

Procedures for Starters

May, 2015

Pacing of the Meet

Starters shall give swimmers sufficient time to report to their races. The hosting club will determine how to manage swimmers/relay teams who miss their heats/events.

Starters should give timers sufficient time after the completion of a race to write down the swimmer's time and reset their watches. Coaches, age group parents, ready bench parents, and timers should be instructed to help swimmers be ready for their races when they step up to start.

Starting Procedure

At the beginning of each new event, the starter shall announce the event number and the race title, such as "Event 1, Girls 7-8 100 yard Individual Medley, Heat 1." For each subsequent heat, the starter should announce the heat number ("Heat 2").

The starter shall tell the swimmers to "step forward," indicating that the swimmers should move forward to the edge of the pool and be ready for their race.

For backstroke events only, and after the "step forward" command, the starter shall say "step in" to ask the swimmers to enter the water. Swimmers must enter feet first for backstroke events for safety reasons.

When all swimmers are ready, the starter shall say "take your mark."

When all swimmers have assumed a stationary starting position, the starter will start the race.

The starting procedure can be modified as necessary for swimmers with permanent disabilities.

Legal Starting Positions

For Freestyle, Breaststroke, Butterfly, and IM starts:

The swimmer assumes a forward entry position from the pool deck. The swimmer can stand or assume a traditional diving position. However, at least one foot must be at the edge of the pool. (Standing with both feet at the edge of the pool is also allowed.)

The swimmer can grasp the edge of the pool with one or both hands, if desired, but this is not required.

Towels and other items intended for providing traction should not be allowed on the start end of the pool, as this is a safety issue.

The swimmer can also choose an in-water start. In this case, the swimmer must be in contact with the wall at the start. "Contact" is defined as having both feet and at least one hand in contact with the pool's wall. Swimmers may not stand on the pool's bottom or spring from the pool's bottom prior to or at the start when doing an in-water start. If the starter observes the swimmer springing from the pool's bottom at the start, the starter shall DQ the swimmer for springing from the pool's bottom and the race shall continue.

For Backstroke Events:

The starter shall ask the swimmers to “step in.” Swimmers must enter the water feet first. When all swimmers have assumed a starting position, with both feet on the wall and both hands on the pool’s edge, the starter shall start the race. Swimmers are not allowed to curl their toes over the edge of the pool. The feet can be in any position on the wall, above or below the water surface. If the starter observes that a swimmer has curled his toes over the pool’s edge prior to the “take your mark” command, the starter shall ask the swimmer in that lane to assume a proper starting position or to “place your feet.” If the starter observes a swimmer who had a legal starting position change his feet position at the start, resulting in the toes being curled over the pool’s edge, the starter shall DQ the swimmer. The race shall proceed.

False Starts

Only the starter shall DQ a swimmer for a false start. For our League, a false start is defined as a swimmer having *released from his or her starting position prior to the starting signal*. This release does not necessarily mean that the swimmer has actually left the pool deck and/or entered the water. The swimmer may have simply started *before* the starter sounded the starting signal.

Examples:

1. After the starter gives the “take your mark” command, the swimmers are all stationary. Prior to the starting signal, the swimmer in lane 5 anticipates the start and releases from his starting position. The rest of the swimmers in the heat remain stationary, and start the race at the starting signal. The starter should DQ the swimmer in lane 5 for a false start, and the race shall continue. In this example, the swimmer in lane 5 “left early” but did not actually enter the water prior to the starting signal. This situation results in the swimmer in lane 5 getting a “head start,” which results in a faster time than the swimmer would have earned had he been completely stationary at the start.
2. After the starter gives the “take your mark” command, the swimmer in lane 1 loses his balance and falls in the water. The starter should ask the heat to “relax” and let the swimmer in lane 1 exit the pool and assume the starting position. The swimmer in lane 1 is not DQ’ed. The starter shall restart the starting procedure by waiting for all swimmers to be ready, and then giving the “take your mark” command again.
3. After the starter gives the “take your mark” command, the swimmers are all stationary. Prior to the starting signal, the swimmer in lane 4 starts the race by releasing from his starting position or by actually diving into the pool. The swimmers in other lanes also start their race, following the movement of the swimmer in lane 4. The starter shall give the recall signal (holding down the button to activate the recall) to call back the heat. *This was not a fair start*—the swimmer in lane 4 clearly left early and the swimmers in other lanes left early as a result of the error in lane 4. In some cases, there may still be swimmers waiting to start. *You must recall the heat*. In addition, lane 4 is DQ’ed for a false start, and should not swim in the recalled heat. If the starter believes that it would be unfair to race the heat immediately (because some swimmers swam the event or part of the event), he can hold the swimmers in the recalled heat and swim the heat later in that event. This decision is made by the starter, who must immediately communicate his decision to the coaches, swimmers, timers, and ready bench.
4. After the starter gives the “take your mark” command, the swimmers are all stationary. Prior to the starting signal, the swimmer in lane 6 starts his race. The other swimmers in the heat remain stationary, because they did not hear the starting signal, nor did they begin the race

based on the swimmer in lane 6 leaving early. The starter should DQ the swimmer in lane 6 for a false start. *Exception:* The starter determines that the swimmer in lane 6 responded to a crowd noise or other interference that caused him to start. In this case, the starter can let the swimmer remain in the heat.

Recall Procedure

The starter should recall a heat only when the start was *unfair*. If a swimmer false starts, but the rest of the heat starts normally (and fairly, as defined by starting at the starting signal), then the starter should allow the heat to continue and DQ the swimmer who false starts.

In situations in which the start is unfair, the starter should recall the heat by activating the recall signal (pressing and holding down the button). If available, the stroke judges on the sides of the pool can also drop the recall rope. League coaches should teach swimmers to listen for the recall sound and stop swimming if they hear it or if they swim into the recall rope.

Note: Recall rules have changed in the past decade so that false starts are charged to a swimmer, and not to the heat. If a swimmer false starts, he shall be DQ'ed. There is no longer a rule to charge the first false start "to the heat."

Relay Take-Offs

Only the starter shall DQ the lead swimmer on a relay team for a false start. After that, the stroke judge for that lane of the pool is responsible for charging the second, third, or fourth swimmer on the relay team with a DQ for an early take-off. In judging an early take-off, the stroke judge should watch the feet of the swimmer leaving the pool's deck. At the moment that the feet leave the wall, the stroke judge should shift his attention to confirm that the swimmer in the water has touched the wall. *Look at the feet of the next swimmer, then look at the hands of the previous swimmer.* An early take-off occurs when you see the feet of the next swimmer leave the wall, and the swimmer in the water has not yet touched the wall. This is a DQ. If you are not sure about the timing, and can't be certain that the swimmer left early, then you should not DQ the swimmer for an early take-off.

If the swimmer in the water *doesn't touch the wall at all*, and the next swimmer leaves the pool deck, this is not an early take-off. This call would be to disqualify the swimmer in the water for failing to finish his leg of the relay correctly for not finishing with a two-hand touch in fly or breast, for not touching the wall on his back to finish the backstroke, or for failing to touch the wall to finish the freestyle leg.