

THE STARTER PHILOSOPHY AND PROTOCOL

UPDATED 11/07/06

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTION – THE STARTER**
- II. PHILOSOPHY OF STARTING**
- III. BASIC PROTOCOL**
- IV. THE STARTER – PROTOCOL WITH WHISTLE PREPARATORY COMMANDS**
- V. THE STARTER AND SWIMMERS WITH DISABILITIES**
- VI. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS**
- VII. APPENDIX**
 - A. Guidelines for the "No Recall" procedure**
 - B. Whistle Preparatory Command Procedure**
 - C. Head Starter Responsibilities**

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 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 for someone interested in becoming a starter or improving upon their skill as a practicing starter. 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. A comprehensive training regimen should include clinics, mentoring by more experienced starters, regular feedback, and evaluation.

First, an overview of the philosophy of starting will be presented. This is followed by the detailed protocol using WHISTLE PREPARATORY COMMANDS and NO RECALL for USA Swimming.

II. PHILOSOPHY OF STARTING

The following lengthy description of the philosophy and protocol of Starting is sometimes hard to put in proper perspective when you consider that most of what is mentioned occurs in a time frame of only a few 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. It is important to understand that starting local level meets and national championship level meets requires a different mindset. Once a starter has become proficient at the local level, the differences in thinking will be noticed as progress is made through the upper levels of competition.

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 experienced starters to be good, they must consider the following characteristics:

- 1. The responsibility 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 fair starts have been ensured for all competitors, the starter will experience the satisfaction of doing a good job. That, in 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. Proficiency comes with experience. All starters are going to make mistakes. A good starter knows mistakes will happen but will learn from them. An experienced starter, who does not admit to mistakes, boast 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 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.**
- 3. 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 expect to advance to the next level almost instantly. 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 platform 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 remains on the platform because they were not yet set. Patience will allow for all swimmers to get set, and experience will dictate when to stand them up and try again. It is important to understand that all situations cannot be remedied with a stand command. If you 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.

- 4. 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 platforms.**
- 5. 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 perform instinctively 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.**
- 6. 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 and not be concerned about outside relationships.**
- 7. 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 and coach'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 their swimmers and having this information may be all that is needed to get a reversal.

8. **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 will have.**
9. **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 his or her own style and personality and can still conform to the current philosophy is well on the way to becoming proficient and experienced.**
10. **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 it is necessary 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.

- 11. Courage to do the right thing is critical. 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 the rules and fairness prevailed, it was the right decision.**
- 12. 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.**
- 13. 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 – the prescribed uniform is determined by the Vice President of Program Operations in conjunction with the National Officials Committee.

LOCAL - Specified by the LSC and the meet being worked

Assignments - as assigned by the Meet Referee; in addition to being a starter, the possibility exists to also watch turns, relay take-offs, 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

As stated in Rule 102.14.4 *The Start of the 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 for swimwear, followed by a long whistle indicating that they should take and maintain their positions on the starting platform, the deck, or in the water. 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 starting platform or deck. Swimmers starting in the water must have at least one hand in**

contact with the wall or starting platform. 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 platforms.**

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

NOTE: The protocols are only RECOMMENDATIONS. Many considerations, such as staffing, local weather conditions for outdoor competitions, meet format etc., will affect how these protocols are implemented. It is the job of meet management and the referee to determine the protocols in place for a specific competition.

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 PREPARATORY COMMAND CLARIFICATION section as to what the whistles should be.)

- 2. When these whistles are blown is to be determined by meet management and referee in order to establish the desired flow of the meet. When all swimmers have approached the starting platforms, a long whistle is blown for the heat to step up and take their preparatory positions. The referee then extends the arm as a signal to the starter to start the race. This should normally be done after the referee determines that all swimmers are present, or has made the decision the race will be started with open lanes as a result of no-shows and/or delay of meet disqualifications. Once the referee has turned it over, it is the starter’s responsibility to start the race when the heat is ready.**

(A learning technique to force a pause to allow the heat to get ready is to hold the starting microphone at your side until the Referee has blown the whistle. Then bring the starting 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 platform that may lead to an early take-off. Take an extra second or two with the pause and a slower command. Be sure that the extra second or two 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 PREPARATORY COMMAND CLARIFICATION** section as to what the whistles should be.)*

2. When all swimmers have approached the side of the platforms, the first long whistle is blown for the heat to immediately step in. This should be done after the referee has determined that all swimmers are present, or has made the decision the race will be started with open lanes as a result of no-shows and/or delay of meet disqualifications. The referee then blows 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 as a signal

to the starter to start the heat. This should be done almost immediately after the swimmers have placed their feet and grasp the grips. Once the referee has turned it over, it is the starter's responsibility to start the race when the heat is ready.

