



STARTERS

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**Monograph Series on Track and Field Officiating Technique
from the
Training Subcommittee (Rex Harvey, Chair)
USATF National Track and Field Officials Committee**

This monograph on Starters is part of an instructional series of monographs on the mechanics and techniques of track and field officiating from the Training Subcommittee (George Kleeman, Chair) of the USATF National Track and Field Officials Committee. It was written by Eric D. Zemper, Ph.D., drawing on the previous writings and expertise of Dr. Kelly Rankin, Dr. Charles Dailey, Fred Adler, Tom McTaggart, Joseph Caruso, and Bill Buttermore, with additional helpful comments from Raymond Pierre. Much of the material contained herein has been utilized in training clinics for starters developed and presented for several years by Drs. Dailey, Rankin and Zemper. That clinic, in turn, was based largely on a book written by Drs. Dailey and Rankin, *Track Starter's Guide*, published in 1990 by the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 1900 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091. (Elements of that book are used as the basis for parts of this monograph with the authors' permission.) My thanks to all of the above named individuals for their help, direct or indirect, in writing this monograph.

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(NOTE: Throughout this document, where either masculine or feminine gender is used in referring to officials or to athletes, both masculine and feminine gender is implied.)

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Starters Monograph

Introduction

Every year in this country there are millions of track athletes participating in tens of thousands of track meets started by thousands of different starters. Every starter brings a unique background and set of experiences to this task. Despite working under a specific set of rules governing the starting of races, there often can be wide variability in the way races are started from one starter to another or from one region of the country to another, or even within a small geographic area. While variety may be the spice of life, too much variety in the way starters handle a start can be very disconcerting for the athlete on the starting line. The start of any race should be a time when athletes can focus on their performance and not have to worry about just how this particular starter operates. At the start of a race, all actions and activities of a good starter will be conducive to a calm atmosphere that allows the athletes to focus their attention on their start.

This monograph is intended to present some suggestions for providing a consistent approach to handling duties at the starting line for all starters, whether they have years of experience or are just starting out. In some cases, alternatives for specific techniques and mechanics of starting are presented, with the hope that a starter will feel free to try these different techniques to see what feels most comfortable. But the overall goal is to give everyone who reads this monograph a common background and approach to the duties of a starter in the hope that it will reduce much of the confusion and distraction athletes may feel when they work with a new starter for the first time.

Characteristics of a Good Starter

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 starters (and for all track and field officials) should be: *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 the starter (and any other official) is that if you leave the meet unnoticed, your job has been well-done. The attention should always be on the athletes. Officials are there only for the purpose of ensuring the meet is conducted according to the rules, not to “grandstand” or draw attention away from the competitors.

Other characteristics of a good starter that often are mentioned include being physically fit, mentally alert, having good eyesight and reactions, the ability to concentrate, possessing a love of youth, and a love of the sport. Common sense and tact also are required. Because the starter is in complete control of the start of a race, and (with certain exceptions to be discussed later) the starter's decisions cannot be appealed, he 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 brusque. A

good starter must have a great deal of patience, and must be able to project an air of calmness at the starting line. It is not enough to be calm yourself, you must be able to project that sense of calmness to the athletes. On occasion a good sense of humor also is necessary. A competent starter should be relaxed and never try to overwhelm the athletes with his or her presence. A competent starter also practices preventive officiating. If a starter sees a situation developing that could result in a problem, he should do something to correct the situation immediately, before it does become a problem. As should be the case with any other official, the competent starter always gives the athlete the benefit of the doubt. And no matter what the level of competition, whether a junior high meet, the Special Olympics, or a national championship, the starter should be able to project the feeling that these athletes are important and that this is the most important race ever started. Sam Bell, former track and field coach at Indiana University, has described a good starter as “one who is friendly, and creates confidence and relaxation in the athletes. He must have complete knowledge of the rules and maintain control, yet never lose compassion for the athletes.”

Pre-Meet Activities

Leaving aside prior details like confirming the date and time of the meet with the meet director or coach, the first thing a starter should do on the day of a meet is to check the equipment bag. Make sure all the equipment needed for that day and the anticipated weather conditions is available (see the later section on "Starter's Equipment - What's in the bag?"). It is a good idea to arrive at the track at least an hour before the start of the first event, to allow time for an unhurried review of the track facility. This includes checking for the correct location of all starting lines and the finish line (especially if you have not worked at this particular track before), location of cables (if automatic timing is being used) and any other electronic equipment such as a sound system. If the track does not have a 3 meter 'walk up line' for the starting lines of the distance races, it is a good idea to carry a piece of white or yellow sidewalk chalk with you in a plastic baggie to make your own 3 meter marks on the track. At this time it also is advisable to check with the meet director or referee to see if there are any last minute changes in the event schedule, or any special circumstances the starter needs to be aware of. Also, meet with the chief clerk to confirm the process for bringing athletes to the starting line and to review the instructions the athletes will be given by the clerks.

Next, the starter and recall starters should get together for a pre-meet conference. If any members of the crew have not worked together before, this is the time for the starter to briefly review the positions of each recall starter for each type of race, and the communication signals between starter and recall starters (see later sections on these topics). The chief or head starter should let everyone know who is assigned to start each race. If there is a complete novice on the crew, this individual might need to spend a couple of meets just being a recall starter, observing and getting a "feel" for how everything works. Otherwise, it is a good practice for the starter to assign the responsibility of starting a few races in each meet to each of the recall starters on the crew. This can begin with starting distance races for novice starters, gradually taking on responsibility for starting sprint races once they gain more experience and confidence. The starter should act as a mentor to those on the crew who are new to starting, offering constructive advice and praising good technique and mechanics. It is helpful for the starter to bring each member of the crew a 3x5 card with the event schedule printed on it, so each can make notes on assignments and have a handy reference during the meet for the event order and time schedule. If there is someone responsible for moving the starting blocks, that individual also should have a schedule card.

Finally, the starter should meet with the finish line crew. If you have not worked with this set of finish line officials, it is a good idea to review the procedures you will use, and any whistle signals or arm signals you will use, so they know what to expect. (See the later section on communication between the starting line and finish line.) When fully automatic timing is being used, check with the camera crew to confirm how they will let you know when they are ready for the next race, and how you will alert them that you are ready to start the next race. If there is an announcer for the meet, check with this individual to work out the logistics of when to start announcing race participants' names, so these announcements do not delay the start of the race. Usually this announcement should begin about two minutes before the scheduled start of the race, or right after you have given the order to remove the warm-up gear. And make sure the announcer understands that, once you have called the runners to their marks, an announcement should not begin until after the race has started (unless it is a call for quiet for the start). Communication between the starter crew, the finish line, the clerks and the announcer, and an understanding of the need to avoid delays, are vital to keeping a meet running on time.

Recall Starters

In small meets, particularly at the junior and senior high school level, a starter often may have to work without a recall starter. But if one or more recall starters are available, these individuals normally are responsible for assuming control of the athletes when they are brought to the start area by the clerks, doing last minute checks of bib numbers and uniforms, and ensuring each athlete is on the proper start line and in the proper lane or start position. In races using starting blocks, the recall starter should be prepared to assist athletes having problems setting their blocks. When all is ready, the recall starter lets the starter know that the athletes are ready to begin the race, and then assumes the assigned position to observe the start, checking for toes or fingers over the line and for false starts.

A recommended alternative, particularly for larger meets, is to have a 'line clerk' or 'start clerk', one of the clerk crew who is knowledgeable about starting and activities at the starting line, and who stays with the starter crew throughout the meet. This individual gives final instructions to the athletes and does all the other tasks noted above for recall starters, up to but not including observing the start. A good line clerk can contribute a great deal to the efficient, on-time operation of a meet. This official is very similar to the 'starter's assistants' or 'marksmen' used in Canada and Europe, except that when the starter begins the starting commands, the starter's assistants/marksmen also take specific positions to observe the start, also checking toes and fingers. While they do not have starter pistols to recall a race, they can signal the starter to stand the athletes up if they see a problem, and they are additional pairs of eyes that the starter can consult if necessary.

Instructions to Competitors

Most of the instructions regarding the race should have been provided to the athletes by the clerks in the Clerks Circle, but the starter should give some brief instructions before the start of each race to ensure that your procedures and expectations are clear to every runner. These explanations should be given about 2-3 minutes prior to the start, and be kept brief so as not to unduly distract the runners as they prepare for their race. The length of your comments will vary with the experience level of the competitors. With youth age group competitors, junior high school and even high school competitors, you will want to be thorough and give instructions up to and including the finals. At the collegiate level somewhat briefer instructions are appropriate for the preliminary rounds, but the

runners may need only a brief reminder for the finals. For elite athletes, generally no instructions are necessary from the starter, at most a brief reminder to hold steady and wait for the gun.

An example of a more thorough set of instructions appropriate for sprint races (less than 800 M) for high school or early season collegiate runners is as follows:

"There will be two verbal commands and then the gun to start the race. Please stand behind your blocks and, when I give the command 'On your marks,' come forward and get settled into your blocks without any delays. When everyone is settled, I will give the 'Set' command. Come up to a full, complete set position without any hesitations or slow roll-ups, and then hold steady and wait for the gun. I will not surprise you with a quick gun, I will hold you until I am satisfied everyone is still and in control. React to the gun; do not try to anticipate it to the point that you disqualify yourself. Are there any questions?"

An example of the starter's instructions for a distance race (800 M or more) is as follows:

"There will be one verbal command and then the gun at the start. We will use the 'International' start or walk-up start. Please line up about 3 meters behind the starting line and, on the command 'On your marks,' come forward quickly to the starting line, checking to make sure your toes are not on or over the line. When everyone is still and in control, I will fire the gun. If anyone goes down because of contact in the first 100 meters, we will fire a recall gun and bring you back to start you again. You will receive lap times here on every lap. Are there any questions?"

(NOTE: Recalling because of a fall caused by contact with another athlete in the first 100 meters is allowed under NFSHSA and NCAA rules; it is not mentioned in the USATF or IAAF rule books.)

In each case you have reminded the runners of what the command cycle will be, and what your expectations are after each of the commands. And you have assured them that you will give everyone the opportunity to be focused and thoroughly prepared for the starting signal.

In meets involving younger athletes or Masters athletes, there will be occasions where individual runners in the shorter races will not use starting blocks. In such cases the starter should identify these athletes and give them additional instructions following the instructions to those using blocks. These competitors should be informed that after the "On your marks" command they should toe the line and stand relaxed until the "Set" command, since it will take some time for those using blocks to get settled into their blocks. Upon the set command they should assume their final starting position and hold steady until the gun is fired. Sometimes a runner in this situation will begin to move or fall forward before the gun, often because they lose their balance as a result of their feet being too close together. The starter or recall starter should call the competitors up, suggest to the runner having the problem that a wider stance might solve the problem, and start the command cycle again.

For race walks and wheelchair races, the instructions are basically the same as for the distance races. The modification in instructions for the wheelchair racers is that they must have the axle of the front wheel of their chairs behind the starting line.

Position of Starter and Recall Starters

When the pre-race instructions are completed, the starting crew should move to their positions for the start of the race. The exact positions can vary considerably, depending on whether you are working alone or with one to four recall starters, and on the physical layout of the starting area. The following are general suggestions. The primary factor to keep in mind is that the starter should, in most cases, be in a position where the entire field of runners can be seen in as narrow a field of vision as reasonably possible. The preferred view for the starter is more of a side view of all competitors, in order to catch any forward movement before the gun. In addition, particularly in sprint races with a staggered start, the starter ideally should be positioned so the sound of the gun travels roughly an equal distance to the runners in the inside and outside lanes. In this position the starter must rely on the recall starter(s) to help provide visual control of all athletes at their marks. Theoretically, the sound of the gun traveling an equal distance to all athletes may not be so critical when a sound system is used with speakers near each runner, either alongside the track or mounted on each individual starting block, as is the case with some electronic blocks (but see discussion of this issue on the next page).

