

TIMER RESPONSIBILITIES

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At the OAPB meet one of the parents asked me if we had any “instructions” for new parents on the duties of a timer. This article is a compilation of materials gathered from Pacific Swimming, USA Swimming and information provided by Michael Downs of Virginia Swimming.

Timers are a significant resource at swim meets and play a very important role in the success of the swimmers and in the smooth operation of the meet. The swimmers work very hard to achieve certain times and goals. We owe it to them to provide the most accurate times possible. It doesn't take any longer to get an accurate time, just a little more effort.

When the Seahawks are assigned responsibility to time in several seats or a full lane (or two lanes like at the OAPB meet), please volunteer your services. Your shift is usually for one or two hours per day. Be courteous to your fellow parents by sharing the responsibility equally, both during the meet and from meet to meet.

While timers are volunteers, technically speaking they are actually officials - so it's important to know the responsibilities, rules, and procedures of timing.

Timers have two main responsibilities:

1) make sure the right swimmer is in the right event, the right heat, and the right lane and 2) provide accurate times for every swim.

Most USA Swimming meets use 2 timing systems: semiautomatic (buttons which stop the automatically started clock), and manual (digital watches). Some meets also use touch pads, which stop the clock when the swimmer touches the pad. Usually, there are 3 timers per lane: one operates a button and a watch, while the others operate a button. You may operate a button and/or a watch, but **you many never operate two buttons or two watches at the same time**. One of the lane timers writes the watch time on the lane timer slips. That person is the Head Lane Timer.

At the start of the race swimmers line up behind the starting blocks by lanes/heat for their swims. The Head Lane Timer ensures the correct swimmer is present to swim by checking the name of the swimmer against the lane timer slip. Perform this check prior to the Referee's series of short whistles. That series of whistles notifies the swimmers and timers it's time for the next heat. At the series of short whistles, make sure your swimmer is ready to swim and standing behind the block. When the Referee blows the long whistle that signals the swimmers to step up onto the blocks.

Once all the swimmers are on the blocks, the Referee will turn the heat over to the Starter. The Starter will only say "Take your mark", and then sound the start signal. The Start Console, located along the side of the pool, emits the audio start signal and a simultaneous visual flash from a strobe light. It is very important that you start your watch on the flash, **not on the sound**. If you miss the flash, start your watch on the sound of the start signal. Find a spot near your lane where you can see the strobe. If your watch fails to start (or stops during the race), raise it over your head and get the attention of the Head Timer. You can yell out “Head Timer!!” He/She will bring you another watch. Always start your watch for every heat, even if you don't have a swimmer in your lane ... it may be needed by another timer.

If your swimmer misses their heat, write "NS" (no show) on the lane timer sheet. If your swimmer gets out of the pool before the end of their race, write "DNF" (did not finish) on the lane timer sheet.

During the race, count the laps of your swimmer. If it's 200Y/M or longer, mark them on the lane timer slip so you don't lose count. Don't rely on the scoreboard or lane counter! You need this information to determine when it's the last lap.

Stop your watch and push the button at the end of the race when **any** part of your swimmer's body touches **any** part of the wall. Don't worry if it's a legal touch or not - that's the Stroke and Turn Judge's responsibility. Get right up to the edge of the pool and look down for the touch... don't be afraid to get wet. To get an accurate time it is important to be able to actually see the touch, not just "think" you saw it happen.

Also, don't anticipate the touch. Push the button only once - that's all it takes. Every time you push it, the computer records a new time. Once you stop the watch and push the button, step back away from the blocks and record the watch time. Write the time to the hundredth of a second without rounding (i.e., 33.49).

If you missed the finish, write "NT" on the card or lane timer slip. Never try to match your time to the time on the scoreboard - it shouldn't be the same. A Runner will collect the lane timer slips after each heat or event.

At the end of the race, things get very crowded at the blocks - 2 or 3 timers, an official, and some screaming swimmers. Move the swimmers back and work with the official to share the space. Also if your swimmer is having difficulty getting out of the pool after the race, you may, but are not required to help them (always use two hands to help them out, not one).

For relays, check the name of each swimmer and make sure they swim in that order. If they don't, make a note on the card and notify the Referee.

Stay back behind the blocks, except when stopping your watch and pushing your button at the end of the race. If you get between the blocks at the start, you may block the Starter's and/or Referee's line of sight to the heat. Your movement could also distract them or a swimmer during the start.

For 25Y/50M events, your swimmer may start at the opposite end of the pool from where you are standing. In this case, make sure to check your swimmer's name at the end of the race. If it's not the right swimmer, write their name on the timer slip, record the finish time and immediately notify the Referee.

Some meets use overhead starts, usually called fly-overs or dive-overs. Swimmers in the previous heat remain in the water for the start of the subsequent heat. This saves considerable time and gives the swimmers a little rest at the end of their race. Things will be moving pretty quickly, so you must pay attention to the whistles and where you are in the race/event. The Referee's short whistles will usually come before the race is over (usually when the swimmers are about halfway out on the last lap) and the long whistle will come when the last swimmer touches the wall. You have to stop the watch and hit the button, record the watch time, clear the watch, and get ready for the start quickly. It takes teamwork. If the meet is not using overhead starts, make sure your swimmer quickly exits the pool and moves back behind the blocks. If they want their times, give it to them there, not up at the edge of the pool.

If you need a break, to go to the restroom or your relief timer has not arrived on time, notify the Head Timer. He/She will get a relief timer for your lane.