

# STARTING HIGHLIGHTS AND SCENARIOS

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# REFERENCES

- *2021 USA Swimming Rules and Regulations*
- *The “Professional” Starter National Officials’ Guidance Document*
- *The “Professional” Referee National Officials’ Guidance Document*
- *Situations and Resolutions – Starter and Deck Referee*
  - Presented below as “SR/DR ##”
- *What is a False Start?*
  - Presented below as “False Start Scenario ##”

# SELECTED STARTING RULES

- 101.1.2A — 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.

- 101.1.2B — When the swimmers and officials are ready, the Referee **shall signal** with an out-stretched arm to the Starter that the swimmers are **under the Starter's control**.
- 101.1.2C — 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 the 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.
  - Prior to 1999 — “. . . no swimmer shall be in motion . . .”
  - 1999 and forward — “stationary”

- 101.1.2D — 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 blocks.
- 101.1.2E — A swimmer shall not be disqualified for an illegal starting position at the start if the race is permitted to proceed. Enforcement of the correct starting position is the responsibility of the Starter.

- 101.1.3A — Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation that a violation occurred. Swimmers remaining on the starting blocks shall be relieved from their starting positions with the "stand up" command and may step off the blocks.
- 101.1.3B — If the starting signal has been given before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue without recall. If the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation that a violation occurred, the swimmer or swimmers who have false started shall be disqualified upon completion of the race.
- 101.1.3C — If the recall signal is activated, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start and the Starter shall restart the race upon signal by the Referee.
- 101.1.3D — A swimmer who would otherwise be charged with a false start may be relieved of the charge if the false start was caused by the swimmer's reaction to the "stand up" command.

# PHILOSOPHY OF STARTING

## **Positive approaches**

- Our goal is to ensure a fair start for every swimmer, every time
- The benefit of the doubt goes to the swimmer

## **Negative approaches**

- Trying to catch someone who has a reputation for getting away with false starts
- Rush the starting process to catch up or stay on the timeline

# IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF AN EXCELLENT STARTER

- Knows when the swimmers are ready to assume their starting position (ie, knows when to say “take your mark”)
  - Patience, patience, patience
  - Let the swimmers tell you when they are ready to start
- Knows when the swimmers are ready to start (ie, knows when to give the starting signal)
  - Patience, patience, patience
  - Stationary is not necessarily motionless
- Knows when it is necessary to intervene (eg, knows when to say “stand, please”)
- Having the above qualities builds trust between the swimmers and starter

# WHAT IS A FALSE START?

- By rule it is “... starting before the starting signal is given ...”
- Leaving the stationary position prior to the starting signal being given

# UNFAIR STARTS

- Examples
  - Loud sound immediately prior to the start signal
  - Light flash immediately prior to the start signal
  - Crowd noise impedes the ability to hear “take your mark” or the start signal
  - Start signal doesn’t fire on lane
- We don’t recall false starts, but we should recall unfair starts
- If a heat with an unfair start is not recalled, or the swimmers do not stop, ALL swimmers should be offered a re-swim
  - The time from the re-swim replaces the original time

# THINGS TO SAY OR NOT SAY

- Never deviate the language of “take your mark” and ”stand, please”
- Refer to the swimmers as “ladies” and “gentlemen”
- ”Relax, please” or “swimmers, relax” for a prolonged delay
- ”Lane \_\_\_, toes, please” to lower the toes in backstroke
- “Thank you, ladies/gentlemen” to clear the pool
- Additional instructions only as directed by the referee

# SR/DR PRE-SESSION CHAT

- Who is standing where? How close?
- How are possible false starts to be communicated?
- Communicate only missing swimmers or also full heats?
- When/if to use “step up,” “relax,” “thank you, ladies/gentlemen,” etc?
- What happens if a swimmer steps off the blocks when the starter says “stand, please?”

# STARTING SCENARIOS

## SR/DR #38

- During the finals of the 100 yard backstroke, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command. The swimmer in lane 1 clearly starts well before the starting signal. The race continues without recall. The Starter does not approach the Referee with any observation of a false start, but the Referee raises his hand to disqualify the swimmer in lane 1 for a false start, knowing that the Referee “has the authority to disqualify a swimmer(s) for any violation of the rules that the Referee personally observes.” Is this correct protocol?