NOTE: The placement of the whistles is slightly different than for forward starts in that the Referee can check the heat before the swimmers enter the water which prevents them from waiting in the water or hanging from the grips for an extended period of time. The referee has the option to use the same protocol for forward starts to suit the needs for a particular competition.

*(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 as 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 "lane __, toes, please.", "lane __, feet down.", lane __, 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 platforms 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 or she can instruct the swimmer directly without the use of the starting 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 previous described method of stating the command. At this point, if a swimmer moves to the top of the pad or are above the lip of the gutter, the suggested command is "stand" or "relax" and correct the lane directly about the problem. Backstrokers will often pull up high on the wall and drop back into their stationary position. All swimmers must be given a chance to settle 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 or competition 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, swimmers may lose their grip on the platform, 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 is necessary to stand the heat up twice, the Starter MAY give the command "Step Down" or "Relax" 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 stationary position", "Please stop your motion at some point", etc. PAUSE, then give the "TAKE YOUR MARK" command.

NOTE: *In place of the suggested generic verbal commands, the Referee MAY choose to blow a second whistle to have the swimmers get on the platform or place their feet as the established protocol for the particular competition.*

Depending on the circumstances, a disqualification is possible any time after the second 'stand' on a heat.

4. 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.)*

NOTE: If swimmers are asked to step off the platforms, a reminder to do so safely may need to be given. Timers should be briefed on

providing assistance in this situation. Sometimes, platforms are difficult to step down from, particularly for younger swimmers.

5. 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" or the referee may blow the long whistle.

D. No Recall –

1. Review the **GUIDELINES FOR THE "NO RECALL" STARTING PROCEDURE** as provided in the **APPENDIX** of this manual.
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 HER OR HIS OWN START. IF THEIR 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 platforms, 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 starter's 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. One suggestion is to maintain your observation of the heat but to slowly drop the starting microphone away from the mouth. Other suggestions are to activate the signal and immediately slide the starting finger to the side of the starting 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 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 is 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. If the athlete prefers to remain in their qualifying lane, meet management should make the necessary adjustments.)

- 3. Blind and visually impaired athletes may not require any modifications or may need assistance to and on the platforms. 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. In all cases, work with the athlete and coach as to the preferred procedure.**

(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 will 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 Rule 105 in the 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 platform (this supplements the series of short whistles).
 - ii. The arm overhead is the indication for the swimmer to step onto the starting platform 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 platforms, the deck, or in the water to maintain their balance.

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

- i. starting from a sitting position on the platform 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 in Rule 105 in the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations.)

VI. 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 in the water. 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 being a starter, 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 almost 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. Do not be critical of other officials or their decisions at anytime - on or off the deck. You never know who may be listening.**
- 5. Do not discuss false starts, recalls, or disqualifications with coaches, parents, or swimmers. Direct all questions, complaints, and problems to your on duty Referee.**
- 6. 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 your equipment - the platforms, flags, pistol, starting system, speakers, recall rope, etc.**
- 7. What do you do after the start? Observe the swimmers into the water and until they surface and you are sure that the race 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 starting microphone in hand and ready to use. Once the heat is in the water fairly, you need to begin preparing for the next heat – Do the number of swimmers match your heat sheet? Did a swimmer's goggles break or cap split? Does there seem to be confusion behind the platforms? Before the next heat proceeds, observe the timers to make sure they are ready. Any of these issues, if observed, should be reported to the referee before a heat is turned over to the starter.

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 a starter 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.

VII. APPENDIX

A. GUIDELINES FOR THE "NO RECALL" STARTING PROCEDURE

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 platforms. 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 them self being caught on the platform. 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.

B. WHISTLE PREPARATORY COMMAND PROCEDURE

- 1. Use a minimum of 4 or 5 short whistles (or chirps). This should only be loud enough to get all lanes in the next heat's attention in preparation for their swim. If three chirps are used, this may conflict with the American Red Cross' emergency action plan for lifeguards.**
- 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 be used to step the next heat up/in and alert the venue that a race is about to start.**

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 starters 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 platforms 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 their 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 minor differences.
11. Observe, mentor and evaluate starter candidates for certification, re-certification or advancement and prepare written reports. Provide a copy for the candidate and yourself as Head Starter. These reports shall not change once distributed. Evaluations for re-certification or advancement as part of the National Officials Certification program (including evaluations at National Championship Meet time trials) must be done in accordance with the program guidelines and copies of the report must be forwarded to the National Officials Committee Staff Liaison for appropriate processing.

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 additional evaluations and requirements may be required before an application for advancement can be submitted; advancement does not always bring an assignment; don't promise assignments at future meets; don't promise a satisfactory evaluation 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