



## THE STARTER

The Starter has the responsibility for maintaining direct communication with the Swimmers and for providing an atmosphere in which the competitors can obtain a fair and equal start. Once the Referee has determined that the course is ready for competition and blows the whistle, the race is turned over to the Starter and remains under the Starter's jurisdiction until a fair start has been achieved.

The Starter's preparation begins long before the Meet. The Starter should review rules, go over schedules and become familiar with pool conditions.

The Starter should be familiar with the equipment that will be used. If a gun is used, it should be in working order. There must be enough shells for the entire Meet, and a backup starting pistol should be available. The Starter should check that the gun is loaded prior to each race and double check that there are enough shells in the gun to recall a heat if there is a false start.

If a horn is used, the system should be checked at least one-half hour before the first race so that any needed repairs or modifications can be made. The system should be re-tested with the Timekeepers just before the start of the Meet. If a strobe light is used, the Starter should ensure that all Timekeepers have a view of the light. Since horn start systems are electrically operated, it is important to know how to prevent common malfunctions and how to repair simple problems that may occur. The horn for the false start recall signal should be tested. The primary rule for using any horn start system is to always have a back-up system available, usually a gun.

Prior to the Meet, the Starter and the Referee should follow the FINA rules and decide the best place for the Starter to stand. The Starter shall stand within 5 metres of the starting end of the pool. It is important that the Swimmers can see the Starter and that the Starter can see the Swimmers, even before they are called to the blocks.

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**FINA Swimming Rules** state that the Starter assumes full control of the Swimmers upon a signal from the Referee. A good Starter, however, prepares for starting the next heat the moment the previous heat is in the water. The Starter should check that all Swimmers are in the starting area for the next race. That is a good time to observe the Swimmer's readiness for the race. Some are fidgeting, some are in a trance, some are still putting on their goggles or adjusting their suits. All these are clues that can help a Starter predict how the Swimmers will respond on the block and anticipate what needs to be done to the Swimmers to obtain a good start. The Starter's key job is to help all Swimmers achieve the best start possible.

At the long whistle, the Swimmers are to be in the correct position on the blocks (except Backstroke and Medley Relays). The Referee then transfers control of the Swimmers to the Starter with a stretched-out arm gesture. Should the Referee drop his arm before the start then the Starter must not proceed until the Referee again signals that he is handing over to the Starter.

### **Forward Start**

**FINA Swimming Rules** state that, for the forward start, Swimmers must respond by stepping onto the starting block, assume a position and remain there.

The Starter is in full control of the race when the Swimmers are on the blocks and the Referee's arm signal has been given. It is perfectly acceptable for the Starter to ask for quiet from a noisy audience and to wait until the Swimmers can hear every command. Once there is quiet, the Starter may notify the Swimmers of the distance of the race and the event.

In relay events, the Starter may notify the Swimmers with the assistance of deck officials that all but the last Swimmer must leave the pool immediately upon completion of their leg.

During this instruction, the Starter should have the attention of the Swimmers, the crowd and the other officials. The Starter's attention should be directed toward the entire field of Swimmers. It is sometimes hard not

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to concentrate on a particular Swimmer, especially a familiar Swimmer or one who has a history of some peculiar behaviour during the start. Through experience it will become evident when the Swimmers are ready to race. It is best to give them time to settle down. A few seconds delay to let the Swimmers take their last few shakes and deep breaths can save many minutes worth of delays in false starts.

When the Starter observes that all Swimmers are ready, the Starter gives the command, "take your marks". Each Swimmer must immediately respond by assuming a starting position.

When the Starter sees that all Swimmers are motionless, the starting signal is given, and the race begins.

### **Backstroke Start**

The Backstroke start requires different starting conditions, since the Swimmers start the race in the water. The Swimmers line up in the water facing the starting end with both hands placed on the gutter or the starting grips. The feet, including the toes, must be entirely under the surface of the water until the starting signal is given. The Swimmer may neither stand on the pool bottom, in or on the gutter or curl the toes over the lip of the gutter prior to the start. It is the duty of the Starter to ensure that these requirements are met prior to giving the starting signal.

### **False Starts**

The most common false start is committed when the Swimmer leaves the starting platform prior to the starting signal. It is the responsibility of the Starter to detect the movement of the Swimmer and to recall the race (two start rule). It is important that the Starter provide an atmosphere that gives each and every Swimmer the opportunity to achieve a calm, controlled start. This calm atmosphere best occurs when the Starter allows the Swimmers time to become motionless before giving the starting signal.

