. The Referee then extends the arm to the starter at which point the heat becomes closed. This should be done almost immediately after all swimmers are in place on the platform. Once the starter has control of the heat, there should be a pause.

*A learning technique to force this pause is to hold the microphone at your side until the Referee has blown the whistle. Then slowly bring the microphone up to its proper position for you to speak. You could also take a long breath before you speak to create the same pause. This pause allows the swimmers and the Starter to settle and the crowd noise to subside. The motives are for the noise level to come down to a point where the swimmers can hear the start; see that the swimmers are ready to swim – goggles OK, last minute gyrations completed, etc. and to relax the Starter.*

3. The "TAKE YOUR MARK" command is then given.

*It is extremely important how this is done. It should be given in a conversational tone and manner. You should try to talk the swimmers down with your voice. It has been shown that a sing-song instruction can cause the swimmers to bounce up and down. A **flat** or **slight drop** in the pitch of your voice is all that is needed. It should be natural and conversational, not mechanical. A helpful hint is to think of the phrase "close the door: This phrase, when given normally, will generally give you the pitch change that you are looking for. Remember – **BE CONVERSATIONAL** – don't speed up the command. Quick commands often cause the swimmer to react faster than usual causing them to miss or lose their grasp of the block that may lead to an early take-off. Take an extra 3–5 seconds with the pause and a slower command. Be sure that the 3–5 seconds are after the referee's whistle, not after the **TAKE YOUR MARK** command. This will save you time in the long run because it can avoid many stand-up calls that can break up the rhythm of the meet. It takes practice to become consistent with this procedure.*

4. When all are stationary, activate the starting signal.

## B. Backstroke Starts

1. The Referee will signal to the swimmers with a short series of whistles to remove all clothing except swimwear and approach the edge of the pool to the side of the blocks.

*Refer to the APPENDIX – WHISTLE START CLARIFICATION section as to what the whistles should be.*

2. When all swimmers have approached the side of the blocks, the first long whistle is blown for the heat to immediately step in followed by a second long whistle as all swimmers surface to have them return to the wall and immediately assume their starting positions. The Referee then extends the arm to the starter at which time the heat is closed. This should be done almost immediately after the swimmers have placed their feet and grasp the grips. Once the starter has control of the heat, there should be a pause as previously described.

*Most swimmers will enter feet first. This is a safety concern, but don't make it an issue if the swimmer enters head first – let the Referee follow up if it is necessary. At this point, any corrections for foot placement need to occur. If a lane is in violation, the Starter should speak DIRECTLY to the lane by saying, for example, "lane four, toes, please." "lane six, feet down." "lane one, toes must not be curled over the gutter", etc. After the swimmer has responded, say "Thank You". The reason for going directly to the lane is to keep the amount of time the swimmers are hanging from the blocks to a minimum and to try to keep from interrupting the concentration of the non-offending swimmers. If the offending swimmer is close to the Starter, he/she can instruct the swimmer directly without the use of the microphone. If more than one swimmer needs to be reminded, simply say, "place your feet".*

3. The "TAKE YOUR MARK" command is given.

*Use the previously described method of stating the command. At this point, if a swimmer moves to the top of the pad or feet come out of the water, the suggested command is "stand up" or "relax" and correct the lane directly about the problem. Backstrokers will often pull up high on the wall and drop back into their motionless position. All swimmers must be given a chance to drop into their starting position. Patience is very important on backstroke starts.*