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- *Recommended Resolution:* No, this is not correct protocol. The rule states, “Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.” The rule is very clear that it takes both the Starter and the Referee to disqualify a swimmer for a false start.
- *Applicable Rules:* 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B, 102.11.2

# SR/DR #32

- At the start of the 200 yard breaststroke, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command. The swimmer in lane 2 shoots forward and starts before the starting signal, but the motion is very subtle. The Starter records the observation of the false start and reports it to the Referee. The Referee did not record an observation. The Starter and Referee talk casually about what the Starter observed, and the Referee responds, “Okay, that’s fair. I’ll call it.” The swimmer is disqualified upon completion of the race. Is this proper protocol?

# SR/DR #32

- At the start of the 200 yard breaststroke, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command. The swimmer in lane 2 shoots forward and starts before the starting signal, but the motion is very subtle. The Starter records the observation of the false start and reports it to the Referee. The Referee did not record an observation. The Starter and Referee talk casually about what the Starter observed, and the Referee responds, “Okay, that’s fair. I’ll call it.” The swimmer is disqualified upon completion of the race. Is this proper protocol?
- *Recommended Resolution:* No, this is not proper protocol. The rule states, “Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter’s observation that a violation occurred.” Since the Referee has discussed the potential violation with the Starter prior to recording an observation, any observation that he makes is no longer independent, meaning that the swimmer should not be disqualified for a false start.
- *Applicable Rules:* 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

## 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

...

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. . . disqualified at the conclusion of the race.

Rule 101.1.3B applies. *If the starting signal has been given before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue without recall. If the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation that a violation occurred, the swimmer or swimmers who have false started shall be disqualified upon completion of the race.*

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.

## 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. Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation that a violation occurred. Swimmers remaining on the starting blocks shall be relieved from their starting positions with the "stand up" command and may step off the blocks.*

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.

## FALSE START SCENARIO #3

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*Rule 101.1.3A applies. Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation that a violation occurred. Swimmers remaining on the starting blocks shall be relieved from their starting positions with the "stand up" command and may step off the blocks.*

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.

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*Rule 101.1.3A applies. Any swimmer starting before the starting signal is given shall be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation that a violation occurred. Swimmers remaining on the starting blocks shall be relieved from their starting positions with the "stand up" command and may step off the blocks.*

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.

## 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. *A swimmer who would otherwise be charged with a false start may be relieved of the charge if the false start was caused by the swimmer's reaction to the “stand up” command.*

The swimmer(s) clearly started in reaction to the “stand” command.

This is NOT a false start.

# SR/DR #43

- During the 200 yard breaststroke, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command. Several of the swimmers appear to be taking a while to assume a stationary starting position, so the Starter stands the heat. The swimmer in lane 6 jolts forward in a starting motion in response to the “Stand, please,” command, entering the water. Should the swimmer be disqualified?

# SR/DR #43

- During the 200 yard breaststroke, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command. Several of the swimmers appear to be taking a while to assume a stationary starting position, so the Starter stands the heat. The swimmer in lane 6 jolts forward in a starting motion in response to the “Stand, please,” command, entering the water. Should the swimmer be disqualified?
- *Recommended Resolution:* No, the swimmer should not be disqualified. The rule states, “A swimmer who would otherwise be charged with a false start may be relieved of the charge if the false start was caused by the swimmer’s reaction to the ‘Stand up,’ command.”
- *Applicable Rule:* 101.1.3D

# SR/DR #12

- Just prior to the starting signal, and after the “Take your mark,” command is given, the swimmer in lane 6 twitches his right knee, leaving his stationary starting position and diving into the pool. Reacting to this movement, the swimmer in lane 7 leaves his stationary starting position and dives into the pool. No starting signal has been given. How should the situation be handled?

# SR/DR #12

- Just prior to the starting signal, and after the “Take your mark,” command is given, the swimmer in lane 6 twitches his right knee, leaving his stationary starting position and diving into the pool. Reacting to this movement, the swimmer in lane 7 leaves his stationary starting position and dives into the pool. No starting signal has been given. How should the situation be handled?
- *Recommended Resolution:* If possible, the Starter should stand the heat. If it is observed by the Starter and independently observed and confirmed by the Referee that both swimmers started before the starting signal, both swimmers should be disqualified for false starts. If the Starter is able to stand the heat, the swimmers should be removed from the heat; if not, the race shall continue without recall. The fact that the false start in lane 7 may have been in reaction to the false start in lane 6 has no bearing on the disqualification.
- Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

# SR/DR #11

- Just prior to the starting signal, and after the “Take your mark,” command is given, the swimmer in lane 4 twitches his right knee, but does not leave his stationary starting position. Reacting to this movement, the swimmer in lane 5 dives into the pool. No starting signal has been given. How should the situation be handled?

