

WHAT IS A FALSE START?

The rules state... “When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal” (101.1.2.c) and “Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation” (101.1.3A).

So what constitutes a false start? These scenarios should help you paint the picture.

FALSE START SCENARIO #1

Swimmer leaves the set or stationary position prior to the starting signal. The starting signal is then given. The race proceeds and, assuming the Starter observed the early start and the Deck Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation, the offending swimmer is disqualified at the conclusion of the race. Rule 101.1.3B applies. This is a false start.

FALSE START SCENARIO #2

Swimmer leaves the set or stationary position prior to the starting signal. The swimmer upon realizing the early starting motion attempts to catch himself/herself. Starter says absolutely nothing, and the swimmer fails to halt the forward motion and goes into the pool. Rule 101.1.3A applies. This is a false start.

FALSE START SCENARIO #3

Exactly the same facts as #2 above, but this time the Starter says “stand please” after the swimmer leaves the set or stationary position. The seven other swimmers stand or step down from the blocks. The offending swimmer struggles, but once again is unable to halt the forward motion and falls into the pool. Unlike scenario #2 above, here the starter said “stand please”, but that does not change the false start result. The rule is clear that the "stand" command is for the benefit of the other swimmers on the starting blocks. When the stand command is issued, the athletes have the option of standing or stepping off the blocks. The offending swimmer did neither. He fell into the pool just like the swimmer in scenario #2. Rule 101.1.3A applies. This is a false start.

FALSE START SCENARIO #4

Exactly the same facts as scenarios #2 and #3 above. However, this time when the command “stand please” is issued, the offending swimmer struggles, but is able to stand or step off the blocks. Rule 101.1.3A applies. This is NOT a false start. Why? Because the swimmer remained on the blocks or deck like everyone else in the heat, and no starting signal ever sounded.

FALSE START SCENARIO #5

Exactly the same facts as scenarios #2 and #3 above. However, when the Starter gives the “stand please” command a swimmer(s) other than the offending swimmer instantly bolts from the blocks and enters the water. Rule 101.1.3D applies. The swimmer(s) clearly started in reaction to the “stand” command. This is NOT a false start.

FALSE START SCENARIO #6

The swimmer, upon hearing the command “take your mark” starts down to take a set or stationary position. The swimmer loses his/her balance before coming set and falls into the pool. Rule 101.1.2C applies. The swimmer should be given the opportunity to come to his/her set or stationary position prior to the start. A loss of balance prevented that, and clearly this swimmer never engaged in any starting action. This is NOT a false start.

USA SWIMMING DECK REFEREE & STARTER GUIDELINES

STARTER:

- 1 Takes deck position which affords an optimal view of the starting field.
- 2 Assists in checking starting field for correct number of athletes in proper lanes.
- 3 Raises microphone upon hearing long whistle and awaits deck referee's extended arm
- 4 When the starting field is ready says "Take Your Mark" in a calm, invitational voice.
- 5 Completes the start only after all swimmers have assumed an observable stationary position.
- 6 Notes all empty lanes and time of start on starter's record.
- 7 Takes the finish order on starter's record (if another starter is not available).

DECK REFEREE:

- 1 Signals "prepare to swim" with the series of short whistles.
- 2 Checks starting field for correct number of swimmers in proper lanes.
- 3 Sounds long whistle indicating swimmers should take a position on the blocks, deck, or in the pool.
 - A second long whistle is sounded on backstroke starts to request swimmers move to the wall and prepare for the start. Given when the last head 'pops up' so all athletes can hear it.
- 4 When issues, if any, have been resolved turns control of the swimmers over to the starter with an extended arm.
- 5 Carefully observes the start, noting the lane(s) of any swimmers who started before the starting signal on the deck referee's record, and then focuses attention on the athletes during their swim.

FALSE START PROCEDURE:

- 1 If the starter observes that a swimmer started immediately before the starting signal, the race shall continue without recall, and the lane(s) of the offending athlete(s) noted, in writing.
- 2 The starter should advise the deck referee of a "possible false start".
- 3 If the deck referee agrees that there was a false start, the starter should show the noted lane number(s) to the deck referee without further discussion.
- 4 When there is agreement on the noted lane(s) by the deck referee and the starter, the deck referee shall confirm the false start and implement the meet protocol for handling disqualifications
- 5 If a swimmer starts and the starting signal is not given, the starter should release the rest of the field by saying "please stand", note the lane that started, and follow 2, 3 and 4 above.

REMEMBER:

A. NEVER:

- Force a start by commencing a starting sequence before the swimmers are ready.
- Keep swimmers on the blocks or in the water for an extended time prior to the start.
- Congregate in the starting area when not working an event.

B. ALWAYS:

- Practice PATIENCE, PATIENCE, PATIENCE.
- Use the word PLEASE when giving any command or instruction other than "Take your mark".
- Be alert for requests from the deck referee
 - Especially notice to recall a heat.
- Be conscious of any outside interference that might affect the start.
- As the first starter and deck referee of the session, check starting blocks and starting system operation and volume.
- Be ready to step in for any official when requested.