4. When all are stationary, activate the starting signal.

C. Recommended stand up and other commands depending on the protocol of the governing body are as follows:

1. If the Starter is not comfortable with what is occurring after the starting command, then say "Stand" or "Stand please".  
*A number of things could occur to make you uncomfortable – one or more swimmers are taking too much time to assume their starting positions, the swimmers do not settle into stationary positions relatively quickly, a loud noise, flash or other disturbance occurs, a swimmer loses his/her grip on the block, etc. This is a command that can keep bad things from happening at the start. However, you must be PATIENT with the swimmers and not use this command too often.*
2. After the first "stand", you should pause to let the swimmers get readjusted. Then, give the command "TAKE YOUR MARK".
3. If it necessary to stand the heat up twice, the Starter may give the command "Step Down" for the forward starts, or "Stand Up" or "Relax" for backstroke starts. The Starter should let the swimmers relax and compose themselves briefly. Then, the Starter will give the command "Ladies/Gentlemen, Step up please" for forward starts or "Place your feet" for backstroke starts. At this point the Starter will give a generic command, if deemed necessary, such as "Please assume your starting position without delay", "please respond promptly", "Please find a motionless position", or "Please stop your motion at some point". PAUSE, then give the "TAKE YOUR MARK" command. In place of the generic commands suggested, the Referee could choose to blow a second whistle to have the swimmers get on the platform. Depending on the circumstances, a disqualification is possible any time after the second 'stand' on a heat.
4. If you must stand the swimmers up a third time, and it is the second time for a specific swimmer, warn the swimmer by saying, "Lane\_\_\_\_, please assume your starting position without delay" (*Or whatever the problem may be*). Then give the command "TAKE YOUR MARK" remembering to PAUSE between your instructions and the command.

5. If you would have to stand the heat up again for the same swimmer, step them down and recommend to the Referee that the swimmer be disqualified for delay of the meet.  
*You may never see this. The swimmers usually respond very well to the above listed steps.*
6. Do not repeat starting instructions after a stand-up or stand-up/step-down. Only say, "TAKE YOUR MARK" unless it appears that the swimmers are not ready. At that point, you may want to say "Ladies/Gentlemen" to get their attention, then a LONG PAUSE and "TAKE YOUR MARK".

#### D. No Recall

1. Review the GUIDELINES FOR THE "NO RECALL" STARTING PROCEDURE as provided in the *APPENDIX* of this manual. The Rules and Regulations Committee of USA Swimming in June, 1999 have approved this procedure.
2. The Starter is responsible for watching the actions of all swimmers in each heat including the foot placement of all lanes in backstroke events.
3. When a false start occurs after the signal is given, the Starter records the infraction and any other pertinent facts. This information is then reported to the Referee. Only let the Referee know that you have a violation. The Referee will respond at the earliest possible moment due to other responsibilities during a race. **DO NOT WAIT** for the Referee to check with you.  
*The only record necessary is the lane number that is then shown to the Referee. If the heat is OK, merely mark your heat sheet as you normally would as a way to keep a record of where you are in the session. Do NOT use a system of X's and O's for each heat.*
4. If more than one lane is observed with a false start action, it is imperative that all lanes are recorded and reported whether the initial action caused the others to react or not.  
**EACH SWIMMER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OR /HER OWN START. IF HIS OR HER REACTION IS CAUSED BY THE MOVEMENT OF ANOTHER SWIMMER, THEY ARE ALSO AT RISK OF DISQUALIFICATION.**

## 5. Considerations with the "No Recall" procedure

a. Do not "rush" to avoid a false start.

b. If it looks disastrous, stand the heat up.

*Examples: more than one swimmer moving or showing signs of not being ready, confusion on or behind the blocks, the Starter's focus is off, etc.*

c. Use the "Stand" or "Stand please" command if there is movement on one or more swimmers BEFORE the starting signal. This is used to save the non-offending swimmers from a potential disqualification. The recommendation for disqualification of an offending swimmer should be reported to the Referee.

*The "Stand" command should not be OVERUSED in this situation. If used too often, it can disrupt the flow of the meet, break the swimmer's concentration, and will give the perception of a lack of confidence on the starter's part. Generally, any of these situations will create an uneasy feeling on the deck which in turn can create starting mistakes on the swimmers and starters part that normally would not occur.*

d. It will take practice and concentration to find the technique best for you in preventing an inadvertent recall. Not all suggestions will work for everyone. In standard starting it has always been suggested to keep the microphone in front of the mouth and follow the swimmers until they are into their swim. One suggestion is to maintain your observation of the heat but to slowly drop the microphone away from the mouth. Other suggestions are to activate the signal and immediately slide the starting finger to the side of the microphone or hold it straight up. Another is to hold the button down after the start but a word of caution – THIS DOES NOT WORK WITH ALL EQUIPMENT AND MAY ACTUALLY CAUSE A RECALL.

***KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT AND PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.***

## V. THE STARTER AND SWIMMERS WITH DISABILITIES

Rule 105 in the 2003 USA Swimming Rules and Regulations specifically offers guidelines for officiating swimmers with a disability. Although this refers to competition in USA swimming meets, common sense dictates that these guidelines can be used in any competitive swimming situation where a disability is involved.

### A. AUTHORITY

1. The referee has the authority to modify the rules for the swimmer with the disability.

*Disability is defined as a permanent physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.*

### B. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The ATHLETE/COACH are responsible to notify the Referee and to provide any assistance and/or equipment if required.
2. The Referee must inquire into the athlete's needs and determine the modifications.

*Modifications may include a change in starting position, reassigning of lanes within a heat, and/or allowing an assistant on the deck or in the water to assist with a start.*

3. Blind and visually impaired athletes may not require any modifications or may need assistance to and on the blocks. An in the water start may be required.
4. Deaf and hard of hearing athletes require a visual starting signal as in a strobe light and/or the Starter's arm signals. The Referee may reassign the lane to provide for better visibility of the strobe light and/or arm signals.

*Portable strobe lights are now available and strongly recommended.*

- a. The Referee must notify the swimmer of the location of the strobe and position it where it can be clearly seen. For backstroke starts, the strobe needs to be positioned in a way that swimmer does not have to turn the head to look backwards.

- b. A false start rope is **REQUIRED** in the event of a false start even if the "no recall" procedure is in effect.
  - c. The standard Starter's arm signals are shown in Figure 1 on page 54 in the 2003 USA Swimming Rules and Regulations.
    - i. Unless otherwise instructed by the Referee, the Starter may hold the arm at 90 degrees and twist the hand back and forth to indicate for the swimmer to disrobe to their suit and approach the starting block (this supplements the series of short whistles).
    - ii. The arm overhead is the indication for the swimmer to step onto the starting block or enter the water for backstroke or in the water starts (this supplements the long whistle).
    - iii. The arm moving to shoulder level is the signal to "TAKE YOUR MARK".
    - iv. The arm moving to the side of the body is the starting signal.
  - d. The protocol is the same as previously mentioned in this manual except for any modifications required by the Referee.
5. The mentally impaired athlete may require a deck or in the water start as well as assistance on the deck. Clear communication of instructions is necessary but no other modifications are required.

6. For swimmers with physical disabilities, more time may be required to assume a starting position. They may not be able to hold onto the starting grips or gutter, may need assistance on the deck or in the water to maintain a starting position, and require modifications in the starting position on the blocks, the deck, or in the water to maintain their balance.

a. Modifications for the forward start (facing the course) when swimming freestyle, breaststroke, and butterfly may include:

- i. starting from a sitting position on the block or on the deck;
- ii. starting in the water with or without assistance;
- iii. may use some other part of the body to maintain contact with the wall if a hand or foot cannot be used.

*Examples can be seen on page 55, figures 2 through 5 in 2003 USA Swimming Rules and Regulations.*

## VI. THE STARTER

### PROTOCOL WITHOUT THE WHISTLE STARTS

This procedure is still valuable for use in situations not covered by USA Swimming rules. With very slight modifications, other governing bodies and seasonal programs may find it most useful.

