

ANATOMY OF A START



**U.S. MASTERS
SWIMMING**

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THE STARTER'S GOAL:

- A fair start for every swimmer



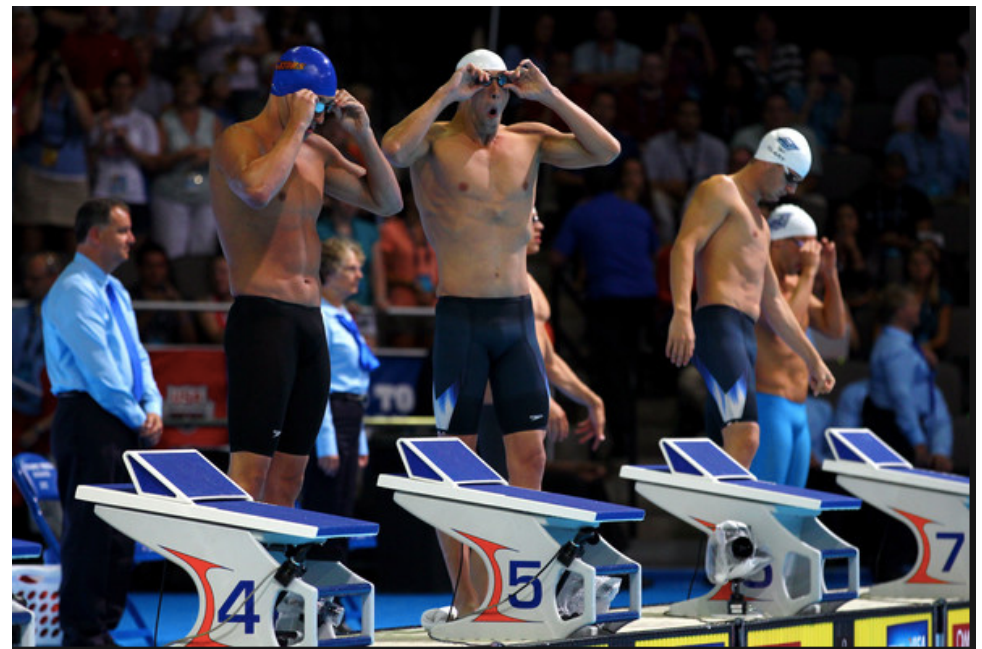
How do we do this?

- **Be athlete-centered**

THE START: A swimmer's view

- Behind the blocks
- On the blocks
- “Take your mark”
- Launch

Behind the blocks



Behind the blocks

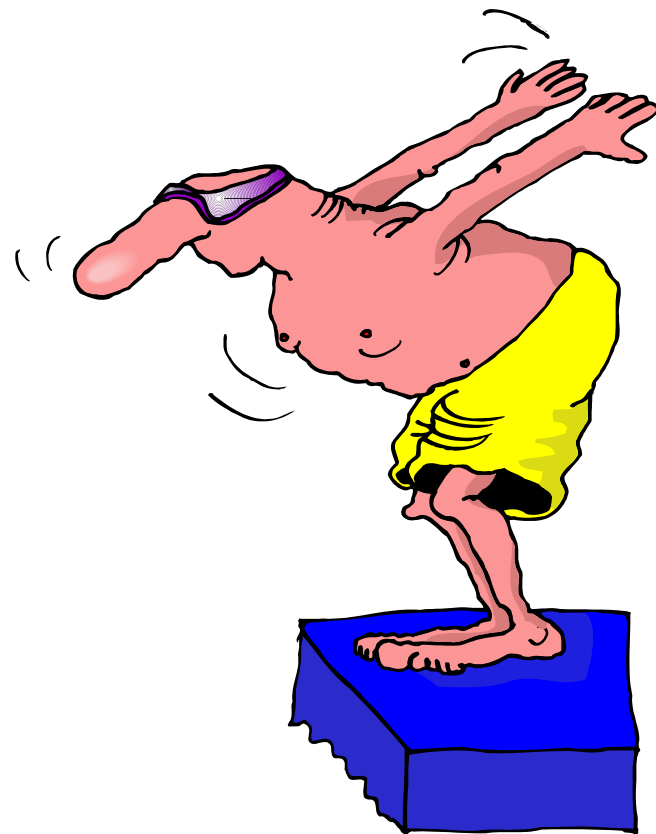
- “What lane am I in?”
- “I can’t hear a thing.”
- “Hope the blocks aren’t slippery.”
- “When do I step up?”
- “Was that a LONG whistle?”
- “Will my goggles stay on?”



