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NOTES ON STARTING SWIM MEETS

Who should be a Starter?

Many people find themselves STARTERS of swimming races through various circumstances. Many times this happens because a starter is needed and that person just happened to be there at the time. Others push themselves into the spot as the result of an "ego trip", their desire to be "authority" in the limelight. Still others have gone through all facets of officiating and know all of the ins and outs of officiating and have studied the importance of the Starter.

Only the latter, should be considered when the starter is being selected for any meet whether it be at the "C" level or a National meet. The starter's position is no place for an "ego trip" looking for recognition or for the person seeking power and authority over a group. Neither is it a showplace for the "ham" actor. The best starter goes out on the deck, does his job and is seldom noticed by most of the people at the meet with the exception of the swimmers. Have you ever worked a meet and had several swimmers come up to you and thank you for doing a good job? Work for it, it is a big thrill.

Philosophy of the start

Now that automatic starting and judging equipment is becoming more prevalent in our meets, the starter must learn to use the various types of equipment that he may find at the pools. The BEEPER is rapidly replacing the gun, but use of the beeper is putting an additional requirement on the starter. He must know of operational peculiarities of the hand control. Because of this, the Starter must give himself enough time before a meet to become familiar with the equipment being used. When fully automatic timing and judging equipment is used, the starter becomes the only person on the deck who has any direct influence on the outcome of any individual performance in the pool. If the start is not given as impartially and precisely at the right moment, one or more swimmers have an advantage over the others who are at a disadvantage. This same philosophy also applies to the gun start.

Firing the gun..., and points leading up thereto:

First of all ... and a point often overlooked ... IT IS NO SIN TO HAVE A FALSE START!

If someone has an advantage over the others, FIRE THE SECOND GUN, OR HIT THE BEEPER! Five other swimmers will silently thank you; most of them will have seen it. Many people who start meets feel that a few false starts or recalls is due to the starter's inconsistency. Consistency is the key to any sport officiating, not mechanical patterns but consistency. One of the fundamental points to remember is that the swimmers on the blocks are about to enter into strenuous COMPETITION and every true competitor

will strive to gain every advantage he or she can over the others. That same person is also a FAIR competitor and will readily respond to a starter who exhibits impartial fairness to all. Younger swimmers don't present the same problems that do the older ones, particularly, the Senior swimmers and the AA and AAA swimmers. The starter who finds it necessary to place undue restrictions on the swimmers at the blocks should take a long look in the mirror and have a questioning conversation with the person looking back.

NOTES FOR THE STARTER. Cont'd.

THE METHOD What is the secret? Two very important points and much, much, much practice.

1. When the swimmers are called to the blocks, give them time to wind down the fidgets, adjust the glasses and pull down the suits. Give them time to get ready, (this only takes a very few moments...much less time than a false start by a swimmer who isn't ready). Watch for the "magic moment sign" of "we're ready", then calmly, conversationally, give a dignified "take your mark". Your voice inflection is most important at this point. This is the end of your conversation with them... after telling them what they are to do, and this will be treated more fully later, your voice inflection asks them to "take your mark".

Your voice should have a politeness to it. Not a big question "are you going to"? but a "I know you will" tone. If the first "come down" is ragged, stand them up immediately. Nine times out of ten someone is going to go in: if your command was given too early, this often happens and it is really your fault even though you will probably charge the one who did go in just on general principles. But if your command is given at the right moment, it will be a good start. The percentage even gets much better as the swimmers get used to you and respect you and trust you.

2. WHEN TO FIRE THE GUN OR PUSH THE BUTTON... another magic moment ...!

First of all, recognize that there is very rarely a point at which all people on the blocks are completely motionless. It can be honestly said that such is the case in less than one in twenty starts. However, there is a point at which the competitors are ready as they will ever be for that particular group. You may be able to recognize this and fire immediately! The worst thing that a starter can do is to make that charged up swimming machine remain in that wound up position for more than a fraction of a second, let alone for three or four. They just won't tolerate it. The second worst thing that a starter can do is to fire BEFORE ALL are ready or locked down. A good starter learns to recognize when that swimming machine is coiled, cocked and ready to spring.

It is learned through week in and week out of practice and experience in observing and working with swimmers. If you really want to be a good starter, make it a point to go to a meet where a recognized good starter is working, sit

behind him or her and listen and watch. After a while you will get to know exactly what he or she is going to do. Mentally go through the motions yourself, it will make it much easier when you pick up that gun for the first time.

3. WHAT TO SAY ... AND WHEN AND WHEN NOT TO SAY IT ...

As was stated earlier, the starter is on the deck for the sole purpose to get the swimmers off in a fair and impartial manner. Prior to getting them off though, there are certain things that must be said according to the rules. Any more than that is up to the dictates of the situation. For the experienced swimmers, the A swimmers on up know what they have to do. The rules require that the starter announce the distance and event and when a warning shot may be fired ... nothing more! Any more than that is a distraction to the swimmers of that caliber... Remember all swimmers in this class are out to make a specific time or goal. Any remarks other than that is not what the starter is out there for.

The starting position is not a place for rhetoric, neither is a starter judged on his or her eloquence.