#### A. Forward starts

1. At the referee's signal, the Starter will give the command, "Ladies/Gentlemen, step up please."  
*This should be stated in a conversational tone with the intention of inviting the swimmers to the blocks.*
2. When the pool is clear and the swimmers are ready, the Referee will blow the whistle.
3. The Starter will give the distance and event (i.e. 100 meter freestyle) and then the "Take your mark" command. In calling the event, omit the "s" from meters/yards. Often, the quality of the microphone makes it have a whistling sound.  
*There should be two pauses in the delivery of your commands. The first pause is between the Referee's whistle and the start of your instructions. Refer to the learning techniques for creating pauses beginning on page 9. The second pause is after you have given the distance and event. There are two techniques that can help you to generate this pause. First, take another slow, deep breath and exhale slowly. The second technique is to slowly move the microphone away from your mouth and then bring it back. Either of these techniques will give you approximately the proper pause.*

#### B. Backstroke starts

1. At the referee's signal, the Starter will give the command, "Ladies/Gentlemen, step in please."
2. When the pool is clear and the swimmers are ready, the Referee will blow the whistle.

3. The Starter will give the distance and event (i.e. 100 meter backstroke) and then the "Take your mark" command. *(The previously mentioned pauses are to be used here as well.)*
  4. The Starter will use the "Place your feet" command only when one or more swimmers have not attained a starting position within a reasonably short time frame. The NCAA and YMCA currently recommend this command.
- C. Recommended stand-up and other commands are stated in section IV.

D. Backstroke starts

1. The Recall Starter will not raise the recall device (pistol, air horn, etc.) or signal otherwise until all swimmers on his/her side of the pool have their feet in the proper position. If a pistol or air horn is used, until the time the Recall Starter is ready to raise the pistol or air horn, it should be kept out of sight, either straight beside your leg or behind your back.  
*For safety reasons, only raise the pistol to a maximum of waist level and aim it toward the pool away from the blocks. Always be aware of your surroundings and where the packing from the pistol and the flash will go. It is recommended to NEVER hold the pistol overhead.*
2. If the pistol or air horn remains down, the Starter will speak directly to the lane who is in violation by saying, for example, "Lane four, toes, please.", "Lane six, toes under for the start, please.", "Lane one, your toes must be completely under the surface." or " Lane five, toes must not be curled over the gutter." After the swimmer has responded, say "Thank you". The reason for going directly to the lane is to keep the amount of time the swimmers are hanging from the blocks to a minimum and to keep from interrupting the concentration of non-offending swimmers. If the offending swimmer is close to the Recall Starter, he/she can instruct the swimmer directly. If the Starter sees the Recall Starter but can not identify the offender, the Recall Starter can signal the lane number to the Starter – just be sure that you both understand the system you will use. If the Starter does not see the Recall Starter keep the gun or air horn down or notice a swimmer in violation, the Recall Starter should continue to keep the pistol or air horn down and signal to the Starter the offending lane number

without making a spectacle of the situation. If the Starter still does not acknowledge the infraction, do nothing else until after the start and then mention to the Starter what you observed. Do not recall the heat.

#### E. False Start Actions

1. The Starter and the Recall Starter will recall all false starts. In other words, the beeper and the pistol or air horn are to be heard on all false starts.

*The Recall Starter should fire the pistol one time only unless it is necessary to fire another shot to be sure the swimmers stop.*

2. The Starter, Recall Starter, and the Referee will independently write down the lane they saw false start. The Referee and Starter will compare notes. If the Referee and Starter concur, the Referee does not need to confer with the Recall Starter.

*The specific procedure here may vary depending on the level of meet you are starting and the instructions of the Referee. You are to follow procedures the Referee gives you. It is highly recommended the people confirming the false start record what was seen or heard – the lane and any unusual occurrences. Then, if the decision is questioned, it is easy to justify the decision made. This also eliminates any appearance of one official talking the other official into or out of a call. There should not be discussion – you either match or you don't.*

3. If the Starter and the Referee do not concur, then the Referee will confer with the Recall Starter at the Recall Starter's side of the pool. The Recall Starter WILL WAIT for the Referee to come to him/her.
4. If you have additional information that would affect the decision to disqualify the swimmer, such as the swimmer slipped, a noise behind the swimmer, etc., make sure you relate this to the Referee.