Sprint races - straightaway. For the short sprint and hurdle races on a straightaway, there are two usual positions for the starter. To provide a good side view of all runners, the starter may stand about 3 meters in front of the start line and about 8-10 meters back from the inside edge of the track, preferably on an elevated stand (the position favored by Canadian and many European starters). This allows more of a side view of all competitors to be able to detect any forward movement prior to the gun, yet allows enough of an angle to be reasonably able to detect slow roll-ups. Alternatively, the starter may stand about 8-10 meters in front of the starting line, near the edge of the track, or back a few meters from the edge of the track if there is sufficient room. This is far enough away to provide good visual contact with every lane, but close enough that the verbal commands can be heard by all the runners without having to shout, and it provides a more equidistant position with regard to lanes 1 and 8. Whether the starter stands on the inside or the outside of the track may be personal preference, or it may be dictated by the physical facility (e.g., a fence right next to the edge of the track on one side). If automatic timing with cables rather than a radio link for the gun sensor is being used, the location of the sensor cable may dictate on which side of the track the starter will stand. If possible, it is best to stand on the opposite side of the track from the timers at the finish line, since this makes the starter more easily visible to the timers.

If there are recall starters available, they should take the following positions. If there is one recall starter, this person should stand on the opposite side of the track from the starter, about 1-3 meters in front of the starting line and 3-5 meters from the edge of the track (if the physical facilities allow), if the starter is out further from the start line; or near the edge of the track about 8-10 meters in front of the start line if the starter is in the position more in line with the start line. While the recall starter should be responsible for viewing the whole starting field, it is easier to encompass more runners in your field of focus when those runners are further away as opposed to those in the closest lanes. Therefore, the recall starter who must stand next to the edge of the track near the starting line should primarily focus on the five runners on the opposite side of the track, and keep track of the closest runners only in peripheral vision. The starter, while still covering the whole field, can focus on the five runners farthest from her side of the track, and the two will overlap on the middle two runners (assuming an eight lane track). If a second recall starter is available and the starter is positioned closer to the starting line, this person should stand near the edge of the track on the same side as the starter, about 8-10 meters in front of the starting line (and the first recall starter on the opposite side of the track takes a position 1-3 meters in front of the starting line, allowing more of a side view of the runners). If the starter is further out in front of the starting line, both recall starters should stand on

opposite sides of the track about 1-3 meters in front of the starting line, and 3-5 meters from the edge of the track (if possible). The two recall starters should "criss-cross" their field of focus, primarily viewing the five runners farthest from themselves, with the starter viewing the whole field and focused primarily on the middle of the track. If there is a third recall starter, this person should stand 2-3 meters behind the starting line on either the same side or the opposite side from the starter, and be primarily responsible for watching for slipped blocks. If you have the luxury of a fourth recall starter, this person may be positioned either behind the starting line on the side opposite the third recall starter, also watching for slipped blocks, or 8-10 meters out in front of the starting line on the opposite side of the track from the starter. Of course, any recall starters positioned behind the starting line also are in position to note any foot or leg movement indicating a false start.

Sprint races - staggered starts (up to and including 800 M). Ideally, for races using a staggered start and with at least one recall starter available, the starter should be located on a raised platform on the infield approximately equidistant from lane 1 and lane 8, and providing the preferred side view of all competitors. This has been found to be the position that provides the fairest starting conditions for all competitors with regard to sound travel and reaction times, and with regard to the starter's view of the athletes (assuming at least one recall starter is available). The starter's position also may be dictated by the physical facility. For instance, there may be a fence on the inside of the track blocking easy access to the infield. Or the "ideal" position may be in the landing area for the discus or javelin. In such cases, the starter may need to stand near the inside edge of the track beyond the competitor in the outermost lane. If the starter is working alone, standing on the outside of the track beyond the starting line for lane 8 is preferred, so there is a good view down the line of competitors and they are all in a relatively narrow field of vision. In this case, the need for visual control of all competitors to prevent missing a false start must be the primary consideration, outweighing the need to have an equidistant position for the sound of the gun. If there is at least one recall starter, the starter should be positioned on the inside of the track. Again, this may be impacted by the location of the sensor cable, if automatic timing is being used. In some major international meets you may see the starter positioned near the outside of the track entirely behind the competitors, but this is not an optimal position, since it creates problems with detecting forward movement before the gun and problems with the sound of the gun reaching lane 8 well after the inner lanes (nearly 0.2 second difference between lanes 1 and 8 in a 400 meter stagger). [For discussions of why this starter position should not be used, see A.L. Julin and J. Dapena "Sprinters at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta did not hear the starter's gun through the loudspeakers on the starting blocks" *New Studies in Athletics* 18(1):23-27 (2003); J.R. Young, "One, Two, Three, Go!" Ottawa: Athletics Canada (2001) pp. 70-82.] Even with speakers in the starting blocks there is a problem with the athletes either reacting to the sound through the air rather than through the speakers, or reacting to the speaker sound and then thinking the later arriving sound through the air is a recall gun.

If there is a recall starter, this person should be positioned on the inside of the track slightly behind lane one, looking up the front of the line of competitors with a view of all of them, keeping them in a fairly narrow field of vision. Alternatively, the recall starter can be stationed on the outside of the track beyond the competitor in the outermost lane, looking back down the row of competitors, with the starter in an equidistant position on the infield. If there is a second recall starter, that individual can take the position not taken by the first recaller, on the inside or outside of the track looking up or down the line of runners. An alternative position for the second recall starter is on the outside of the track behind the level of lane 1, with a view of all competitors from behind. From this position the recall starter can also watch for slipped blocks. If there is a third recall starter, this person should stand near the outside of the track at about the level of lane 1, watching for slipped blocks. On those occasions when a fourth recall starter is available, the third recall starter should be positioned on

the outside of the track at about the level of the starting lines for lanes 2-3, and the fourth recall starter on the outside at about the level of lanes 5-6, both covering half the field and watching for slipped blocks.

Distance races (1500 M or longer). For distance races the starter should stand about 5-10 meters in front of the starting line, either on the inside or the outside of the track, depending on personal preference, physical facilities or location of the sensor cable. After the start of the race, the starter should turn and view the runners for the first 100 meters of the race, watching for the possibility of a recall because of a runner going down due to contact. If a recall starter is available, this person should be positioned on the outside of the track about 80 meters out from the starting line, watching for fallen runners. (As noted previously, NFSHSA and NCAA rules allow starters to recall for fallen runners in the first 100 meters, so at least one recall starter should be placed down the track to watch for this. This is the standard practice in USATF meets also, even though USATF rules do not provide for a recall for a fallen runner in the first 100 meters of a distance race. In IAAF meets, recall starters are normally placed at the starting line.) A second recall starter can be stationed either 40 meters out from the starting line watching for fallen runners, or on the side of the track opposite the starter about 2-3 meters in front of the starting line, watching to warn runners to keep their toes off the starting line. A third recall starter can take the position not taken by the second recall starter (i.e., 40 meters out or on the line). If there is a fourth recall starter, that person is positioned on the line on the same side of the track as the starter. If desired, upon the command "On your marks," a recall starter on the line can move quickly along the line checking for toes on the line, finishing in her final position for the start. If there are two recall starters on the line, they can begin standing together in the middle of the track and move in opposite directions, checking for toes on the line, until they reach their final positions on the inside and outside of the track. Of course, the starter must be careful to not fire the gun until the recall starters are clear and in position.

Starter's Stance and Mannerisms

The starter must be the primary calming influence at the starting line. Body language can be critical, and therefore you should always appear to be a person who is in control and enjoying your job. Your stance should be upright and comfortable, so all your concentration can be devoted to the runners at the starting line. Distracting mannerisms, such as unusual movements or voice commands, must be avoided. There normally is enough tension at the starting line without a starter adding to it. Examples of distracting mannerisms include:

- One leg in front of the other, spread wide, and knees bent as if the starter is also getting into the blocks.
- Stern, rigid, loud vocal commands.
- Pointing at the runners during the "On you marks" command.
- Nervous vocal noises such as constantly clearing the throat.
- Showing favoritism to certain runners by putting your arm around their shoulders, wishing them luck, etc. (This does not mean you cannot have brief friendly chats with runners during pre-race preparations; just avoid doing or saying anything that could be interpreted as showing favoritism.)
- Unusual vocal mannerisms. (See next section.)

Voice Commands

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 or sharply spoken, nor should it be 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, a high "s" to a low "t." 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. You might try using a tape recorder when practicing voice commands (or during a meet) to get an accurate idea of how you sound. If there seems to be confusion or problems at the starting line, it could well be due to the vocal commands of the starter.

Arm Signals

Starter to finish line (and competitors). The use of arm signals by the starter during the command cycle is primarily for the benefit of the timers at the finish line, so they know when to expect the gun to start the race. However, arm signals also can be of assistance when it is difficult for the runners to hear because of crowd noise or if there is a runner with a hearing impairment among the competitors, or in cases where there is a significant distance between the starter and the runners and a sound system is not available.

Prior to the start of every race, there must be communication between the starting line and the finish line, to ensure that everyone is ready for the start of the race. Ideally, there should be radios or walkie-talkies available to one member of the starter crew, the head timer, and the photo timer if one is being used. This greatly simplifies communications between these groups of officials. In the absence of radio communications, the head timer should have a red and a white flag. The starter gives a long blast on a whistle to indicate that the starting line is ready to begin the race, and the head timer responds with a white flag if the finish line is ready, or a red flag if the finish line is not yet ready (after checking with the photo timer crew if automatic timing is being used). Even if radio communications are available, it may be a good idea for the starter to use a long blast on the whistle before going into the command cycle, to let people in the infield and in the stands know that a race is about to start. In larger national and international meets it is becoming common to have a Finish Line Coordinator assigned to check on the readiness of the finish line crew and automatic timer, and handle the signal flags (also see the section on the USATF Chief Starter / IAAF Start Coordinator).

Before the start of every meet, the starter should meet with the finish line crew, to let them know what arm signals will be used during the command cycle. The IAAF and NCAA rule books are silent on the issue of starter's arm signals. The USATF calls for the gun to be raised above the head no later than the "on your marks" command and held there until the gun is fired, and the non-gun arm to be held at the starter's side. During a sprint start the high school rule book calls for the starter to hold the arm with the gun in a vertical position when the command "On you marks" is given. With the other arm make a 360 degree circle from the side up over the head and back down to the side. After the runners are settled in their blocks, just as the "Set" command is given, the non-gun arm also is brought to a vertical position. This may be appropriate for junior high school and smaller high school

meets, where you are likely to be working with relatively inexperienced timers. However, in college level meets or above, where you will more likely be working with experienced timers, the less motion, the better. If you know you are working with an experienced timing crew, you can simply raise the gun just prior to the "On your marks" command and keep the other arm at your side throughout the whole command cycle (as called for in the USATF rules). If you are using a sound system, you may have a microphone or loudspeaker in your other hand and won't be able to use it for signaling anyway. An alternative method common in international use is to keep the gun hand at the side or to raise the gun arm to a horizontal position at the time of the "On your marks" command, and then raise it to the vertical position just before the "Set" command, keeping the non-gun arm at your side (or holding a microphone). For distance races, simply raise the gun arm to a vertical position just before giving the "On your marks" command and keep it there until the gun has been fired.

There may be occasions where a whistle signal should be used instead of voice commands to the runners, such as in a 3-turn stagger start (4x400 relay), or a 4-turn stagger start (4x200 relay), and no sound system is available. If whistle signals must be used, the athletes must be given specific instructions about the signals prior to the race. The simplest method is to use several short blasts on the whistle to signal the runners to stand behind their blocks. Then one long blast signals them to get "On your marks." When everyone is in their blocks and motionless, a short crisp blast on the whistle signals the "Set" command, and then the gun is fired. The arm signals used throughout the meet should be used in conjunction with the whistle commands. If there is a need to bring the runners up from their blocks (because of a disturbance, etc.), use several short blasts on the whistle.

For starting cross country races and road races, the NCAA rule book has a specific procedure starters should use. The starter should have a red flag and a whistle in addition to the gun. The starter stands in the middle of the starting area at least 50 meters in front of the starting line. After giving instructions on how the race will be started, the starter gives one blast on the whistle to call the runners to the starting line. With the gun in one hand and the red flag in the other, the starter holds both arms straight out at shoulder level and holds that position until all runners are on the line and steady. Then the flag and the gun are raised slowly to the vertical position and the gun is fired while simultaneously pulling the flag down.

