

STARTER INSTRUCTIONS

Updated 2021

The primary goal of any competent starter must be to ensure all runners receive a fair and equal start for each race. The Golden Rule for all track and field officials should be that no athlete is allowed to gain an unfair advantage, and no athlete should have to suffer an unfair disadvantage. The atmosphere at the start of a race can be one of ease and calm or one of confusion, based on the approach and the actions of the starter at the starting line. A competent starter is able to take command and remain calm throughout the starting process. This begins with the ability to give clear, precise instructions and the ability to give the starting commands in a strong but calm voice. This in turn will help relax the competitors and make them feel confident in the starter. If the athletes feel confident that the starter will provide a clean, fair start for everyone, without any quirks or distractions, that is one less thing they have to worry about, which allows them to focus more attention on their race. A good self-evaluation check for starters (and any other official) is that if they leave the meet unnoticed, their job has been well-done. The attention should always be on the athletes.

Because the starter is in complete control of the start of the race, and the starter's decisions can not be appealed, he/she must have a complete and thorough knowledge of the rules regarding the starting of races, and an understanding of competition requirements and the needs of the athlete. Since things can happen so quickly at the starting line, the starter must be decisive, but not overbearing. A good starter must have a great deal of patience, and must be able to project an air of calmness at the starting line. A competent starter should be relaxed and never try to overwhelm the athletes with his/her presence. No matter what the level of competition, whether a junior high meet or the State Track Meet, the starter should be able to project the feeling that these athletes are important and that this is the most important race ever started.

1. Dress

It is important that you dress professionally. Light colored shirt (recommend officials purchase the official white track shirt), dress slacks (khaki, navy or black) and baseball type cap are recommended. Official's shorts or dress shorts are acceptable in hot weather (khaki, navy or black). Jeans or cutoffs are not acceptable. If there is an assistant starter, both should dress similarly. The SDHSAA will issue guidance on the uniform for starters at the State Track Meet.

2. Pre-Meet Duties

a. Starters meeting

1. Review positions on the track
2. Discuss hand/arm signals
3. Review starting violations
4. Review duties of the assistant starter to include when to halt the starting process.

b. Check the starting and finishing lines, relay staggers, exchange zones, cut line and cut line flags.

c. Confer with the announcer to familiarize him/her with the time schedule, plan for preliminary calls and introductions.

d. Confer with the head finish judge to assure agreement and understanding of meet procedures.

1. Red and white flags
2. Lap counter
3. Bell/gun lap
4. Procedure if FAT is used

e. Confer with the clerk of course regarding pre-race instructions to the contestants to avoid duplication of this information at the starting line.

1. Weather permitting, have them remove outer garments before moving to the starting line.
2. Have the next heat ready to move up. If the meet is on time or behind schedule, start them forward as soon as the track is clear on the final lap of the previous race. If the meet is ahead of schedule hold them until shortly before race time.

f. Confer with the meet director. Do we stay on time or is this a "rolling" schedule?

- g. If FAT is in use:
 1. Check it with your pistol.
 2. Recall procedures if FAT fails. Do they have a pistol?
 3. Who is responsible for positioning of strobe?
- h. If they have a speaker system for your use, check it out. It may dictate your starting positions.

3. Pre-race Duties

- a. Inspect your pistol to be sure that it is loaded and direct all attendants and non-competitors to move away from the starting line.
- b. Control the environment around the starting line area so the competitors are able to direct their total concentration to the start of the race.
- c. Give final instructions (especially in the sprints and hurdles). Appropriate information might include the following:

“Runners, do not delay in responding to my commands. At the command “on your marks” I will give you reasonable time to assume your position. When the command “set” is given, I will expect you to promptly come to your final position and remain motionless until the pistol is fired.”
- d. In races of where a waterfall start is being used or where more than one runner is assigned to a lane, alert runners of possible recall during the first 100 meters
- e. Following the instructions, signal the head finish judge with a whistle that the race is about to begin.
- f. When the head finish judge confirms the signal with a white flag, the competitors are asked to remove their warmup clothes if they have not been removed previously.
- g. Take a position appropriate to the type of race being run.