- F. The commands and actions cited above are the guidelines developed for the purpose of consistency. If circumstances dictate that you do something else to ensure a fair start, do it.

## G. Recall Starter

1. The Recall Starter will stand on the opposite side of the pool from the Starter.

*In many cases, this may be the Referee or the assistant Referee for recall who has the authority to confirm false starts.*

2. When the Referee blows the whistle, the Recall Starter will raise the pistol or air horn, if used, no higher than waist level and aim it toward the pool.

*EXCEPTION: During the backstroke starts, the Recall Starter will not raise the pistol until the swimmers on his/her side of the pool have their feet in the proper position. You must always be aware of safety in firing the recall pistol. Be careful where you hold the gun so that if you must fire it, it will not injure anyone.*

3. Recall Starting is a tough job. Do not try to anticipate or prompt the Starter. *You do not have control.* If you see movement at the start, fire one (1) shot. Do not pre-cock the pistol unless your hand is not strong enough to fire without doing so. Fire an additional shot only if it is necessary to stop the swimmers.
4. If the Starter recalls the swimmers, fire your pistol, if used, once.
5. Guard your space for safety if you must fire the pistol or sound the air horn. **WARN COACHES, SPECTATORS, ATHLETES, PHOTOGRAPHERS, ETC. OF THE POSITION OF THE PISTOL OR AIR HORN.**

## VII. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS

1. All doubts and questions go in favor of the swimmer.
2. Be Very patient. Do not "speed up" to get a heat off. Treat all heats and all events with the same courtesy and professionalism. Remember that you are the only official that has a direct bearing on how the athletes perform. When you agree to a starting position, you are agreeing to do your best to give every swimmer the best start that they ever had. Once the swimmers are turned over to you, it is your responsibility to give them a fair and equitable start. At this point, forget the time line – treat each heat the same whether it is the first or the last.
3. Maintain good deck perspective – you are the referee's 2nd set of eyes and ears. Many questions will come to you because you are visible and always in the same spot – near the starting equipment. Answer courteously those questions within your jurisdiction and direct all other questions to the Referee.
4. When "whistle starts" are not being used and you say the wrong event, simply say " Correction, proper event and distance".
5. Do not be critical of other officials or their decisions at any time – on or off the deck. You never know who may be listening.
6. Do not discuss false starts, recalls, or DQ's with coaches, parents, or swimmers. Direct all questions, complaints, and problems to your on duty Referee.
7. Focus and concentrate on your events. Watch and observe other starters. Learn as much as you can about the art of starting. Before every session, check the blocks, flags, pistol, starting system, speakers, recall rope, etc.

8. What do you do after the start? Keep the microphone in the normal speaking position unless you are doing "no recall" and choose to lower the microphone to avoid an inadvertent recall. Simply rotate your head and/or your body and watch the swimmers into the water and until they surface and you are sure that the race is has begun fairly. Why should you do this? You are the Starter and it is your responsibility to be sure that each heat gets off to a good and fair start. What if there was an echo and half of the field stopped because they thought the race had been recalled? You must know what happened. What if seven lanes started fine but one lane stopped? You need to be able to provide information to the Referee concerning the fairness and correctness of the start. What if something unusual happened that would cause you to recall or stop the heat? (At the 1995 Pan-Pacs in Atlanta, the backstroke flag socket and pole came out of the deck and fell into the pool. What if this had happened right after a start?) Lane lines sometimes break. A swimmer sometimes hits the bottom of the pool. The Referee may frantically ask you to stop the race. These occurrences don't happen often, but when they do, you must have the microphone in hand and ready to use.

In closing, many of the characteristics mentioned are not new to most good, experienced starters. The purpose of this information is to reiterate what it takes to become proficient so those wishing to become starters have some guidelines in which to begin and those with experience will be aware of and reflect on the many considerations that go into becoming *EXPERIENCED AND PROFICIENT*.