# SR/DR #11

- Just prior to the starting signal, and after the “Take your mark,” command is given, the swimmer in lane 4 twitches his right knee, but does not leave his stationary starting position. Reacting to this movement, the swimmer in lane 5 dives into the pool. No starting signal has been given. How should the situation be handled?
- *Recommended Resolution:* If possible, the Starter should stand the heat. If it is observed by the Starter and independently observed and confirmed by the Referee that the swimmer in lane 5 started before the starting signal, the swimmer lane 5 should be disqualified for a false start. If the Starter is able to stand the heat, this swimmer should be removed from the heat; if not, the race shall continue without recall. As the swimmer in lane 4 did not leave his stationary starting position, the knee twitch is not considered to be a starting motion, and the swimmer should not be disqualified. The fact that the false start in lane 5 may have been in reaction to the movement of the swimmer in lane 4 has no bearing on the disqualification.
- Applicable Rules: 101.1.2C, 101.1.3A, 101.1.3B

## **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.

# 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. *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 the 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.*

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.

# RECALL SCENARIOS

# SR/DR #41

- In the 50 yard freestyle, the swimmers in all lanes become stationary following the "Take your mark," command. The swimmer in lane 4 starts before the starting signal. The Starter recalls the heat, and upon returning to the start end, the Referee blows the long whistle, signaling for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks. The coach of one of the other swimmers in the heat approaches the Referee, claiming that the false start in lane 4 was clear to everyone and that the Starter recalled the heat intentionally. Should the swimmer in lane 4 be allowed to swim?

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- *Recommended Resolution:* While a race can be recalled for an unfair start, by rule it is not recalled for a false start, as the rules direct, in the event of a false start, "If the starting signal has been given before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue without recall." Therefore, even though the Starter recalled the race in reaction to the false start, it is considered to be an inadvertent recall, as the recall should not have taken place. The rule states, "If the recall signal is activated inadvertently, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start." The swimmer in lane 4 should not be charged with a false start and should be allowed to swim. [NOTE REVISED RULE BELOW]
- Applicable Rules: 101.1.3B, 101.1.3C
- 101.1.3C — If the recall signal is activated, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start and the Starter shall restart the race upon signal by the Referee.

# SR/DR #42

- In the 100 yard backstroke, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command and then the starting signal. The swimmer in lane 3 starts before the starting signal. After the start, the Starter accidentally activates the recall signal, and the heat is recalled. The Starter recorded an observation of a false start in lane 3, and the Referee independently observed and confirmed the Starter’s observation. The swimmer in lane 3 is disqualified and removed from the heat, as the false start was independent from the recall. Is this correct?

# SR/DR #42

- In the 100 yard backstroke, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command and then the starting signal. The swimmer in lane 3 starts before the starting signal. After the start, the Starter accidentally activates the recall signal, and the heat is recalled. The Starter recorded an observation of a false start in lane 3, and the Referee independently observed and confirmed the Starter’s observation. The swimmer in lane 3 is disqualified and removed from the heat, as the false start was independent from the recall. Is this correct?
- *Recommended Resolution:* No, this is not correct. The rule states, “If the recall signal is activated inadvertently, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start.” The swimmer in lane 3 should not be disqualified for a false start and should be allowed to swim with the heat. [NOTE REVISED RULE BELOW]
- Applicable Rule: 101.1.3C
- 101.1.3C — If the recall signal is activated, no swimmer shall be charged with a false start and the Starter shall restart the race upon signal by the Referee.

# EXTERNAL EVENTS

# SR/DR #36

- In the 200 yard individual medley, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command, and the swimmers assume their stationary starting positions. The swimmer in lane 4 starts before the starting signal, but the starting signal is given, and the race continues without recall. After the start, the Starter approaches the Referee with an observation of a false start in lane 4, which the Referee also independently observed and confirmed. At the conclusion of the race, when the swimmer is notified that his swim has been disqualified for a false start, he claims that he had heard somebody shout “Go!” which caused him to start before the starting signal. The Referee did not hear this himself. How should the situation be handled.

# SR/DR #36

- In the 200 yard individual medley, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command, and the swimmers assume their stationary starting positions. The swimmer in lane 4 starts before the starting signal, but the starting signal is given, and the race continues without recall. After the start, the Starter approaches the Referee with an observation of a false start in lane 4, which the Referee also independently observed and confirmed. At the conclusion of the race, when the swimmer is notified that his swim has been disqualified for a false start, he claims that he had heard somebody shout “Go!” which caused him to start before the starting signal. The Referee did not hear this himself. How should the situation be handled?
- *Recommended Resolution:* The Referee should investigate the situation, consulting the Starter, and possibly other officials at the start end of the pool, to determine whether or not somebody did, in fact, yell “Go!” during the start. If the Referee is able to confirm that this did, in fact, happen, he may allow the swimmer to have the opportunity to re-swim the race. If the Referee cannot confirm that somebody did, in fact, yell “Go!” at the start of the race, the disqualification should be upheld, as the Referee cannot overturn the disqualification simply because the swimmer claims to have heard someone shout at the start, as it would set a precedent that could not be sustainably continued.