4. Starting the Race

- a. For races or opening relay legs of less than 800 meters, when all of the competitors are in position, the starter will give the command, “ON YOUR MARKS”.
- b. After a reasonable length of time, sufficient to allow all competitors to become motionless, the starter will give the command “SET”. If the starter believes the time taken to prepare for the command “SET” is unfair, he or she may direct the competitors to stand up and warn the offender(s) to arrive at the final set position immediately.
- c. The importance of the starter’s voice control cannot be emphasized too much. A calm voice is one of the most important characteristics of the successful starter. The starter’s voice commands should be practiced regularly, so the volume or tone is consistent from the beginning to the final set command. Again, calmness is the key. The “Set” command should never be forcefully spoken or drawn out. It can be quite disconcerting to the runners in the blocks to have a starter give the set command starting with a low “s” and finishing with a high ‘t’, or the opposite. It should be a crisp, normal spoken command, just loud enough to be easily heard by the runner furthest from the starter. Yelling the “Set” command also will disrupt the atmosphere at the starting line. Care must be taken to maintain a calm, consistent intonation throughout the command cycle in order for all the competitors to hear and comfortably react. If there seems to be confusion or problems at the starting line, it could well be due to the vocal commands of the starter. After the “Set” command, the starter should be certain that all competitors, at once and without delay, assume their final position.
- d. The “hold” is the length of time between the “Set” command and the firing of the gun. Any hold of less than 1.5 seconds does not allow the athletes sufficient time to get into the set position. There are two activities that require sufficient time to occur between the “Set” command and the firing of the gun. First, the starter needs to ensure that all the competitors have come to a full and complete set position, and have stabilized or are still. This requires a finite amount of time to do properly, usually a minimum of 1.5 seconds. Second, consider what the athlete must do in sequence: they must hear the “Set” command, respond to it by directing the body to begin rising to the set position, sense when the body has reached the correct position, stop body movement, and then refocus on listening for the gun and concentrating on the explosive reaction of the sound of the gun. While this becomes an almost automatic sequence with experience, for both the novice and the experienced competitor this still takes a finite amount of time to complete. If the gun is fired with less than 1.5 seconds of hold time, there is an extremely high probability that at least one runner has not had sufficient time to complete this process, and the starter has

created a disadvantage for someone by firing a quick gun. A good hold time will range from 1.8 to 2.2 or 2.3 seconds. It is adequate to give the starter the time to view the field and adequate to give the athletes the time to get settled in the set position and refocus on reacting to the gun. If a starter has to wait for an athlete who is slow in coming up or reaching a stable position at about 2.5 or 2.6 second the starter should be ready to call the runners up. A starter should practice voice commands regularly and time himself/herself from the "Set" command until the trigger is pulled.

- e. The starter may for any reason, either before or after the "SET" command, cancel a start by directing all competitors to stand up. After making the appropriate adjustments, a new start will be made.
 - f. The use of arm signals, with either vocal or whistle commands, assist both the competitors and timers.
 1. When competitors are starting from a crouched position, the starter should raise the gun to the proper over-the-head position and give the command "ON YOUR MARKS". At the same time swing the other arm, starting with the elbow straight and hand at side, backward and upward over the head and then down in front, ending with the hand pointing to the ground in front.
 2. After a reasonable length of time sufficient to allow all competitors to become motionless, give the command "SET" and at the same time quickly raise the free hand above the head.
 3. Fire the pistol only after you are certain all competitors are set and motionless. If this interval is too long, the competitors should be called up and the race restarted.
 - g. When the starting marks are staggered for two turns or more, and a speaker system is not available, the starter should explain that whistle commands will be used.
 1. The starter will, after taking a position in front of the runners and inside the race course:
 - a. Give five or six short blasts on the whistle. This is the signal for the runners to "stand at their marks".
 - b. With the gun raised over the head, give one long blast on the whistle and at the same time swing the other arm over the head the same as for vocal commands. This is the signal for all runners to get "ON YOUR MARKS".
 - c. After a reasonable delay, the starter will sound another long blast and at the same time raise the arm over the head. This is the signal for all runners to come to the "SET" position. When all are "set and motionless" the starter will fire the gun.
 - d. If for any reason the starter wishes to call the runners "off their marks" he/she blows five or six short blasts on the whistle and at the same time moves the arm in front of the body.
 - h. Individual races or relay legs of 800 meters or longer, the starter shall use one command, "ON YOUR MARKS".
 1. To alleviate the problem of leaning or movement at the starting line on this preliminary command, all competitors should be asked to take a position three meters behind the starting line. On the command "ON YOUR MARKS", all competitors will, without delay, step up to the starting line and when all are "set and motionless" the pistol will be fired.
 - a. The starter will begin this command with the pistol raised over his head and the other hand pointing to the ground in front.
 - b. When the command "ON YOUR MARKS" is given, the starter will at the same time raise the arm over the head.
 - c. When all are "set and motionless", fire the pistol.
5. Assistant Starter
- a. The assistant starter shall assist the starter in each race. The assistant starter has the same authority as the starter to ensure a fair start in each race.
 - b. The assistant starter may stop the race and recall the competitors if there is an unfair start.
 - c. A race, including relays, shall be recalled in the first 100 meters when a competitor falls due to contact with another competitor in the following situations:
 1. The race is not started in lanes (waterfall start) or
 2. Two or more competitors are assigned to a single lane (or alley).
 - d. During distance races, this official should take a position on the first turn where there may be a spill which would be cause for recalling the race.