The information on philosophy is applicable to all governing bodies in training starters and the protocol can be adjusted to suit current practices within each organization. The goal should be universal in providing each swimmer, regardless of affiliation, the best and fairest start possible.

## VIII. APPENDIX

### A. GUIDELINES FOR THE “NO RECALL” STARTING PROCEDURE

(Effective June, 1999 for all USA Swimming competitions)

#### **RATIONALE**

The swimmers best effort is generally on their first start. They should not be penalized for a good start by having a race recalled due to someone else false starting. The penalty for the false start will be imposed to the offender after completion of the swim. It is each swimmer’s responsibility to focus on their own start and race and not be affected by actions of another on the blocks. Reaction to movement on the part of another swimmer could result in a disqualification if confirmed by the referee or, at the very least, find the swimmer being caught on the block. Additionally, all other violations are called after the completion of a swim.

#### **STARTER RESPONSIBILITIES**

All National Championship procedures will take place as usual. If the starter observes a false start, the race will continue without recall and will record the lane/s in violation and report it to the referee. Any other information observed by the starter should also be reported.

If the movement occurred before the signal and the starter has time to stand the heat, no signal shall be given and the offending swimmer will be disqualified by the referee or designee after confirmation with the starter. All other swimmers entering the water upon reacting to the “stand” command shall be released. The starter may inform the heat to “please hold a stationary position”. The heat is then restarted. A recall by the starter for unusual circumstances that affect the racing course (i.e. – a lane line breaks) is appropriate.

#### **REFEREE RESPONSIBILITIES**

The procedure for initiating a race is the National Championship protocol currently in use. The referee must observe the start for movement or any irregularities, if any, immediately record the observation but shall allow the race to continue without recall. Communication with the starter for confirmation will determine if there was a false start. Upon confirmation, and the completion of the race, the referee or designee shall inform the swimmer of the violation. If a heat is instinctively recalled, the referee will relieve the heat and restart. In the 50-meter races, notification of the infraction will be communicated by the referee/chief judge at the starting end to the chief judge at the finish end who then will inform the athlete of the infraction.

#### **RECALL STARTER**

A recall starter will not be used with this procedure. The starter shall have full responsibility of ensuring that proper starting procedures occur.

## **B. WHISTLE START CLARIFICATION**

Early interpretations of the whistles by the referee have created some confusion among LSC's as to what is appropriate. Initially, it was stated 3 short whistles were to be used which is also shown in the Starters Training Video. It has been brought to the Officials Committee's attention that this is a direct conflict with current communication procedures utilized by lifeguards in facilities that have American Red Cross trained staffs. As stated on page 97 in the AMERICAN RED CROSS – LIFEGUARDING TODAY manual:

### *COMMUNICATION*

*When you recognize an emergency is occurring, you need to communicate the situation to your safety team. You communicate with other lifeguards and staff with special signals.*

*Every facility has a communication system that all staff must use. Systems vary depending on the type of facility and the number of staff. The signals used also vary among facilities, although certain signals are common. Signals must be simple, clear, and easily understood. Methods of communication include –*

*The whistle. Use the whistle sparingly and only when needed. The following are examples of whistle signals:*

*To get the attention of a swimmer – One short blast.*

*To get the attention of another staff member – Two short blasts.*

### ➤ **TO ACTIVATE THE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN – THREE SHORT BLASTS**

*To clear the water – One long blast*

The Starters Training Video has been revised to show the procedure correctly explained and demonstrated. The Officials Committee is asking that the SHORT SERIES OF WHISTLES (as stated in the rule book) be implemented so the Red Cross plan is not jeopardized. In order to do so, use the following guidelines:

1. Use a minimum of 4 or 5 short whistles (or chirps). These should only be loud enough to get all lanes in the next heat's attention in preparation for their swim.
2. The suggested procedure is to use the tongue on the end of the whistle as you exhale to create the short pause between each whistle in the series.
3. The Long whistle will still be used to step the next heat up/in and alert the

venue that a race is about to start.