When it becomes apparent, because of uneven motion or delay of the Swimmers in assuming their positions, that a fair start will be difficult to

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achieve, the Starter should give the command "stand down". Upon hearing this command, the Swimmers should step down from the starting platform (backstrokers relax). If the command "stand down" causes any Swimmer to enter the water it is not treated as a false start. This, however, does not prevent disqualification for delaying the start if the Swimmer intentionally enters the water.

The Starter signals a recall by repeating the starting signal. Alternatively, if the Referee decides that the start is false he should blow his whistle which shall be followed by the Starter's recall signals and the dropping of the false start rope.

The Swimmers shall be recalled and be warned of the penalty for the next false start (two start rule). Should the next start be false, the race shall continue and the Swimmer or Swimmers shall be disqualified upon completing the race.

**FINA Swimming Rules** state that any Swimmers starting prior to the starting signal shall be disqualified. This disqualification may be ignored if, in the opinion of the Starter and Referee, the Swimmer moved as result of the action or movement of another Swimmer.

Starters are charged with a great deal of responsibility in seeing that one Swimmer does not gain an advantage over the others in the start. This responsibility requires concentration, quick reactions and fair decisions. It takes practice to become a good Starter. With experience, the Starter will be able to accurately predict when the field is ready to race. This will help to prevent the false starts caused by Swimmers being jumpy or in a hurry because they are not ready.

Starters should speak in a slow, distinct voice, avoiding rapid instructions and sharp commands. The voice of a good Starter will lead the Swimmers into their starting positions, not break their concentration with unexpected orders or remarks. At the same time, the Starter must ensure that all competitors are given a fair start. No Swimmer should gain an unfair advantage.

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### **Responsibilities of the Starter:**

1. May notify the Swimmers of the distance and stroke.
2. Ensures that legal starting form is observed.
3. Gives the starting command, "Take your marks".
4. Activates the starting device.
5. Assures that no Swimmer has an unfair advantage over the other swimmers.

### **Position:**

The Starter should stand at the side of the pool, within 5 metres of the starting end with a clear view of all lanes.

### **Preparation and Use of Equipment:**

Starters should check beforehand that the lanes are numbered properly.

When a gun is used,

- Wear ear plugs during the competition.
- Examine the gun to determine that it is clean and in good working condition.
- Ensure there are enough shells available to get through the session.
- Load the gun.
- Fire a practice shot. This can be done in conjunction with a time check for the Timekeepers.
- Do a time check.
- Have a back up gun or other starting device.
- Hold the gun so that the Timekeepers can see the flash and smoke.
- Keep at least three shells in the chamber.

When a horn is used,

- Be prepared to troubleshoot the system.
- Ensure the system is working properly.
- When a strobe is used, it should be visible to all lanes.

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- Pre-Check and be familiar with the things that can go wrong with an automatic timing system. Know how to prevent and fix common problems. There should be a contingency plan in case the system goes down and doesn't come back up.

### **Tips:**

- Have a copy of the order of events for the session (heat sheet) available.
- Always be calm, clear and confident with instructions. The Swimmers should not be threatened with the tone of voice used. The Starter shall instruct rather than order.
- Pause between any instructions and the command, "Take your marks". This gives the Swimmers time to process the Starter's command and to prepare for the start.

### **Instructing the Swimmers:**

A Starter should not confuse the Swimmers with unnecessary comments.

Instructions may be the following:

- Identifying the distance.
- Identifying the stroke.

Optional instructions might include:

- The stroke or stroke order.
- The number of lengths in the event.
- Informing all relay Swimmers that, with the exception of the last Swimmer, they must leave the pool immediately upon completion of their swims.
- Telling backstroke Swimmers to "place your feet" before the starting command.

The Starter should be familiar with any special starting rules which apply to Swimmers with disabilities.

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### **Procedures for the Starter:**

The Referee gives the attention signal, usually a series of short whistles.

Determines that all Swimmers are present.

The Referee gives a long signal (whistle) which calls the swimmers onto the blocks or the backstrokers into the water. The Referee hands over control to the Starter by holding out one arm horizontally to the side, and only drops it when he is satisfied that the start was fair, or drops the arm early indicating that the Starter should wait.

In a backstroke event the Referee would give a second long whistle to call the Swimmers back to the wall.

When all swimmers have mounted the block, or entered the water in a backstroke event, the starter would give the command "Take your marks".

If all the Swimmers are not ready within a reasonable amount of time, the Starter should ask them to "stand up". In backstroke events, ask them to "relax" or "stand down".

When Swimmers are ready, the Starter activates the starting device.

### **Summary:**

The Starter should:

- Know the rules.
- Check the equipment before the start of each session.
- Stand in the best position to see the entire field.
- Use standard commands and instructions.
- Address the Swimmers with respect.
- Always be impartial, fair and consistent.
- Signal a recall immediately. (two start rule).



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