

The Deck Referee and Starter Team

It's All About Communication Kathleen Scandary and Denice Wepasnick

No matter the size or level of the meet, the deck referee and starter must be a team that communicates. The teamwork begins when you are assigned to one of these two roles, whether it be for the entire session or a few events within a session. Even before starting your pre-session checks, you both should have a conversation regarding potential circumstances that might come up, such as how false starts should be handled, should the SR communicate empty lanes/full heat, etc. While the athletes are in the pool for warm-ups, the SR can check the integrity of the start system as the DR inspects the blocks. While the DR is inspecting blocks, he/she can also listen to the voice of the SR projecting through the speakers, checking for clarity. The DR's feedback allows for the necessary adjustments to be made before the athletes are even on the block or in the water and possibly on the ledge. During this time, or in the minutes before the event, the SR is the first to pick their spot for the best view of all lanes. The goal for the DR in choosing their position to stand is the same: an unobstructed visual gaze over the lanes. However, the DR must also keep in mind that their outstretched arm, signifying the heat has been given to the SR, must be easily and peripherally visible. This is another example of the teamwork necessary to ensure the SR, as well as the DR, maintains sight of all athletes at the blocks before the start.

The SR may report to the DR when the anticipated number of athletes are all present, or only when there is an empty lane, depending on what is established in the pre-session dialogue. The short whistles are blown and as the athletes are transitioning onto the blocks, the DR hands over the heat to the SR. It is now up to the SR to decide when to give the start command and the start signal. If all is well, the two watch the swimmers break the surface before going into their distinctly different roles. The SR, who is aware of the amount of time the DR is spending processing calls, can be very helpful by providing information on which swimmer is trailing behind and anything of importance regarding athletes in the next heat. The DR can help the SR by their own demeanor and walking away to take calls. This allows the SR to calmly observe the behavior of the swimmers in the next heat.

Prior to the start, an issue that has the potential to create inequity may require the DR to retract their arm and tell the SR to stand the heat. If need be, the DR may ask the SR to have the athletes step down carefully. The field has been returned to the DR, at this point. The team may spend a moment in conference, take action if needed, and bring the heat back onto the blocks with the DR blowing the long whistle. The SR is equally responsible for making sure that the athletes are settling and are not distracted. In some instances, the command to stand is used at the discretion of the SR if the starter feels that there may be the possibility of inequity at the start while the arm of the DR remains extended. Should a false start occur, both the SR and DR mark their sheet independent of one another. The SR initiates the call by approaching the DR, observing first whether radio communication is taking place. The SR uses a phrase that will get the DR's attention, like, "I have a potential..." or "Did you see anything?" The two show their sheet with the markings on the lane of the swimmer who committed the false start, thus solidifying the independence of their calls.

The goal of effective communication between the SR and DR is to develop a team approach to ensure the best possible outcome for the athletes we serve.