Recall starters to starter. Non-verbal communication between the recall starters and the starter is important during the command cycle. Two methods are most commonly used in which the recall starters let the starter know that they feel everyone is settled in their blocks and ready for the "Set" command. In the first method the recall starters stand with their non-gun hand held normally at their side after the "On your marks" command. When they feel the runners are ready for the "Set" command, they turn the palm of the non-gun hand out to face the starter. An alternative is to start with the palm open or out, and then turn it in toward the body when the runners are ready. In the second method the recall starters stand with their non-gun hand held out to the side, bent 90 degrees at the elbow, upon the "On your marks" command. Care should be taken to ensure the arm is held at an angle perpendicular to the line between the recall starter and the starter, in order for the arm to be readily visible to the starter. When the recall starter feels the runners are ready for the "Set" command, the non-gun arm is slowly lowered to the side of the body. Either method works well, and each starter crew should decide what they feel most comfortable using. The advantage of the first method is that it is less conspicuous. The advantage of the second method is that it is more readily visible to the starter in peripheral vision, so the starter does not have to be distracted by consciously looking at each recall starter for the signal. This can be particularly important in races with staggered starts. When there are two or more recall starters spread out over a wide area (for instance, with a three-turn stagger), instead of trying to spot all the recall starters, it may be helpful to the starter to key on the nearest recall starter

for the "All is ready" signal. Have that recall starter "on the point" on the outside of the track with a better view observe the other recall starters and lower the arm or turn the hand only after all the others have.

Relay races. One additional area where the starter must be concerned with signals is the start of the 4x100 relay. Often it is difficult for the starter to see and know when the relay exchange zones are ready. It is recommended that before the meet the starter talk with the head umpire to arrange a simple signaling system. One umpire in each of the three exchange zones should be designated to raise a yellow flag while the athletes are getting prepared, and then raise a white flag when everyone is ready. The umpire in the second exchange zone should not raise a white flag until the white flag is seen in the third exchange zone, and likewise the umpire in the first exchange zone should not raise a white flag until a white flag is seen in the second exchange zone. The starter should key on the umpire in the first exchange zone, knowing that when that white flag goes up all zones are ready for the start of the race.

Reasons to Halt the Starting Process

At any time during the cycle of starting commands, if either the starter or the recall starter feel it is not possible to produce a fair start or they are not satisfied that the start has been fair after the gun goes off, they may terminate the starting procedure. This is accomplished by calling the runners up from their blocks with a command of "Stand up" (or "Roll back" in the case of wheelchair athletes), or recalling them with a second shot from the gun. If there has been any condition or circumstance at the starting line that could be a distraction to the athletes, it is the responsibility of the starting crew to abort the start and correct the situation, so all competitors have a fair and equal start. If there is any doubt that everything is not right, it is better to bring the runners up and start again, rather than hope the situation "really was not that much of a problem." The starter must always be in control and anticipate problems. If a noisy crowd is close to the starting line, ask that they help you out during the starting commands, 'don't snap the shutter on the camera during the "Set" command', 'don't kick the fence', and 'please remain quiet.' If you are courteous to the spectators, usually they will respond in kind.

Sprint races. The following are examples of situations that could cause the starter or recall starter to bring the runners up out of their blocks or call them back after a sprint start.

- 1) *Runner's 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 to request a delay. This can be done for any of several reasons; e.g., the blocks not being properly adjusted, dirt or dust blown in an eye, or crowd noise. But this should be for a legitimate reason. If the starter feels the athlete has halted the process for no legitimate reason, or to play 'mind games' with the other competitors, the starter should give the athlete a warning that a repetition of that act will result in a disqualification. It also should be noted that the athlete is not allowed to briefly raise the hand and then run out of the blocks. Technically, this can be considered a false start and should be charged as such. The athlete should raise a hand and wait for the command from the starter for everyone to come up.
- 2) *Crowd control.* If the starter feels there is enough noise from the nearby spectators that it will distract the runners, or someone is playing a radio too loud, the command cycle should be halted until the situation can be corrected. Again, a courteous request to the spectators is generally all that is needed. On occasion the starter may have to delay a start to wait for the crowd to stop their rhythmic clapping for a field event competitor. In such cases, be patient; it should only take a few

seconds, and it is better to delay those few seconds than to risk an unnecessary false start because of crowd noise.

- 3) *Starting block problems.* Some starting blocks used by schools can be difficult to set, especially for young, inexperienced runners. Be patient, but firm in urging quick setting of the blocks, especially if there are many preliminary races to be run. The recall starters should be prepared to step in quickly to help the younger, inexperienced runners in these cases.
- 4) *Fingers on the line.* If an athlete has settled into the blocks with his or her fingers beyond the front edge of the starting line (i.e., the fingers are on the white line), the athletes should be brought up and the offending athlete advised to properly place the fingers behind the starting line. Usually a recall starter is in the best position to see this. If this is noticed early enough, the recall starter can quietly advise the athlete to move the fingers back, but if the 'set' command is imminent it is best to bring all the athletes up and then correct the problem (preventive officiating). Be aware also that a recent USATF rule change states that no body parts are allowed to touch the ground in front of the starting line at any time once the athlete has settled into the blocks; i.e., the knee can no longer rest on the ground in front of the starting line while waiting for the 'set' command.
- 5) *Obstructions on the track.* Once in awhile someone not paying attention will wander onto the track, or a piece of waste paper may blow onto the track in front of a runner, just as the "Set" command is about to be given. A runner may notice and raise a hand, or a recall starter may see it through peripheral vision.
- 6) *Slow athlete.* Occasionally an athlete will be slow in getting the warm-up clothing off, or take too long in getting settled into the blocks. During cold or rainy weather athletes may wear several layers of warm-ups, so a special effort should be made to ensure removing them does not delay everyone. The starter can help forestall this problem by telling them to get their sweats off a little earlier than normal in such weather. Once the "On your marks" command is given, there is no specified amount of time before the "Set" command. It will vary, and the starter must be somewhat intuitive in feeling when it is the right time to give the "Set" command and when it is taking too long. Often sprinters and hurdlers have their own special routines they go through as they get settled into the blocks, and sometimes these rituals are still being performed while everyone else is ready in the blocks. If one or two athletes are holding everyone else up, call them all up and caution the individual(s). In cases where this seems to have been a blatantly purposeful act, the starter can issue a yellow card warning to the individual, or request the referee to do so. If an athlete persists in delaying everyone after such a warning, the starter can request the referee to red card (disqualify) the individual, or the starter can do it if no referee is immediately available.
- 7) *Meet-oriented problems.* Even if the starter has spoken with the announcer prior to the meet about not talking while the runners are in their blocks, occasionally the announcer will begin an announcement just before or just after the "Set" command. The runners should be brought up immediately, and the starting sequence begun again. Other problems include things like the finish line not being ready, the photo timer not being ready, or an athlete being in the wrong lane. Any number of situations such as these may cause a delay, and this is a time when the calm demeanor of the starter is important.
- 8) *Wrong starting line.* On older tracks that have not yet been rebuilt to 400 meters, there often exist two sets of starting lines for each race, one for metric races and one for races in yards. This sometimes can cause confusion when lining athletes up for the start of a race, particularly races with staggered starts. For this reason, the starter should always go over the track prior the meet to make sure the correct location of each start is identified and the color code for each distance is known. For races with staggered starts, the recall starter looking up the line of runners should be able to see if one runner happens to be placed on a wrong starting line, because that individual will be clearly "out of line" with the other runners.

- 9) *Inclement weather, outside noises.* Weather can sometimes cause a delay, if there is a sudden downpour. If there is lightning in the vicinity, it is wise to delay until the storm front has passed, especially if a longer race is about to start. (NCAA and NFSHSA policy requires a meet delay whenever lightning is observed in the vicinity.) Outside uncontrollable noises may sometimes occur, such as a low-flying airplane, a nearby locomotive that decides to blow a whistle just at the "Set" command, or a clock tolling the hour. In all such cases it is best to bring the runners up and wait for the disturbance to pass.
- 10) *Slow roll-up.* During the pre-race instructions (whether given by the starter or the clerk), the athletes should be told that on the "Set" command they are to come immediately up to the full and final set position without any hesitation or slow roll-up. If a slow roll-up does occur, the runners should all be called up immediately and the individual cautioned. In meets where the runners are disqualified after the second false start, some runners tend to play games with the starter and the rest of the field. Having a "free" false start, a runner will sometimes hesitate on coming up for a fraction of a second after the "Set" command, and try to "roll" into the start without ever coming to a completely still set position. In meets where the no false start rule is in effect, this usually is not as much of a problem. Another related action to watch for is the buttocks slowly settling or drifting down after reaching the peak 'set' position. While a brief 'settle' is not uncommon among top sprinters and generally is not a problem, the starter and recall starters should watch for any delayed or lengthy downward movement. This could be an alternative way to attempt to 'roll' into a start, and it could be distracting to competitors on either side to the point of causing them to false start. If this movement is seen, the athletes should be called up and the offending athlete verbally warned, or issued a yellow card warning, and issued a red card if the athlete persists in this action.
- 11) *Bad shell/misfire.* If the gun malfunctions, or a shell is a dud, the runners should immediately be called up and the problem corrected, then the runners called to their marks again. Although it may be hard to admit, it has been known that a misfire was due to the starter forgetting to load (or reload) the gun. This is one of those embarrassing situations that hopefully happens only once in a career. It is highly recommended that the starter replace the spent shell after each start, ensuring the gun always has a full load of good shells.
- 12) *Flinch or buck.* During the momentary hold at the peak of the set position, a runner may "flinch" or "buck" yet not break contact with the ground with the hands or break contact with the blocks. This action will cause the runner to move slightly forward or upward and then slightly back. If the gun is fired in the middle of this flinching action, the other runners are going forward while this runner is still going back. In such a case you are faced with a dilemma. You could let the race go on, based on the viewpoint that the athlete who flinched 'dug his own hole' (a somewhat questionable philosophy if you are supposed to be there to ensure everyone gets a fair start). While this athlete was moving, he certainly was not gaining any advantage because he was moving back when the gun fired, and you could interpret this as an unfair start and call the runners back with no penalty to the runner who flinched. On the other hand, there also is a valid point of view that holds that recalling and starting again allows this individual to correct their mistake while in some sense penalizing all those who had a fair start and now have lost concentration because of the recall. How to handle this situation in any given case may depend on how extreme the flinch was, and whether or not it could be considered an unquestionable full commencement of the starting motion (see later section on False Starts). These will always be subjective decisions on the part of the starter. However, if the runner who flinches draws a runner to either side into a false start, the runner who flinched should be charged, since by his actions he has "disturb[ed] other competitors in the race through sound or otherwise". If the flinch occurs early in the pause between the "Set" command and the gun, it may be possible for the starter to "wait it out" and let everyone stabilize before the gun is fired. If the flinch occurs late in the pause before the gun, or if more than one runner flinches, the starter (or the recall starter) should call everyone up, calm the athletes down,

and start the command cycle again. This is basic preventive officiating, giving the athletes the benefit of the doubt. Given the explosive atmosphere at the start, there occasionally will be movements of this type, and the starter crew should be prepared to handle these instantaneous situations. If a race is called back because of a flinch or a false start caused by a flinch, the starter should briefly confer with the recall starters to get input from other pairs of eyes and make sure all agree on exactly what happened before making the call.