# SR/DR #51

- The Starter gives the “Take your mark” command, and the swimmers assume their stationary starting positions. The swimmer in lane 8 starts before the starting signal, but the starting signal is given. The Referee heard a door slam just as the Starter was sending the heat, which clearly prompted the starting motion of the swimmer in lane 8. How should the situation be handled?

# SR/DR #51

- The Starter gives the “Take your mark” command, and the swimmers assume their stationary starting positions. The swimmer in lane 8 starts before the starting signal, but the starting signal is given. The Referee heard a door slam just as the Starter was sending the heat, which clearly prompted the starting motion of the swimmer in lane 8. How should the situation be handled?
- *Recommended Resolution:* As the Referee clearly heard the door slam, and was able to see the impact that it had on the start, the start can and should be considered to be unfair. He should ask the Starter to recall the heat. The swimmer in lane 8 should not be charged with a false start and be allowed to swim with the heat.
- *Applicable Rules:* 102.11.1, 102.11.5, 102.12.1

# SR/DR #40

- In the 400 yard individual medley, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command, and the swimmers assume their stationary starting positions. The swimmer in lane 2 starts before the starting signal, and the Starter stands the heat. The Starter approaches the Referee with an observation of a false start in lane 2, which the Referee also independently observed and confirmed. When the Referee removes the swimmer in lane 2 from the heat, the swimmer informs the Referee that he saw a flash, which caused him to start before the starting signal. The Referee did not observe a flash himself. How should the situation be handled?

# SR/DR #40

- In the 400 yard individual medley, the Starter gives the “Take your mark,” command, and the swimmers assume their stationary starting positions. The swimmer in lane 2 starts before the starting signal, and the Starter stands the heat. The Starter approaches the Referee with an observation of a false start in lane 2, which the Referee also independently observed and confirmed. When the Referee removes the swimmer in lane 2 from the heat, the swimmer informs the Referee that he saw a flash, which caused him to start before the starting signal. The Referee did not observe a flash himself. How should the situation be handled?
- *Recommended Resolution:* The Referee should quickly investigate the situation, first consulting the Starter to see if he had observed a flash. If this takes more than a moment or two, the Referee should ask the Starter to step down the heat and ask the field to relax, so as to not disrupt their competitive environment. If, given the information available, the Referee determines that there was, in fact, a flash, she should allow the swimmer to swim with the heat. If she cannot confirm that there was, in fact, a flash, the swimmer should be disqualified for a false start and removed from the heat. The Referee cannot overturn the disqualification simply because the swimmer claims to have seen a flash, as it would set a precedent that could not be sustainably continued.
- Applicable Rules: 101.1.3A, 102.11.1, 102.11.5

# EQUIPMENT

# SR/DR #48

- During the 100 yard backstroke, a swimmer chooses to utilize the backstroke ledge. While all of her toes are in contact with the ledge, none of her toes are in contact with the touchpad or end wall. Is this legal?

# SR/DR #48

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- *Recommended Resolution:* No, this is not legal. The rule states, “When using a backstroke ledge at the start, the toes of both feet must be in contact with the end wall or face of the touchpad.” USA Swimming’s interpretation of the rule requires that, in this case, “the toes of both feet” is defined as one toe of each foot.
- Applicable Rule: 101.4.1

# SR/DR #46

- During the 100 yard breaststroke, the Referee is about to blow the long whistle, signaling for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks, when the goggles of the swimmer in lane 8 break. The swimmer in lane 8 approaches the Referee, asking for a few moments to obtain a new pair of goggles. Should the Referee grant the request?

# SR/DR #46

- During the 100 yard breaststroke, the Referee is about to blow the long whistle, signaling for the swimmers to step up onto the blocks, when the goggles of the swimmer in lane 8 break. The swimmer in lane 8 approaches the Referee, asking for a few moments to obtain a new pair of goggles. Should the Referee grant the request?
- *Recommended Resolution:* Yes, the Referee should grant the request. Obtaining a new pair of goggles should only take a few moments and should not be considered delay of meet.
- *Applicable Rules:* 101.1.5A, 101.1.5B, 102.11.1, 102.11.5

# THANK YOU!

Questions?