On the blocks

- “Okay, I’m up here”
- “Give me a moment, I need time”
- “Wow, these blocks are high – and slippery”
- “I’m moving SLOWLY, give me a minute!”
- “Will I be able to hear? Did you speak?”
- “Wait, wait – I need to get steady”

Masters swimmers often have balance issues, be patient!



Take your mark

- “What was that?”
- “Wait – slow down, I’ve got to get my feet set”
- “This IS my Set position!”
- “What are we waiting for?”
- “Ah, I’m ready”



Launch!



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The starter's perspective

- Pre-meet
 - Check your equipment
 - Microphone, volume, cord
 - Find your position
 - Talk with your referee
 - How to handle false starts
 - Timing of the meet

The starter's perspective

- Behind the blocks
 - Check for swimmers behind each block
 - Look for any potential problems
 - Missing swimmers
 - Confused timers
 - Cap or goggle malfunctions
 - Be an extra set of eyes for the referee
 - Be calm, smile
 - Be ready for a long whistle
 - Hold microphone and cord in a relaxed way

The starter's perspective

- On the blocks
 - Be ready to start at the long whistle
 - Microphone in place
 - Stay focused on the field
 - Between two center lanes, with peripheral vision
 - Know when you've been given the heat by referee
 - Use your peripheral vision
 - Read the athletes
 - Are they ready to swim?



–Take a breath

“Take your mark”

- Invite the swimmers into their starting positions
 - Relaxed
 - Conversational
 - No jerks or lalts
 - Save the songs
 - Don't ask, tell
 - Don't yell (you have a microphone!)
- Are they ready to swim?
 - Allow swimmers time to get into their positions
 - Be patient
 - A second or two here will reap dividends down the line



Are they ready?

- Yes
 - Launch!
- Follow the field into the water to be certain the start is fair
 - If yes, begin preparations for the next heat
 - If no, recall the race (rarely)

Are they ready?

- No
 - “Stand, please” Two words on purpose!
 - Take a breath, “TYM”
- Still no?
 - “Stand, please”. Time usually resolves issue, inexperienced athletes need patience to learn.
 - Take a breath, “TYM”

Be patient!

- Use the “stand” command sparingly
- Stay calm
- Trust the swimmers to settle
 - A prompt response is required
 - Not all athletes can move the same
- All “set” positions not the same, allow each swimmer to get ready. Especially in USMS!
- Balance movements are **NOT** FS movement and may never settle, recognize & ignore.

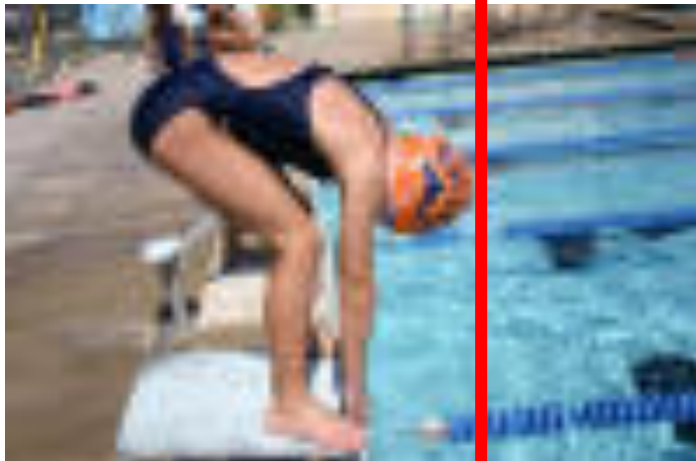
Responding promptly

- Rule 103.8.5.C
- “On the Starter’s command ‘take your mark,’ each swimmer shall immediately assume a starting position that **maintains at least one foot at the front of the starting platform** or at the front of the pool deck...when all swimmers are **stationary**, the starter shall give the starting signal.”