- 13) *Slipped blocks.* Watching for slipped blocks is one of the key responsibilities of the recall starters. The two primary ways of immediately detecting slipped blocks are by the clattering sound they make when they slip, or by noting a runner stumbling or seeming to hesitate awkwardly when coming out of the blocks. If a recall starter is assigned to watch from behind the starting line, the backward movement of the blocks can be seen directly. Often it can be seen that a pair of blocks is positioned considerably further back compared with the others, after the runners have left their marks. This is another major clue for recall starters to look for to determine whether or not blocks have slipped. When slipped blocks are detected, the race should be recalled immediately, the runner involved given time to readjust the blocks and time to refocus on the start, and the command cycle started again. Blocks that have wing nuts, or other mechanisms requiring hand tightening, must be watched closely. If slipping continues, the recall starter should have someone hold the blocks during the start. Block holders should always be seated on the track surface, not standing, and should not place their feet on the backs of the pedals. Always caution block holders to stand back until the runner gets into the blocks, since some runners will kick backwards as they are getting into the blocks and could spike someone standing too close.
- 14) *Stumble.* If a competitor comes out of the blocks awkwardly and stumbles during the first or second step, the race should immediately be recalled, since this should be considered an unfair start. This might occur because the blocks slipped or because the athlete caught a spike on the track surface. At the instant it occurs you cannot be sure why it happened, but if there is any chance it was because the blocks slipped you should immediately recall because of an unfair start, giving the benefit of the doubt to the athlete. If the stumble occurs after the second step, the race should not be recalled, since the runner will have established a stride pattern at that point and is in a more upright position.

Distance races. The following are examples of situations where the start should be halted or the runners recalled during the start of a distance race.

- 1) *Runners not steady.* If the runners are not steady or still after coming up to the starting line, they should be brought up and reminded to stay still on the line until the gun is fired. The start also should be halted if a runner is off balance and is falling forward. In these situations the runners should be brought up off their marks by the command "Stand up," given a quick explanation, and set back three meters for another walk up start.
- 2) *Toes on the line.* When the runners come to the line in a walk up start, if one or more runners have a toe on or over the line, the runners should be brought up and reminded to keep their toes behind the starting line, and then set back for another walk up start. Again, this is basic preventive officiating. If one or two recall starters are assigned on the starting line, an option is to have the recall starter(s) move quickly down the line checking toes and verbally instructing any runners with their toes on the line to move them back. Of course, the starter has to wait for the recall starter(s) to clear the line before firing the gun.
- 3) *Fall during the first 100 meters.* If a runner falls because of contact with another runner anywhere during the first 100 meters of a distance race, the race should be recalled, the runners given a chance to catch their breath and refocus, and then set up for another walk up start. If a runner goes down without contact with another runner, or because of stepping on the inside rail (without being

pushed by another runner), the race should not be recalled. (NOTE: While this is a specific rule in the NCAA and NFSHSA rulebooks, it is not mentioned in the USATF or IAAF rulebooks. However, in USATF competitions it is generally considered a good practice to follow, and it is within your authority as a starter.)

- 4) *Stumble*. If a runner stumbles or slips on the first step or two, the race should be recalled as an unfair start, and started again. This situation may occur on a wet, slick track, or on an indoor board track.

In all cases, for both sprint starts and for distance starts, the best "rule of thumb" is common sense. If the starter or the recall starter feels someone is at a disadvantage, the race should be recalled or the start halted. If there is any doubt, start the race again. Just because a recall gun has been fired does not automatically mean someone has to be charged with a false start or disqualified.

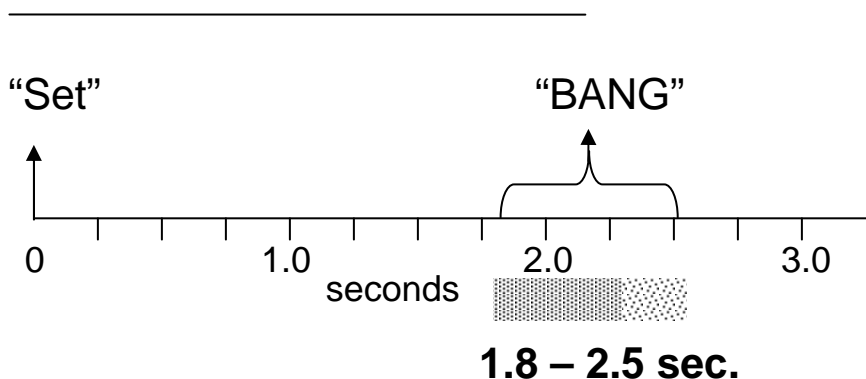
Pulling the Trigger

Pulling the trigger to start the race is the *sine qua non* of the starter's trade. The starter should be very familiar with his or her gun, and know the feel of it and how much slack is in the trigger. It should feel comfortable in the hand, and have a fairly tight trigger. A hair trigger should be avoided in order to prevent firing a "fast gun" after the "Set" command. During the command cycle, the gun should be cocked just before the "On your marks" command is given. The finger should be closed around the trigger, taking out any slack, and then the "Set" command is given. At this point the gun may be fired, or the pressure may be let up on the trigger if the runners must be called up off their marks. If the gun has a hair trigger, this is not as easy to do, because it is harder to let up pressure on the trigger without firing. The starter should avoid jerking the trigger when firing, because the hand moves and this can be distracting to the timers. It also provides a visual cue to any runners who might happen to be watching the gun. The gun hand should be held still and solid throughout the command cycle.

The "hold" is the length of time between the initiation of the "Set" command and the firing of the gun for races started out of blocks. *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. Both the USATF and IAAF rules state that following the "Set" command the gun shall be fired *after* "the Starter has ascertained that each competitor is steady and in the correct starting position." This requires a finite amount of time to do properly, usually a minimum of 1.5 seconds to ensure that the athlete taking the most time in the field of runners is steady. Second, consider what the athletes 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, make any final readjustments (many top sprinters have a tendency to "settle" slightly after reaching their top position, and you must wait for that settling to be completed), start applying constant pressure to the starting blocks, and then focus on listening for the gun and concentrating on the explosive reaction to the sound of the gun. While this becomes an almost automatic sequence with experience, this still takes a finite amount of time to complete for both the novice and the experienced competitor. Even with elite athletes, the amount of time this process takes can vary considerably within any group of athletes at the starting line. *If the gun goes off 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.*

The starter crew at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon, has worked together for many years doing a large number of national and international meets, and through our experience we have come to a consensus that a good hold time will range from 1.8 to 2.4 or 2.5 seconds (see Figure 1). 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. This is what we strongly recommend during the starters clinics we have been giving for several years. [For an additional discussion of this topic, see A. Lennart Julin, "An alternative approach to solve the false start problem", *New Studies in Athletics* 18(1):7-10 (2003); J.W. Aspland, "Starting and Timekeeping", London: Amateur Athletic Association (1969) pp. 12-14; and J.R. Young, "One, Two, Three, Go!" Ottawa: Athletics Canada (2001) pp. 89-91.] For the short sprints and hurdles, the hold time normally will average near the lower end of that range. For the longer sprints with a staggered start, it will average near the longer end of the range in order to give the starter a little more time to scan the runners spread out on the staggered starting positions. As noted in the last section, if the starter has to wait for an athlete who is slow in responding or reaching a stable set position, at about 2.7 to 2.8 seconds the starter should be ready to call the runners up. (It also should be noted that in some major international championship meets the starter will hold the runners for 3 to 3.5 seconds in order to be certain that all runners are still at the start.) A slightly longer hold is not unfair to the runners; they will adjust quite readily. Many top level athletes have specifically noted that they appreciate having enough time to get focused after the "Set" command, and would rather have enough time to get settled than have a quick gun.

Figure 1: The "Hold"



Every race will vary with regard to how long it takes for all competitors to become still and motionless, and therefore the length of the hold time will vary with every race, but still should be within the reasonable range noted above. A starter should never get in the habit of firing the gun at the exact same length of time after the "Set" command. Athletes will pick up on this in a hurry, and it is a good recipe for having runners anticipate the gun. On rare occasions all of the runners in the field will come up immediately and together, being stabilized right away. In a case like this, there is no reason to hold them if everyone is stable, and the gun can be fired at less than 1.8 seconds; but this does not happen very often.

It is a good idea for the starter to practice the voice commands regularly, at home in front of a mirror, or anywhere where others will not be disturbed. Use a stopwatch to time yourself from the beginning of the "Set" command until you "pull the trigger" by punching the button on the stopwatch. It also is a good practice to have someone time your hold intervals between the beginning of the "Set" command and the gun during meets. This is excellent immediate feedback under real conditions. At Hayward Field we do this on a regular basis among ourselves on the starter crew, particularly at the beginning of a new season, to make sure we all are in the proper range for the hold time.

Developing trust between the starter and the competitors is very important. If, at the time of the instructions, the runners are told they will not get a quick gun and will be given time to get set, then that should be the case. To tell the athletes this and then fire a quick gun will very quickly break that trust, and the result generally is confusion and frustration at the starting line.

False Starts - What to Look for and How to Handle Them

A starter who has given adequate instructions to the athletes, gained their trust and maintained a calm atmosphere at the starting line, normally will have few problems with false starts, especially in high school or collegiate meets where the "no false start" rule is in effect. Nevertheless, the starter and recall starters should be alert and fully prepared to immediately respond to a false start every time a race is started.

The IAAF, USATF and NCAA rule books now all state that, after assuming a full and final set position, an athlete is only allowed to *commence* his starting motion *after* the report of the gun or approved starting apparatus. (As of 2006, the IAAF and USATF rules state that competitors may not commence the starting motion until after *receiving* the report of the pistol/starting device.) If the starting motion is commenced prior to (or less than 0.10 second after) the sound of the gun, it is considered a false start. The high school rule book does not define a false start this clearly, but the intent is the same. These recent rule clarifications should settle a difference of opinion that has existed for many years. The old rule wording appeared to allow an athlete to internally commence the starting motion before the sound of the gun (i.e., try to outguess the starter and get a 'flyer') as long as there was no detectable motion before the sound of the gun; so if the athlete moved exactly with the gun it was felt to be a fair start. This was the opinion of a number of athletes, coaches and even some starters. Now the intent is clear: the runner is not allowed to commence starting until after receiving the starting signal (i.e., the runner must *react* to the gun, not anticipate it).

A runner who begins movement out of the starting blocks before the sound of the gun normally will move the back foot and leg first, along with the opposite hand and arm. Unless there are enough recall starters to assign at least one to watching for slipped blocks, the starter and recall starters will have to key on the arm and hand movement, since it will be more difficult for them to see movement from the legs. Upon seeing any movement out of the blocks on the part of a runner before (or with) the sound of the gun, the starter or the recall starters should give the "Stand up" command if the gun has not yet fired, or fire a recall shot if the starter's gun has fired. Be aware, too, of situations like "flinches" or "bucks," or other extraneous factors (see the above section on reasons to halt the starting process). The starter or recall starters stationed more to the side of the runners are in a better position to see hand movement and rolling starts, although it is a little more difficult to see the runner who is slow coming to the set position. On the other hand, the starter or recall starter in a position further in front of the line is in a better position to see the runner who is slow coming to the set position, but it is a little more difficult to see the runner moving forward at the gun. With the combination of proper starter and recall starter positions, there usually is little opportunity for an athlete to succeed in making an unfair start.

It should be pointed out here that the recall starter should never have the gun cocked at the start of a race, and should hold the trigger finger outside of the trigger housing. If the trigger finger is on the trigger, there is a natural tendency for the recall starter to squeeze the trigger at the sound of the starter's gun, or even before the starter's gun fires, resulting in an unnecessary recall. This can be highly embarrassing and, like forgetting to load the gun, is hopefully something that happens only once

in a career. With a little practice, one can quickly become accustomed to getting the finger on the trigger and firing the recall shot within the first 2-3 strides of the race.

Upon calling the runners up or firing a recall gun, the starter should confer briefly with the recall starters to ensure everyone agrees on what happened and who, if anyone, should be charged. Even when it is very obvious who or what caused the recall, there should at least be brief visual communication among the starter and recall starters to ensure agreement. If a recall starter has seen or heard something that the starter apparently has missed, this should be noted immediately, since it could have an impact on the starter's decision. On the rare occasions when there is no immediate agreement, the starter must make the final decision. If an athlete is to be charged with a false start, it is the starter's responsibility to notify that athlete, although a recent rule change allows the starter to assign this task to another (e.g., a recall starter or an umpire with a yellow card or flag). However, the starter is still responsible for directing this task. Keep in mind that there are many situations where there has been movement, but the runner does not have to be charged (e.g., extraneous noises, an adjacent runner flinching or bucking). Again, a competitor does not necessarily need to be charged with a false start every time there is a recall. IAAF and USATF rules now require the runners be notified of a first false start by showing them a yellow card, and a disqualification by showing a red card. In cases where no one is being charged, a green card is shown to all competitors.