- e. Unless a bell is used, the assistant starter is assigned the duty of firing a pistol to begin the last lap of individual races of three laps or more.
6. Reason to Halt the Starting Process
- a. While not all inclusive, the following is a list of some examples of when to halt the starting process:
 - 1. Crowd control
 - 2. Starting block problems
 - 3. Obstructions on the track
 - 4. Slow athlete
 - 5. Announcer interrupting
 - 6. Wrong starting line
 - 7. Inclement weather, outside noises
 - 8. Slow roll-up
 - 9. Bad shell/misfire
 - 10. Flinch or Buck or Runners having difficulty holding the set position
 - 11. Slipped blocks
 - 12. Stumble – If the runner stumbles during the first two steps, the race should be recalled, since this should be considered an unfair start. If the stumble occurs after second step, the race **should not** be recalled, since the runner is in his/her stride pattern by this time.
 - 13. Runners request – At any time from the “On your marks” command until the gun goes off, a runner may halt the start of a race by raising a hand and requesting a delay. This can be for any of several reasons, e.g. the blocks not being properly adjusted, dirt or dust blown in an eye, or crowd noise.
7. False Starts
- a. Starting violations which constitute a false start include:
 - 1. Failure to comply with the starter’s commands
 - 2. Having any part of the body in contact with the starting line or running surface beyond the line when the pistol is fired.
 - 3. Failure to remain motionless after assuming the set position prior to the pistol being fired.
 - 4. Repeated use of disconcerting acts.
 - b. A competitor who commits a false start shall be disqualified.
8. The Three Point Start
- a. On the command “ON YOUR MARKS” the athletes hands must be on or below the knee of the forward leg.
 - b. On the “SET” command, the hand opposite the forward foot gently touches the track right next to the line. Simultaneously, the opposite arm should be cocked, with the hand positioned next to the forward hip or raised behind the body.
 - c. If any athlete is slow in taking either position, runners are called up and the athlete is given a warning.
 - d. A false start in this starting position usually occurs when the athlete starts leaning or falling forward or when the upper arm starts down. The forward arm will start back when the upper arm starts down.
9. Other Duties and General Thoughts
- a. Be responsible for avoiding unnecessary delay in continuance of events.
 - b. Observe and assist in ruling on relay exchanges and finishes.
 - c. Starters are to create fair starts and keep the meet moving. Do not make the position more glorified than it is or call undue attention to the position or yourself. Be “smooth” in giving starting commands.
 - d. Track layouts may dictate different positioning. Be flexible enough to allow various necessary adjustments.
 - e. In all cases, fairness to all runners should be the primary consideration.
 - f. Professionalism and good common sense will get the job done properly.

Positioning

STRAIGHTAWAY – (100, 100 Hurdles, 110 Hurdles)

Starter – On inside of track about 5-7 yards down from starting line

Assistant – On outside of track about 3-5 yards down from the starting line and in view of the starter. Will check hand placement and observe a false start. The assistant will observe lanes 1 through 4 and the starter will observe lanes 5 through 8.

Signal – after “ON YOUR MARKS” command, assistant raises off gun arm parallel to the track when all runners he is responsible for have complied with the command.