The committee feels this protocol will achieve our goal of consistency and cooperation between USA Swimming and the American Red Cross.

**Note: When arriving at the meet, the meet referee should coordinate safety protocols and procedures with the facility director.**

### C. HEAD STARTER RESPONSIBILITIES

The following is a set of guidelines that a person should follow when performing the duties of a Head Starter whether it be a national championship or an LSC level meet. Some items may not apply as heavily at an LSC level but should still be considered. The level of the meet and how long starters have worked together will determine the degree to which each is followed.

The Head Starter should:

1. Get acquainted with the team of referees and starters.
2. Assign the starter/recall starter and possibly the referee rotation IF requested by the referee. If pre-meet communication is difficult, have a tentative schedule prepared.
3. Meet with the referee to answer/ask questions about specific procedures and then meet with the starters to discuss details of the meet, commands, and protocol.
4. Check equipment and make sure starters know how it works; check daily. Also, assist the referee by checking the blocks and pool layout.
5. Be a mentor – observe, offer positive comments and encouragement, constructive criticism when asked or following the meet.
6. Be a part of the leadership team and set a positive example.
7. Do other tasks as requested by the meet referee or your deck referee.
8. Be prepared, for the referee and other starters, to verbally evaluate the starting team AFTER the meet.
9. Let each starter develop his or her own rhythm and stay out of the way unless there is a serious concern – discuss the concern with the referee before talking to the starter.
10. Know the differences between NCAA, HIGH SCHOOL, USA Swimming, and FINA rules – there are differences.
11. Observe starter candidates at time trials and prepare written observation reports – provide copies for the candidate, National Officials Chairman, and yourself as Head Starter. These reports shall not change once distributed.

The following should be considered:

- a) Be honest – don't perpetuate an impossible situation;
- b) Base observations on current national championship starting philosophies
- c) Meet with the candidate at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss the observation
- d) Be an educator and offer suggestions for improvement
- e) Inform the candidate(s) that a recommendation for an assignment does not always bring an assignment; don't promise

assignments at future meets; don't promise a recommendation on the next attempt as a starter candidate;  
f) Be consistent in your evaluations using the following areas for consideration:

- 1) Voice
- 2) Eye
- 3) Spacing
- 4) Calmness and control
- 5) Position on the deck and holding the cord
- 6) Response to unusual situations

REPORT ON OBSERVATION OF  
OFFICIALS DURING TIME TRIALS

NAME OF MEET: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

PERSON OBSERVED: \_\_\_\_\_ LSC: \_\_\_\_\_

POSITION WORKED: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS ON PERFORMANCE: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Starts \_\_\_\_\_

RECOMMENDATION:

- Needs additional work in this position at the local level before being considered for National Championship assignment.
- Ready to be considered for assignment in this position at the Speedo Champions Series level.
- Ready to be considered for assignment in this position at the Junior Championship level.
- Ready to be considered for assignment in this position at the National Championship level.

NAME OF OBSERVER: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

## E. BECOMING A SKILLED STARTER

By Jeannine Dennis

Your job as a starter is to give the athletes the best start they've ever had every time you say "Take Your Mark"... and give the starting signal. This is one of the hardest jobs on the pool deck. You may be fighting heat/cold, noise, equipment that doesn't work properly, conflicts between egos or personalities, new swimmers, or cocky 16-year-olds. So the key is - be prepared.

Get to the meet early enough to check the equipment. Talk to the coaches and athletes (this clues you into any problems that may be simmering on the back burner). **Smile** and give everyone the feeling that you are a calm professional that will be fair and responsive to the athlete. Get with your referee and discuss how you are going to handle **the big one - a situation where everything goes down the tubes - kids are fidgety, your concentration is broken, lightning threatens or you just had a terrible start.**

At that point, you recall the race, walk over, check a block, kick a pad, reset a machine, call the swimmers back up and start them again. Use common sense: do not penalize the field because you had a bad start. A good starter does not stand out. The best compliment you can receive is for someone to ask you after the meet what you did.