After a recall for a false start, a good starter will avoid the tendency to fire a faster gun on the second start. This is a common failing, and the starter should consciously and scrupulously adhere to the normal pattern of hold times.

In 2003, the IAAF implemented a new false start rule. The new IAAF rule allows only one false start per race without disqualification. This means the first runner who jumps will not be penalized, but anyone who jumps after that first recall will be disqualified, whether or not they were the one who jumped the first time. This is sometimes referred to as the “one to the field rule.” The USATF also adopted this rule beginning in the 2004 season. However, the old rule disqualifying a runner after the second false start charged to the individual will continue to be used for Combined Events, and for Youth and Masters competition. This is in addition to the "no false start rule" used in high school and college meets in the U.S., where a runner is disqualified on his or her first false start. So as a starter you now need to be aware of what type of competition you are working and which of the three false start rules applies to a given race (Table 1): the “no false start rule” for high school and collegiate competitions, the “one to the field rule” for IAAF and USATF competitions, or the “two to the individual rule” for Combined Events and USATF Youth, JO and Masters competitions. And be aware that in a given meet there could be more than one rule applied (e.g., 'two to the individual' rule for combined event or JO athletes in one race, and 'one to the field' rule for open athletes in the next race).

Table 1: False Start Rules

Level of Competition	Rule Book	False Start Rule used
Youth / Junior Olympics	USATF	'Two to the individual' rule
High school / junior high / middle school	NFSHSA	No false start rule
Collegiate (NCAA, NAIA, NJCAA)	NCAA	No false start rule
Open / elite	USATF	'One to the field' rule
Open / elite	IAAF	'One to the field' rule
Masters	USATF / WMA	'Two to the individual' rule
Combined events	(all)	'Two to the individual' rule

Recent IAAF and USATF Rule Changes Regarding Starter's Authority

In the summer of 2001 the IAAF adopted a rule change that eliminated the phrase "and shall be the sole Judge of any fact connected with the start of the race" from the description of the starter's duties and authority, thereby allowing the track referee to overrule a starter's decision. This apparently was done in an attempt to allow recourse in situations where there was a clear false start that was not recalled by the starter or the recall starters. The USATF Rules Committee felt that this was an unwise solution to the problem, which would open up to protest every race and every decision by the starter to recall or not to recall a race. It also could potentially result in inordinate meet delays while the protest is being considered by the referee and then the jury of appeal. Therefore, the USATF did not adopt this IAAF rule change, but instead formulated a new rule implemented in 2002 that stated:

"In races where a false start control apparatus is used, a protest may be based on the failure of the starter to recall a false start. The protest may be made only by, or on behalf of, an athlete who has completed the race. If the protest is upheld, the Referee shall disqualify the athlete who committed the false start."

This was a very tightly defined, very limited change in the starter's authority. It applied *only* in races where electronic sensor blocks are being used (at the moment that is essentially major national championships and major international meets), the protest can only be made concerning a failure to call a false start (*not* when a false start *is* called), and the protest can only be made by or on behalf of a runner who completed the race. The referee will have the readout from the sensor blocks to guide the decision, and the only recourse is to disqualify the competitor(s) who false started (the race cannot be rerun). This got at the problem the IAAF was trying to fix, but did not gut the authority of the starter nor set up the possibility of major delays of the meet. Similar wording now has been adopted by the IAAF beginning with the 2006 season. Except for the top-level competitions that utilize the electronic sensor blocks, this change will have no impact on you as a starter.

Somewhat ironically, the above quoted language was removed from the USATF rule book in 2006. The situation covered by the wording of this rule is now subsumed under the authority of a start referee (USATF rule 125.3):

"When appointed, the Start Referee has the authority to make a final decision on any facts related to the start of a race where there is disagreement with a decision of the Starter. This authority is not granted in cases when the start involves a false start detected by a false start detection apparatus, unless for any reason the Referee determines that the information provided by the apparatus is obviously inaccurate or not fully considered."

The start referee will directly observe all starts and will make immediate final decisions with regard to any protests or disagreements regarding a start; i.e., these decisions regarding the start cannot be appealed to the jury of appeal, in order to minimize any delays in the competition. In the immediate future it is likely that the start referee will be used primarily in major competitions, although it will be an option at the local level if there are a sufficient number of officials available.

There also is a new USATF rule (146.4) that states:

"In races where a false start control apparatus is used, if an immediate oral protest is made regarding a decision by the Starter to charge a false start, the Referee may allow an

athlete to compete under protest in order to protect the rights of all concerned and provide the time required to determine if the information provided by the apparatus is obviously inaccurate.”

This parallels the situation in the field events where an athlete can have an attempt measured after a foul was called, in order to protect the athlete’s rights until a final determination can be made by the referee.

False Start Control Apparatus (Electronic Sensor Starting Blocks)

After several years of experimentation and development, the electronic sensor starting blocks to detect false starts are becoming more accepted and are becoming commonly used in major international meets and in U.S. open and collegiate championship meets. If you ever have occasion to start a meet that utilizes this equipment, it is recommended that the headphones that signal the false start be given to a recall starter, and the starter only use headphones that have the microphone for the speakers on each set of starting blocks. During the starter's command cycle there are a number of beeps that sound in the headphones, signaling various stages in the arming process for the sensor system, including a set of beeps after the "set" command. Many starters have found it to be very disconcerting and confusing to have all these sounds going off in their ears while trying to focus on the start of the race. Following discussions between starters and the equipment manufacturers, the systems are now set up so that it is possible for the starter to wear only a headset with the microphone, and a recall starter can be given the headset that is used for signaling a false start. The rules now allow a recall starter to wear the headset that carries the false start signal, and it is highly recommended that you request that this be the way the system is set up at the starting line. However, this is an individual decision; some starters prefer to wear the headset that gives the signals.

If there are at least three recall starters available, an option is to have the recall starter wearing the headset face completely away from the start and only be responsible for firing a recall gun if the false start signal is heard. This ensures that a recall signal is not inadvertently missed by a starter or recall starter who is primarily focused on the action at the starting line. Obviously, this should only be done when there are a sufficient number of additional recall starters to adequately cover the start. However, this option is now required in the USATF rule book if a recall starter does wear the headphones (i.e., the recall starter wearing the headphones will face away from the start line); but for all practical purposes this rule will likely only apply in USATF national championship meets where the equipment is being used and there will be an adequate number of recall starters. IAAF and USATF rules now also require that a recall signal through the speakers be an automated function of the false start detection system, if that option is available on the system being used. In other words, the athletes would hear the system’s recall signal at the same time the starter and/or recall starter hears it in the headphones. This would seem to eliminate the need for the headphones in this situation.

Before continuing with a description of the output from electronic sensor blocks, it would be appropriate to provide a brief primer on how they work. There are three primary manufacturers of these systems that are most frequently used in track and field (in alphabetical order): FinishLynx (USA), Omega or Swiss Timing (Switzerland), and Seiko (Japan). The Omega and Seiko systems utilize custom built starting blocks with pressure sensors in the foot pedals, with slightly different approaches to measuring forces and analyzing the signals produced. The FinishLynx system instead uses an accelerometer to sense motion along the axis of the starting blocks, in a housing that can be attached to most any type of starting block. The accelerometer is attached to the central spine of the

starting block assembly. There are no wires or connections to the foot pedals to sense pressure on the pedals in this system, as in the other two systems. When the athlete begins the explosive starting motion out of the blocks, the pressure put on the pedals will cause the whole block assembly to move backward slightly. This slight motion is what is sensed by the accelerometer in the FinishLynx system, whereas it is the pressure on the foot pedals that is sensed in the Omega and Seiko systems. When the rate of backward movement passes a certain threshold set in the computer software monitoring the accelerometer (or the amount of force or the rate of force increase in the other systems), this is the indication that the athlete has begun the starting motion. The trick is in setting the right threshold, so that it indicates a true starting motion and not the small movements and foot adjustments that may take place while waiting for the gun to go off. The other measurement the computer monitoring software tracks is the time from the sound of the gun until the threshold is passed. By rule, this lower limit is set at 0.10 second; any movement rate beyond the threshold that occurs before the 0.10 second time limit is presumed to be caused by an initiation of the starting motion before the gun went off. This limit is based on physiological data that indicates the normal human reaction time to sound is in the range of 0.14-0.16 second. Giving a 'safety factor' of 0.04 second, it is assumed that it is physiologically impossible for a human to react faster to the sound of the gun than 0.10 second, and therefore any 'reaction time' or 'starting time' faster than that must be the result of the athlete anticipating the gun or trying to get an unfair advantage at the start.

If you have occasion to work at a meet using sensor blocks, there are additional things you need to be aware of with regard to their use. When the equipment indicates a false start has occurred, it is recommended that you check with your recall starters first, to come to agreement on what everyone saw, before checking the results from the equipment. In most cases there should be agreement between what you saw and what the equipment indicates. If there is disagreement, it is likely one of two possible situations. First, the sensors have picked up a starting motion that was just inside the 0.10 second limit and therefore difficult to pick up visually; or second, there could have been an error on the part of the equipment. This latter possibility is admittedly rare, but it is not unheard of. Until the 2006 season, IAAF rules assumed that the sensor equipment never made errors, and therefore there was no recourse if the equipment indicated a false start. The starter or the referee had no choice; the athlete(s) must be charged. Fortunately, this lack of recourse now has been corrected beginning with the 2006 season, and the referee can over-ride the results of the sensor equipment if it is apparent that there has been a malfunction.

As a starter, you should be aware that there is more information available to you from the sensor equipment than just the printout of 'reaction times' in each lane that are immediately presented to you. You also should be aware that the technical staff handling the equipment generally are instructed not to provide information unless asked for it. Sometimes this additional information can be critical, especially in situations where there is a discrepancy between what you and your crew saw and what the machine appears to be telling you. As an example, such a situation arose in the preliminary rounds of the men's 100M at the 2005 USATF outdoor meet. After an initial false start, the next start was again recalled when the equipment indicated a false start. The starter crew all agreed they saw movement just prior to the gun in lane 5 only. The sensor equipment printout of reaction times indicated that the false start occurred in lane 4. The printout indicated lane 4's time was 0.095 second, and lane 5 was 0.205 second. At that point, appearing to have no other options, the starter disqualified lane 4. Later, the waveforms were reviewed, and they showed a different story. These waveforms are reproduced in the Appendices (courtesy of FinishLynx). Appendix A shows the summary waveforms for all lanes; lane 1 at the top, lane 9 at the bottom. This also shows movement before the gun in lane 4 (circle). (In this diagram the left-most of the two closely spaced vertical lines indicates the instant when the gun went off, and the right vertical line indicates the 0.10 second reaction time limit; each

hashmark along the bottom axis represents 0.1 second.) But notice there also was a shallow rise in the line prior to the gun for lane 5 (arrow), although apparently it did not rise to the level that it set off the sensors.

This summary waveform still does not exhaust all the information available to you, however. It is possible to look at blowups of the waveforms for each individual lane as well. Appendix B shows the waveform for lane 4. Again, it shows movement after the gun but before the 0.10 second limit (circle). Here again the left vertical line represents the instant the gun went off, but in this diagram the right vertical line represents when the movement passed a set threshold (arrow), in this case at 0.095 seconds. (Actually, there are two lines here, one at 0.095 second marking when acceleration passed the threshold, and one at 0.10 second marking the time threshold, but they are so close together it is difficult to separate them.) Appendix C shows the expanded waveform for lane 5. Now it is possible to see that there was movement recorded beginning 0.15 seconds before the gun (circle), but it fell off slightly and did not reach the threshold until 0.205 seconds after the gun (arrow). (In this diagram the left vertical line again represents the gun, the middle line represents the 0.10 reaction time limit, and the right line represents when the movement passed the threshold.) It is evident that the movement in this lane prior to the gun nearly reached the threshold, but did not quite trigger the system. Now with this additional information, it is possible to see that what the starters saw (movement in lane 5 before the gun) actually did occur, and this 'buck' or 'jerk' was of sufficient magnitude that it likely drew lane 4 next to him into a false start. (Note that the movement in lane 4 does not begin until about 0.19 second after the movement in lane 5, which is a typical reaction time to a visual stimulus. Note also that lane 5 was shutting down his start movement just as the gun went off, and could not recover and react until over 0.20 second after the gun, again typical of what happens with a 'buck' or 'jerk' just before the gun.)