ONE TURN STAGGER – (800, 1600, 3200, 3200 Relay)

Starter – On infield equidistant from all runners. Will observe lanes 1 through 4.

Assistant – On outside of lane 8 and in view of the starter. Will observe lanes 5 through 8, checking foot placement and observe false start.

Signal – Assistant starts with off arm parallel to the track. After “ON YOUR MARKS” command and all runners in lanes 5 through 8 have moved up to the starting line and are “set and motionless” the assistant raises off arm above head. When arm starts up starter can fire pistol if his runners are also set.

ONE TURN STAGGER – (200, 300 Hurdles)

Starter – On the infield equidistant from all runners. Will observe lanes 1 through 4.

Assistant – On infield, in view of the starter, slightly ahead of lane one. Will observe lanes 5 through 8, checking foot placement and observe false start.

Signal – After “ON YOUR MARKS” command, assistant raises off gun arm parallel to the track when all runners have complied with this command. After “SET” command when all runners in lanes 5 through 8 are set, raises off gun arm above head. When the arm starts up the starter can fire the pistol if his/her runners are set.

TWO TURN STAGGER – (400, 400 Relay), THREE TURN STAGGER - (Medley, 1600 Relay), and FOUR TURN STAGGER – (800 Relay)

Starter – On the infield equidistant from all runners. Will use whistle commands, if speaker system is not available, and observe lanes 1 through 4.

Assistant – Behind runner in lane 4 in view of starter. Will observe lanes 5 through 8, check hand placement and observe false start.

Signal – After “ON YOUR MARKS” command, assistant raises off gun arm parallel to the track when all runners in lanes 5 through 8 have complied with the command. After “SET” command when all runners in lanes 5 through 8 are set, raises off gun arm above head. When arm starts up, starter can fire pistol if his/her runners are set.

CHECK LIST FOR STARTERS

The following are check lists for head starters and recall starters covering their major responsibilities

Head Starter

- Arrive a minimum of one hour before the meet is to start.
- Look over the facility – study the color codes for the starting lines; 1-turn, 2-turn and 3 turn staggers; break points, etc.
- Anticipate problems – improper markings, no batons, lap counters, starting blocks, etc.
- Obtain time schedule from Meet Director or Clerk of Course.
- Synchronize watch with Meet Director and/or Head Timer
- Discuss hand and arm signals to be used with finish line personnel and announcer.
- Check for obstructions between starter's positions and timers.
- From the 200 M start, is the background too light so that the timers cannot see the smoke? (May need to adjust the starter's position)
- Check blocks and hurdles. Are they correct? Does the starter crew have to move them, or are there helpers?
- If a sound system is to be used for staggered starts, check to make sure all speakers are working and it can be heard easily from each lane.
- Establish starter and recall starter positions for straight and staggered races.
- Determine how the "all clear" will be received from each exchange zone before the start of the 4x100 relay.
- If a photo timer is being used, check out the system with the operator (i.e., check that the sensor is operating correctly at each starting line).
- Discuss duties and responsibilities with the recall starter(s).
- Pick up shells from host coach. Always check to make sure the shells are black powder, not smokeless.
- Do not discard used shells in the track area. Keep them on your person until you can properly dispose of them.
- If using headphones to communicate with the finish line and photo timer, check to make sure they are operating correctly.

Assistant/Recall Starter

- Arrive early with the head starter before the meet.
- Look over the facility and study the color codes for the starting lines, etc.
- Discuss with the head starter the conduct and signals to be used during the meet.
- Obtain the time schedule for the meet.
- Identify the positions the head starter wishes the recall starters to use.
- Assist at the starting line with starting blocks, answering questions, checking equipment such as batons, numbers, etc.
- During the start of a race, never have finger on the trigger and never have the gun cocked.
- For sprint races, when the runners are in their blocks, quickly check hands and see if there are any problems. If you spot a problem, call the runners up.
- For distance races, if you are on the line, quickly check to see that toes are behind the line. Call the runners up and reset them if there is a problem. If a photo timer is being used, help moving the cables.
- Have either a .22 or a .32 caliber pistol available for recalling.
- Establish whether or not the recall starter is responsible for firing a gun or ringing a bell to signal the "gun lap" on distance races.