Foot must be forward BEFORE the TYM command.

The stationary position

- A stationary swimmer establishes a vertical plane at the *front* of the block



- Watch for movement relative to that plane
 - *Not twitching muscles, back feet, wiggly butts, balancing, etc.*
- Starting positions can be different for each athlete!
- Allow each athlete to get set – patience.
- Balance issues are not False Start movements!

False Starts

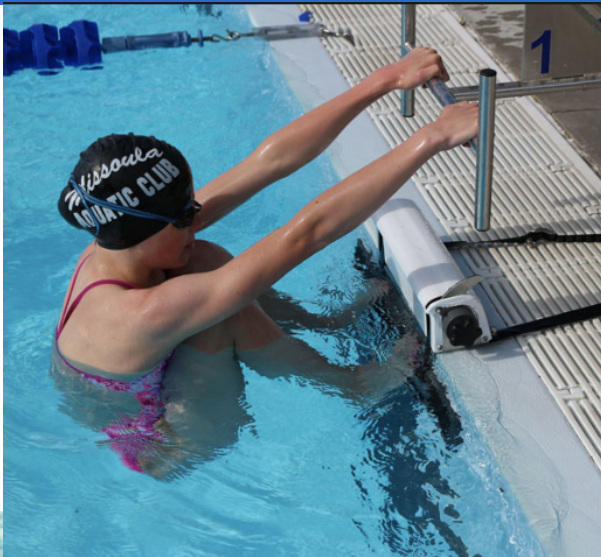
- Before the starting signal
 - Stand the heat, step it down if blocks safe
 - Indicate a lane on your heat sheet - **REQUIRED**
 - Alert referee “I have a potential false start”



False starts

- After the starting signal
 - Follow the heat into the water to be certain you have a fair start
 - Indicate on your heat sheet the potential lane(s)
 - Notify the referee “I have a potential false start”
 - Compare sheets without discussion
 - If confirmed, DQ written, you sign as “judge”
 - If not confirmed, start to prepare for the next heat

Backstroke starts



- Find your position, no toes over the gutter
- “Take your mark”
- Read the swimmers
 - They come up, and often need to settle back down
- If ledges are used, toe(s) must touch the wall
- Don't let them hang – stand if there are problems.

Starting swimmers with disabilities

- Your referee should know in advance that you have a disabled swimmer
 - Be patient
 - Focus, but don't fixate
 - Try very hard not to stand
 - Hold the same expectations
 - Aides are allowed, ignore their presence

Physically disabled swimmers

- May need more time getting on the blocks
- May need more time assuming starting position
- May start in the water or on deck, or may sit on the starting platform
- May need more time to get out of the pool



Deaf swimmers

- No, not all of them!
- May want to change lanes to see strobe better
 - Nice to have portable strobe for their block
- May need help getting to block
- Starter shall use hand signals (See Rule 105)
 - May have coach or assistant using signals on other side of pool or behind blocks

Starters

- People of few words
- Calm, relaxing
- Patient
- Interested in the swimmers
- Focused
- Facilitators, not controllers
- Always learning, always wanting to be better



Training and mentoring starters

- Help new starters feel comfortable and confident
 - Be positive and nurturing
 - Focus on getting fair starts
 - Poise
 - Sense of the swimmers
 - Don't nitpick
 - Let them practice and self-critique
 - Remind them that becoming a proficient starter takes time
 - Comment on the good things first, then talk about items to improve
- Encourage them to learn, to try new things
- Suggest they watch lots of starts, observe good starters at work

Summary – Novice Starters

- Take your time with the test.
- Seek opportunities to work with Starters you admire, listen, emulate, learn.
- Practice, practice practice! This is a skill, develop and nourish. Always be open to mentoring.