All of this is not apparent from the first level of information available, the printed reaction times for each lane, nor from the second level of information available, the summary waveforms for all lanes. The third level of information is necessary, the blowups of the waveforms for each individual lane. The lessons here are to always ask for as much information as possible in these situations, and to realize that it will not necessarily be provided unless you ask for it. The equipment is there for the starter to be able to "examine the reaction times on the false start control apparatus in order to confirm which athlete(s) is/are responsible for the false start." The key word is 'confirm'. In other words, it is a tool to verify what the starter and recall starters observed visually. In most cases there will be no discrepancy; but, when there is, all the information available should be utilized to come to a final decision. And starters and recall starters should never get in the habit of relaxing their vigilance just because the false start detection equipment is being used; the human eye is still the primary tool.

USATF Chief Starter / IAAF Start Coordinator

Recently the IAAF created a position called Start Coordinator, in addition to the Starter and Recall Starters, and the USATF followed suit with a similar position called the Chief Starter. The responsibilities of this individual include 1) allocating duty assignments to the Starters and Recall Starters (e.g., assigning who will start each race); 2) supervise the duties performed by all members of the starter crew; 3) inform the Starter when all is ready for each race to start; 4) act as the intermediary between the starter crew and the technical staff operating the timing equipment and false start sensor blocks; and 5) keep all papers produced during the start (i.e., printouts from the false start sensor apparatus) until turned in to the Competition Secretary. The IAAF also stipulates that this individual will oversee the proper administration of the false start rule, including proper notification of the

athletes by a yellow (first false start), red (second false start) card or flag, or green card if no one is being charged. These are all duties that previously were done by the 'Head Starter' or senior member of the starter crew, and the intent of the IAAF is that this will continue to be the case, but with a new title. This newly defined position will not result in any change in practices at the local level for USATF meets (i.e., the 'Head Starter' / 'Chief Starter' / 'Start Coordinator' will continue to assume these responsibilities while also starting races), and it does not apply to the high school or collegiate level.

Honest Effort

On rare occasions an athlete may intentionally false start in order to be disqualified (usually because the athlete has been entered in the race and must show up, but the athlete or the coach has decided to try to "save" the athlete for a later event). The starter may eventually be asked by the meet referee to make a determination whether the athlete made an honest effort or intentionally jumped. At times this may be a subjective judgement on the part of the starter or the recall starter; at other times it may be quite obvious. Generally, the starter will not pursue the referee to report such incidents, but must be prepared to report what was observed, if asked. (NCAA rules have now eliminated the 'honest effort' rule, and thus eliminated the impossible task of assessing 'intent' for the starter and referee. The rule was replaced by a more objectively observable 'failure to participate' rule.)

Rotating Starters

If more than one head starter is used during a meet with preliminary and final rounds, it is generally advisable to assign the same starter to the same event throughout the preliminary and final rounds. Because of differences in voice and rhythm between starters, this is fairest to the athletes. However, in major meets with experienced athletes and experienced starters, it may be acceptable to assign starters without regard to keeping one starter with one event throughout the meet, especially if the starters have worked together often and have a very similar cadence in their starting commands.

Starters' Uniform

As with other officials, the uniform worn by the starters is determined by meet management. You wear whatever uniform meet management stipulates. In the absence of any requirements from meet management, it is strongly recommended that starters wear a red jacket/blazer or polo shirt. This has been the standard starters' uniform at the national level for several decades (it is what meet management at major meets often request), and it is recommended for use at all levels of competition. A brightly colored sleeve on the gun arm also is recommended (only for the starter actually starting the race). For indoor meets, a red jacket or blazer should be used with a white dress shirt and dark tie. For outdoor meets, the red blazer, white shirt and dark tie should be used, or a red polo shirt (particularly in warmer weather). The slacks (or skirt/coulottes for women) can be either black or khaki. However, black slacks are recommended, as they provide a crisper, more professional look with the red blazer. Black socks and shoes also should be worn with the black slacks.

Aside from being a tradition for many years in this country, this distinctive uniform for the starters is worn for several reasons: 1) so the starter is easy to spot by the hand timers at the finish line (despite all the wonderful electronics, there should always be a minimum of three human back-up

timers); 2) to make the starter easier to spot as a service to the many spectators and coaches who time races themselves; and most importantly 3) to make it easier for the members of the starter crew to spot each other during the starting sequence. If the starters do not have a uniform distinctive from all the other officials and personnel in the area, it can be difficult for a head starter to quickly spot the rest of the crew among all the bodies around the track at a large meet when looking for the hand signals that pass among the starter crew during the starting commands. Because of the need to avoid unnecessary delays during the starting sequence, this visual activity needs to be instantaneous, and the distinctive red starters' uniform makes this visual processing much easier. For these reasons the red blazer or shirt is the standard for starters, to provide them with a uniform that is easily and quickly spotted, yet is professional and not garish in appearance. It also fulfills the requirements of the USATF rule specifying that starters must be clearly identifiable among all other personnel at the starting line.

Ear Protection

It is highly recommended that the starter protect the ears from the sound of the gun blast. Race after race, meet after meet, year after year, firing the starting gun will take its toll on the auditory nerves of the ear, eventually creating hearing loss, starting in the high frequency range. Good earplugs are highly recommended, rather than cotton or inexpensive earplugs. They should be used in both ears, not just the ear closest to the gun. A good earplug should be comfortable in the ear and allow hearing normal conversation. They should not block out all sound, since it is important that the starter be able to hear noises that may distract the athletes during the start. Some starters use the earmuff or headphone type of ear protection often seen on target ranges. This is a reasonable alternative, as long as the individual does not have to wear radio headphones for communication purposes during the meet. When wearing radio headphones, earplugs still should be worn, since radio headphones are not designed to give sufficient noise protection to the ears.

Another means of long-term protection of hearing for the starter is to use an open barrel pistol. Much of the noise will be directed straight upward with an open barrel pistol, rather than to the side (and toward the starter's ears) as with a closed barrel starter pistol. Tests have shown that the decibel level at the head with an open barrel pistol is significantly lower than with a closed barrel pistol. However, with an open barrel pistol, you will have to go through the process of getting a weapons permit from the appropriate local law enforcement office. A potential problem is taking the open barrel pistol onto the campus of a high school with a "zero tolerance" policy on weapons. If the school administrators have not had the good sense to foresee the need for common sense exceptions like starter pistols for track meets, or feel they cannot take the responsibility to allow a reasonable exception to an inflexible policy, you will need to have a closed barrel pistol handy.

An alternative is one of the new electronic starting pistols recently coming on the market. The manufacturers have not yet been able to reproduce the sharp, intense sound and impact of the blast from a black powder cartridge, and there have been reports of athletes not reacting as well to the electronic guns, while others have reported no problems adapting. In some cases an electronic 'beep' is used, similar to the swimming start signal, instead of an imitation pistol shot. However, some have questioned whether this has as much impact outdoors as it does indoors in a swimming pool. But improvements are being made, and it is entirely possible that in the not too distant future the traditional starter pistol with black powder shells will be a thing of the past, and we will all be using electronic pistols. (Having a 'silent gun' with an electronic start signal going to speakers in each starting block, rather than through the air from a regular pistol, is seen as fairer for the athletes, particularly in

staggered starts. See: L. Julin “Did Sydney blocks rob Mo Greene of Olympic record?” at http://www.trackandfieldnews.com/results/newsletter/200105/reaction_times.html.)

Moving Equipment

Often the starter is not only in charge of starting races, but must be responsible for moving the starting blocks from one starting line to another, helping move and set up hurdles, and helping the clerk. This is particularly true in high school dual meets and junior high meets. It is recommended that the starter try to avoid being given the responsibility of also being the meet referee, although this is a common practice in many states at high school dual meets and junior high meets. The starter usually has enough to do without delaying the meet to go make decisions on other events. Still, these are all part of the job. However, at higher levels of competition and as the meets get larger, these extra jobs should and will be assumed by other individuals.

Care of the Starter Pistol

A good starter pistol should last a lifetime if properly cared for. It should be thoroughly cleaned as soon as possible after each use, using the materials and instructions found in a good commercially available gun cleaning kit. This eliminates the build-up of gunpowder, carbon and other materials that can lead to gumming up or freezing the mechanisms of the pistol. It is especially important to clean the gun after a meet where it has rained. Rust is another primary enemy that can ruin a pistol. The proper and consistent use of a good gun oil and cleaning kit will help prolong the life of a starter pistol and help maintain its reliability.

Safety

Safety precautions are not something starters are usually as concerned about, compared with other officials such as those doing the throwing events. However, the starter must still be aware of things like looking to make sure a runner is not headed on a collision course when stepping onto the track. Better yet, develop the habit of crossing the track behind the starting blocks when sprinters and hurdlers are warming up. When helping to set hurdles on the track, always check in both directions before moving anywhere after setting a hurdle. There always is the risk of a hurdler taking a practice run in the lane next to you. If the location of a starting line requires the starter to be near an area where errant throwing implements could land, try to ensure there is a marshal or someone else in the area to act as an extra pair of eyes and warn the starting crew if necessary.

Another safety concern to keep in mind is sun protection. While baseball caps have been the common outdoor headgear for starters, it would be wise to consider the use of a wide brimmed hat to help protect the face, neck and ears from the many hours of direct sun that starters often are subjected to at outdoor meets. Along with liberal use of a high SPF sun block on all parts of the head, neck, arms and hands, this will help protect you from the long-term consequences of sun exposure.

Traveling with Your Starter Pistol

When traveling to and from meets, it goes without saying that your starter pistol, even if it's a closed barrel pistol, should be kept (unloaded!) in a case and locked in your car trunk (not in the glove box or the console). If your vehicle does not have a trunk, you will need to carry your pistol in a hard case that is locked. It can lead to some touchy situations if you happen to be stopped by the police with a pistol lying on your car seat or in a holster on your belt. If you have an open barrel pistol, make sure you have your carry permit with you if you live in a state that requires them. Laws on carrying firearms vary from state to state, and many states' laws are more restrictive than federal laws. Check with your local sheriff's office for the exact requirements in your area.

If you have occasion to travel by air with your starter pistol, it must be unloaded and in a locked, hard case in your checked baggage; you cannot have it in carry-on baggage. When you check in for your flight, you must declare orally (or in writing) that you are carrying the pistol, even if it is a closed barrel pistol, and ask the ticket agent for a gun tag to fill out and put with your gun case in your suitcase. If you forget to declare the pistol in your bag and it is seen without the expected tag when the bag is X-rayed, you could find yourself being unceremoniously escorted from the plane by Air Marshals. Even though it is legal to carry black powder blanks with your pistol in your checked baggage (but not bulk black powder or percussion caps), it is probably best to travel without your blank shells. In some jurisdictions blank shells are, or may be, considered to be ammunition, the rationale being that the wadding in a blank shell can inflict harm. If you do take blanks with you, you must carry them in a suitable container meant for carrying small amounts of ammunition (e.g., the manufacturer's packaging). Some airlines will allow you to carry them in the same bag as your gun case, others do not. It probably creates less hassle to carry them in a separate checked bag if possible. To help 'educate' any airline personnel who may be unfamiliar with the situation regarding starter pistols, it is a good idea to carry with you a copy of the federal regulations regarding transporting a gun on an airline flight and/or a copy of the specific airline's regulations. A summary of these federal regulations can be found at http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/assistant/editorial_1666.shtm. A summary of the requirements of several domestic airlines can be found at <http://www.fuertecases.com/firearms-airline-transportation-guidelines.htm>. You also can get information on any specific requirements of your air carrier by contacting the airline or going to its website prior to your flight, if you have not flown previously with that airline.