Always maintain a calm demeanor. Never look or act as if you are nervous. It is contagious.

Be consistent. If you do not call a false start on a swimmer because he or she slipped on a block, you must have the same rules for all heats. You can't call a false start on an older athlete "because they should have been able to catch themselves."

Know the rules: NFHS, summer league, USA Swimming, NCAA, YMCA, or FINA. Do not start a meet until you review the rules that apply.

Never hesitate to stand a heat up if you see a problem, e.g. broken goggles, torn bathing suit, etc. Saving a swimmer from a disqualification is a heroic thing to do.

Time lines are there for a reason, but never hurry the swimmers for the sake of staying on the time line. You can usually make up the time later. Don't let a time line make you a bad starter. NCAA, generally, does not use a time line for that reason.

Keep your concentration. Be sure to watch the start; you would be surprised how

many starters turn away to hang up the mike immediately after pushing the button. Watch the swimmers **at least** to the false start rope if there is one. You may see a problem right after the start that you can nip in the bud.

Work with your referee, especially when few or no officials show up. Call his or her attention to empty lanes. Offer to help in any way you can.

We all have bad days. If you are not at your best, take a break. If there is no other starter to take over, then step back, take a deep breath, and try again. A positive attitude will help.

Be familiar with the equipment you will be using. Make sure the cords are long enough. Check buttons, guns, shells, transducers, bullhorns, whistles, bells, hand mikes, or omega boxes. Know how the equipment operates.

The first meet of the season may be difficult. Have patience with the new deck and administrative officials and the athletes themselves. Take it easy, be calm, and use common sense. Don't rush; mistakes will be made. Smile and keep going. Make sure the rookies have a positive experience. We want them to be participating 10 years from now. The same goes for the veteran. Treat everyone with courtesy.

The meet begins; the whistle is blown. You are now in charge. Your job is to give the best possible start to the swimmers on the block.

**Invite** the swimmers to swim – don't order them.

Effective 2001, only NCAA, NFHS, YMCA, and summer leagues use this:

You may say, "step up," or "step up please," or "backstrokers in the water," "feet first" may be added, or "step in please." Use whatever suits your style.

Announce the event:

Ladies, 100 yard freestyle, or  
Gentlemen, 100 yard freestyle.

I find when you use ladies or gentlemen, the athletes respond as such.

After a slight pause, state the command in a conversational tone, **not an order**. Begin the command in a slightly higher pitched but normal voice level and gradually lower your pitch.

TAKE  
YOUR  
MARK

DOWN  
THE  
SCALE

Practice in front of a mirror. Listen to how you sound. Is your voice calm? Very high-pitched voices are hard to hear on a mike. Practicing lowering the tone you use. Never use sharp commands. It can cause a swimmer to jump. If you need to stand the heat up, say, "stand please," very calmly and clearly.

Effective 2001, do not use except for other governing bodies meets:

On the backstroke after you say, "step in," give the swimmers a moment to get set. Then the referee blows the whistle and you may give the command, "place your feet." This allows you to see if any feet or toes are above the water. Announce the event - "100 yard backstroke," and then say, "take your mark." This gives the backstrokers time to get set without too long a delay.

On warning the swimmers, use your judgment and common sense. If there is a problem, stand the swimmers up or down (backstroke), and warn the field. If a second warning is needed, identify the problem lane. If the swimmer fails to respond, you may wish to walk to the lane to see if there is a problem. You may have to judge how to handle this by the caliber of the meet. My motto is "give the swimmer the benefit of the doubt."

Be sensitive when dealing with disabled swimmers. Their coaches usually will talk to you before a meet to tell you of their swimmer's special needs. A "legally" blind swimmer may be able to see a strobe, but may need help to the blocks. Deaf swimmers may need a hand signal or strobe.

**A good starter cares about the athlete - BE A GOOD STARTER.**