Whenever traveling to another state, by air or driving, it would be a wise precaution to carry your USATF officials ID card with you, along with copies of any selection letters or e-mails noting your status as a starter. Copies of these documents also should be placed with your gun case in your checked baggage when you are flying. If you do run into any problems, remember to remain calm, and ask to speak to a supervisor. Maintaining a calm, professional demeanor will help avoid further delays.

In Conclusion

Being a starter or a recall starter is a major responsibility in a track meet, and you can have a positive or a negative impact on the satisfaction and enjoyment an athlete will have in participating in the sport, depending on how well you do your job. This monograph has attempted to present information on the major aspects of the mechanics and techniques of being a good starter. Practice the skills discussed here, observe other starters, take the time to practice voice commands and use a stopwatch to time your holds, stand in front of a mirror to observe your body language and arm signals.

These will help with your mechanics. However, it still boils down to knowing the rules and using common sense in applying them. Again, all your actions and decisions should be focused on the good of all the athletes, the basic principle being to ensure that no athlete gains an unfair advantage over the other competitors, and no athlete has to compete under an unfair disadvantage.

The remaining sections of this monograph include a list of equipment that a starter should have for a meet, and checklists of responsibilities for the starter and the recall starter.

STARTERS EQUIPMENT - "What's in the bag?"

The following is a list of suggested equipment for starters (carried in an athletic bag):

.32 caliber pistol (a .22 caliber pistol may be used for indoor meets)
Gun cleaning kit. Care should always be taken to clean the gun immediately following a meet
Metal whistle on a lanyard (keep a spare handy)
Complete set of raingear, plus goulashes
Bottle of sun block
Sunglasses
Earplugs (and a spare set)
Red blazer or red sweater
Bright fluorescent arm sleeve
Comfortable shoes
Hat (generally white, preferably wide brimmed)
Extra baton
Current rule books (NFSHSA, NCAA, USATF, IAAF)
Pencil and paper or 3x5 cards
Safety pins
Extra black powder shells
Hand towel
Piece of sidewalk chalk in a baggie (to mark a 3 meter walk-up line on tracks that do not have these marked for distance races)
Extra track spikes and spike wrench
Tape
Small knife and/or scissors
Watch and/or stopwatch
Hand-held loudspeaker
Clean handkerchief and clean saline solution for contact lenses

CHECKLIST FOR STARTERS

The following are checklists for head starters and recall starters covering their major responsibilities:

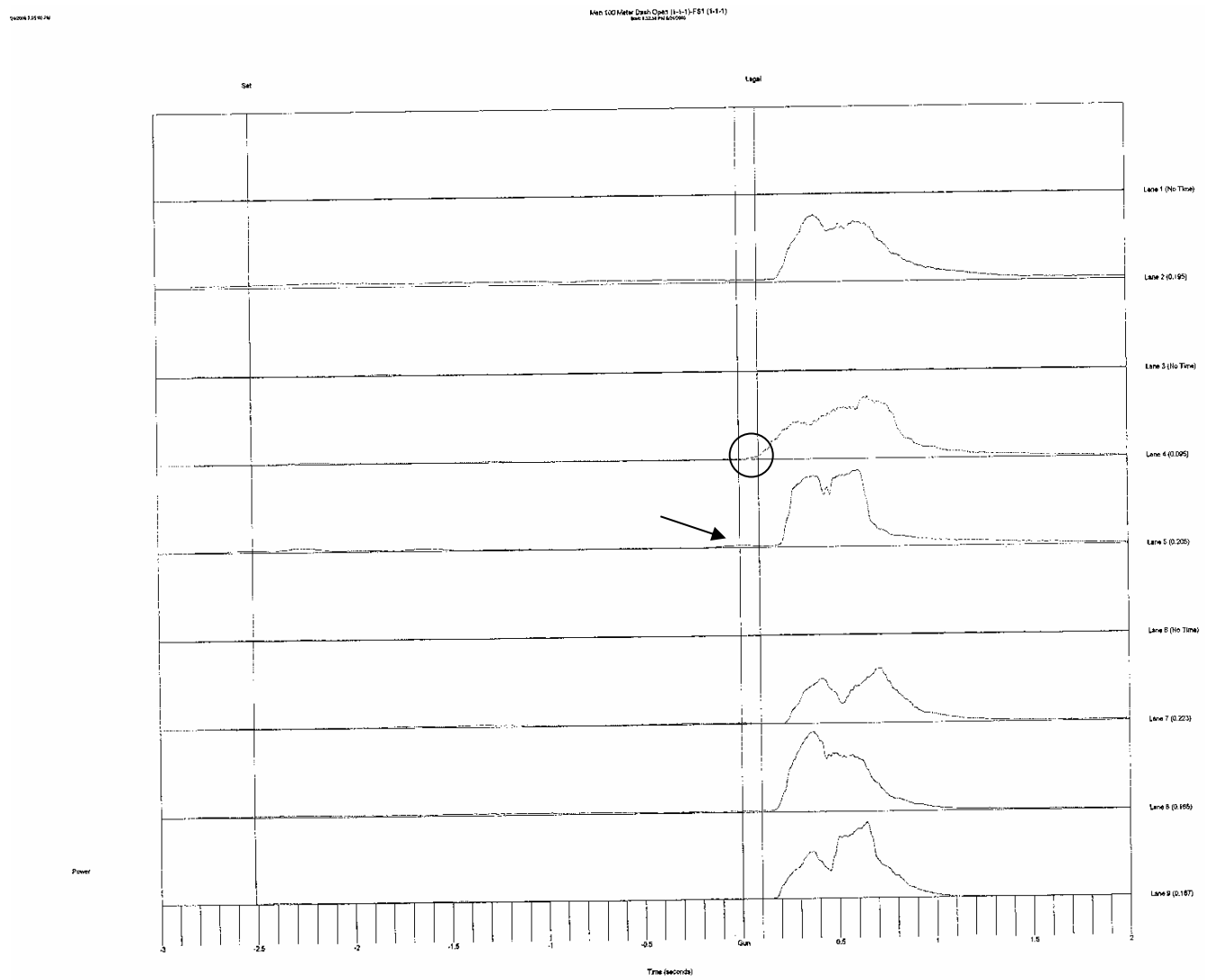
Head Starter

- ___ Arrive an 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.

Recall Starter

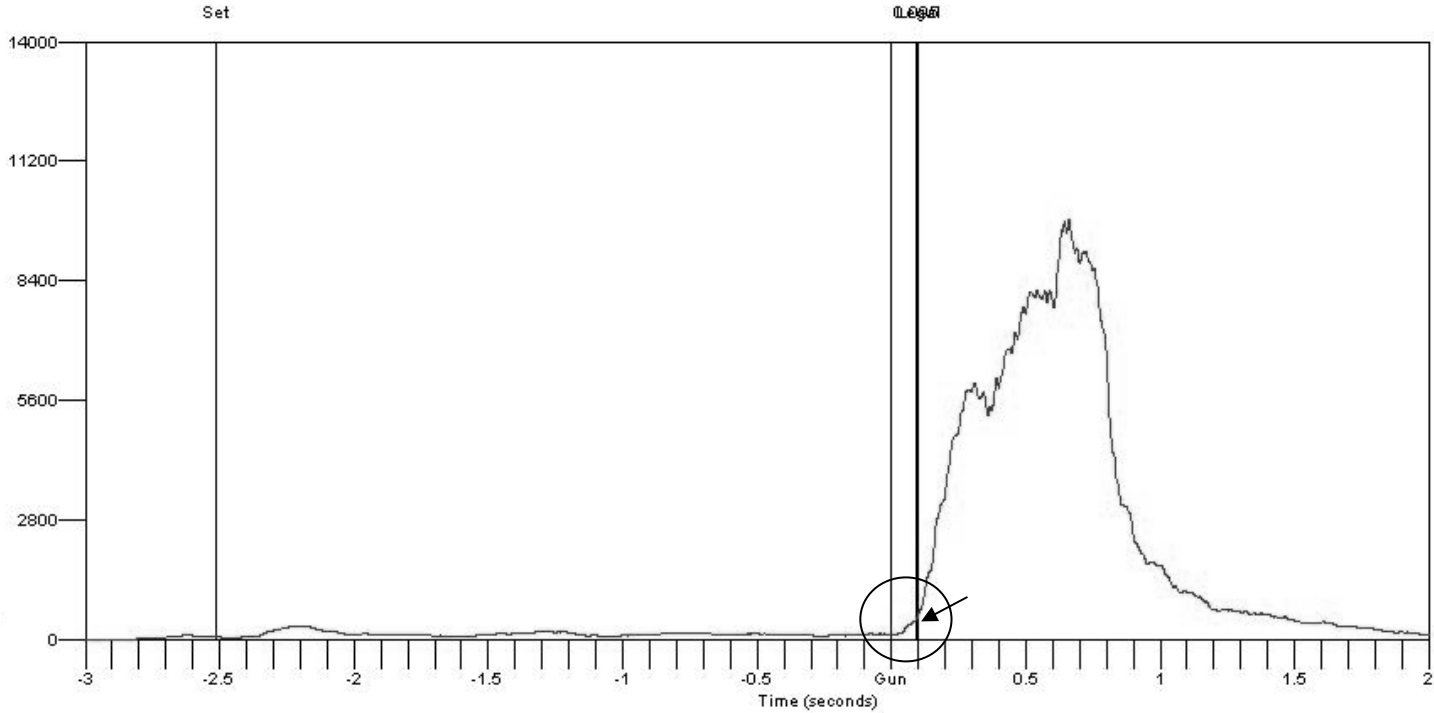
- ___ Arrive early with the head starter before the meet.
- ___ Look over the facility and study the color codes for the starting lines, etc.
- ___ Discuss with the head starter the conduct and signals to be used during the meet.
- ___ Obtain the time schedule for the meet.
- ___ Identify the positions 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 runners are in their blocks, quickly check hands and see if there are any problems. If you spot a problem, quickly notify the starter to 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.
- ___ Be especially alert for such things as outside noises that could cause a break at the "set" command, or for blocks slipping or a stumble on the first stride.
- ___ On a staggered start, whether in the front or the back, use an appropriate signal to the starter when "all is ready," or notify him 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.

APPENDIX A: Summary wave forms for all lanes

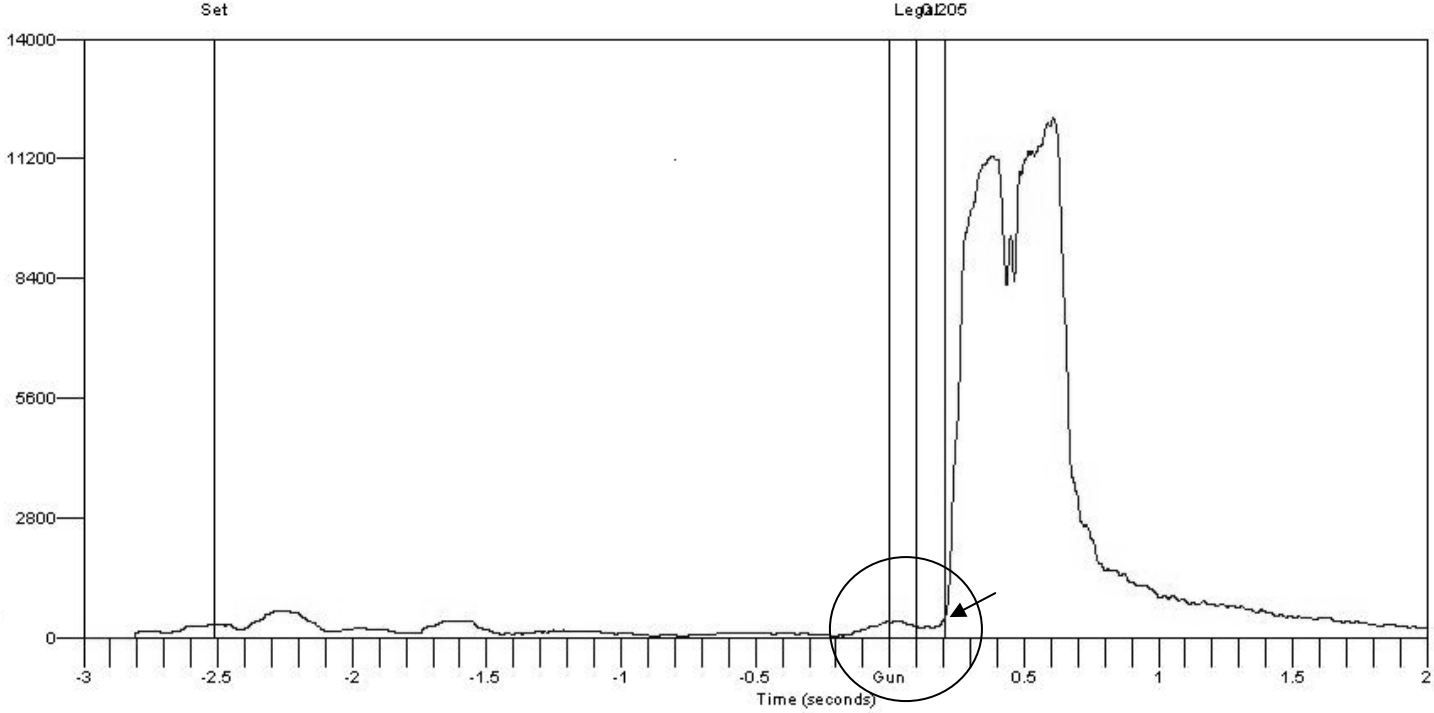


[Courtesy of FinisLynx]

APPENDIX B: Expanded waveform for lane 4



APPENDIX C: Expanded waveform for lane 5



[Courtesy of FinishLynx]

THE **STARTERS** **CASE BOOK**

**Insight from the Top Experts
in Track and Field Starting**

Presented By:



**Multinational
Starters Panel
2007**

By: RAYMOND PIERRE

WELCOME

This **STARTERS CASE BOOK** is composed of no less than 350 years of experience from some of the most renowned starters in the world.

This case book is unique in that it covers only the subject of starting. All starters at all skill levels, all experience levels, and from all areas of the world should find this book useful. However, the intended reader is the moderately experienced starter in the US.

This case book is intended to provide answers to the most common “Case Study” problems track & field starters face all around the country and world. These common problems are comprised of **two important elements:**

- 1) The starter must make a difficult choice between 2 or more equally justifiable alternatives, and**
- 2) The rulebook provides little or no help in making that choice.**

It is primarily that 2nd element that fuels this case book. When a starter faces a situation not clearly addressed in the rulebook, the starter must rely on past experience and insight to make the choice. But at the end of the day – without expert help, guidance, or input – the starter leaves the stadium never completely sure if the call was the right call, the best call, or the “perfect” call.

So in March of 2007, the world’s first **MULTI-NATIONAL STARTERS PANEL** was created, consisting of the most decorated starters from the United States, Canada, and England. We asked them what they would do when faced with the challenges outlined in this case book. Some of the cases are very common, some very rare. And for the first time ever, the phenomenal insight from these panelists has been compiled and summarized in one convenient place.

The panel consists of Olympic starters and highly skilled experts, so the reader can have great confidence that no conclusion in this case book was reached lightly. From now on, when a starter faces a difficult situation, they are no longer alone.

All situations in this case book are **true stories** based on actual dilemmas that starters have faced. They range from youth meets to world-class championships. Each case has been laid out in a way that makes reading quick and easy. The cases are unrelated, so the reader is free to jump around from case to case. It is our intent that the information in this book will be easy and enjoyable to read, and achieve a significant step towards the goal of uniformity in track and field officiating.



About the Author: *Raymond Pierre* is an ex-world-class 400 meter sprinter, turned starter. It has been his honor to start races alongside several members of this esteemed panel. Creating this book was a difficult undertaking, and it is his hope that this book will serve as a useful tool to starters everywhere.



Multinational Starters Panel 2007

(Listed alphabetically)

[Alan Bell \(Tyne Wear, England\)](#)

31 years starting
1997 IAAF World Cup, Head Starter 17 IAAF
Grand Prix, IAAF Starters Development Group,
2012 London Olympics

[Kelly Rankin, Ed.D. \(Washington, USA\)](#)

39 years starting
1984 Los Angeles Olympics, 1996 Atlanta
Olympics, 1998 Goodwill Games
Author – [Track Starters Guide](#)

[Ken Caouette](#)

(cow-WET – Massachusetts, USA)

40 years starting
Head Starter 1984 Los Angeles Olympics,
Officials Coordinator 1996 Atlanta Olympics

[Bill Von Fabrice \(Arizona, USA\)](#)

46 years starting
1996 Atlanta Olympics, 1987 Pan Am,
Ex-Head Starter: Millrose Games
and Penn Relays

[Thomas P. McTaggart \(New York, USA\)](#)

35 years starting
1996 Atlanta Olympics, Head Starter 1998
Goodwill Games, Head Starter 2004 U.S.
Olympic Trials, Head Starter Penn Relays

[Doris Wahl \(New York, USA\)](#)

31 years starting
1996 Atlanta Olympics, IAAF Grand Prix,
1998 Goodwill Games,
Penn Relays, Millrose Games

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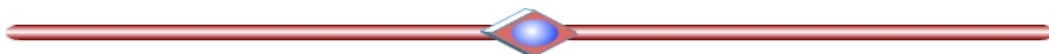
42 years starting
The U.S.A.'s Top Rules Interpreter,
Head Starter 2000 U.S. Olympic Trials

[Joe Young \(Ontario, Canada\)](#)

54 years starting
Head Starter 1976 Montreal Olympics,
Head Starter 1979 World Cup, 1983 World
University Games, Author – [One, Two Three,
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[Eric D. Zemper, Ph.D. \(Michigan, USA\)](#)

33 years starting
Author – [USATF Starters Training Monogram](#),
IAAF International Technical Official – world's
highest officiating level



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1. Athlete Flinches, Causing Other Athletes to False Start

In the 100 meter dash, after "Set", the athlete flinches (jerks forward slightly), but then gets still. But the motion causes other athletes to false start.

Question: Should the flinching athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: National Championship. Early summer, clear skies, slightly hot, and humid, late afternoon, full stadium.

Event: 100 meter dash finals. False start results in disqualification. The athletes in lanes 2 – 6 are heavy favorites.

Situation: On the command "On your marks," the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command, "Set" all athletes promptly come to a set position and get still.

.30 seconds after coming to a set position, the athlete in lane 5 flinches (jerks forward slightly), but his hands do not leave the track surface. He immediately gets still again, without commencing a starting motion.

.20 seconds after that motion, the athlete in lane 4 commences a start. His hands leave the track and he departs the starting line.

.15 seconds after that motion, the athletes in lanes 5 and 7 commence a start in the same fashion.

Without firing the gun, the starter says "Stand up". The 3 assistants meet with the starter and all conclude that lane 5 flinched, and the flinch resulted in lanes 4, 5 and 7 false starting.

The starter rules that **the flinching athlete in lane 5 (ONLY) will be charged with the false start**, which in this case resulted in disqualification. The athlete in lane 5 appears surprised at the ruling, and reluctantly exits the track as the spectators jeer at the starter's ruling.

Aftermath: At an appropriate time later that evening, the starter and assistants have a friendly but heated discussion over the ruling. Two of the assistants feel the starter made the incorrect call for these reasons:

- The flinching athlete never commenced a starting motion.
- Just because the other athletes commenced a starting motion in response to the “flinch” doesn’t make the flinching athlete guiltier of a false start.
- In an event as highly “pressurized” as the 100 meters, penalizing an athlete for every little “flinch” is overly harsh. A “warning” is more appropriate.

In response, the starter feels his call was correct for these reasons:

- Although the flinching athlete did not leave the track surface, his flinch was the commencement of a starting motion.
- His action caused enough of a disruption at the starting line to warrant a penalty.

Question: After 30 minutes, both sides reach both exhaustion and a stalemate. They then turn to you for the FINAL WORD. What was the correct ruling in that situation and why?

2. Athlete Immediately Leaves Blocks on “Set”

In the 400 meter dash, after “Set”, the athlete never rises to a set position, but instead immediately takes off from the blocks.

Question: Should the athlete be penalized?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: Youth (High School) State Championship. Late spring, clear skies, warm, early evening, full stadium.

Event: 400 meter dash finals. False start results in disqualification. The offending athlete is the heavy favorite.

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command, “Set” all athletes promptly come to a set position – except the athlete in lane 4.

Rather than coming to a set position, the athlete in lane 4 immediately leaves the blocks and commences a starting motion. After taking a step, she stops, displays a gesture of embarrassment and disgust.

Without firing the gun, the starter says, “Stand up.” The athlete places her face in her hands and begins to cry.

The starter steps down from the rostrum, and talks to the assistant. The assistant feels the athlete should be charged with a false start, which in this case results in disqualification. The starter walks over to the athlete, asks if she is okay, gives her a warning, then returns to the rostrum.

The next start commences without further incident.

Aftermath: While the race is in progress, the starter and assistant have a friendly but heated discussion over the incident. The assistant feels the athlete should have been charged with a false start. The assistant’s argument:

- The athlete commenced a starting motion after “set,” which is a false start.
- The athlete’s motion – although odd and unintentional – was unfairly penalizing the other athletes who were complying with the starter’s command.

- The starter was being overly sympathetic to a crying athlete.
- The starter's argument for allowing the athlete to remain in the race:
- A false start can take place only AFTER the athlete reaches a full and final set position and gets still. This athlete never came close to reaching that position.
 - Sympathy had nothing to do with it. A warning for her bizarre behavior was appropriate.

Question: What would have been the correct action to take in this situation and why?

3. Athlete Rises Very Slowly

In the 100 meter hurdles, after “Set”, the athlete rises to a set position very slowly and eventually gets still.

Question: Should the athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: World-Class non-championship. Mid-summer, cloudy skies, warm, late-afternoon, half-full stadium.

Event: 100 meter hurdles. False start results in disqualification.

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command, “Set” all athletes promptly come to a set position – except the athlete in lane 6, whose slow rise requires an additional 1.5 seconds to reach a final set position and get still.

Waiting for the slow riser to get finally still, the starter holds the athletes for 3 seconds, and then shoots the gun...

But just prior to the firing of the gun, the athlete in lane 4 false starts. Thus, the gun is immediately fired a second time.

The assistants meet with the starter and point out that lane 6 is rising too slowly. The starter rules that lane 4 false started – which in this case results in disqualification. The starter also tells the assistant to ask the athlete in lane 6 to reach a set position faster.

The start resumes – minus lane 4. Lane 6 rises slightly faster, but still slowly. The hold is between 2.5 and 3 seconds, and the race commences without further incident.

Aftermath: At an appropriate time later in the evening, the assistants discuss what they feel was an incorrect ruling. They feel lane 6 was the offending athlete. The assistants’ argument:

- Rising slowly violates the “at once and without delay” section of the rulebook.
- Rising slowly unfairly penalizes the athletes who promptly followed the starter’s command
- The athletes were false starting because the starter was holding the athletes too long.

- The only reason the starter was holding the athletes so long was because lane 6 was rising so slowly. Thus, the false starts were a result of the starter's failure to control the athlete in lane 6.

Unfortunately, the starter is a difficult person to confront and openly criticize, so the assistants kept their opinions to themselves. Nevertheless, the starter's reason for the ruling:

- The athlete rose slowly, but got to a set position and got still in a reasonable amount of time.
- The length of the hold was appropriate and the false starting athletes in lanes 2 and 4 should have waited for the gun.
- Honestly, a slow-riser is a difficult person to act upon. Standing her up and warning her often causes more of a disruption to the race than just simply letting her complete her motions, and starting the race.

Question: What was the correct action to take in this race and why?

4. Athlete Rises Promptly, then Continues Rising Slowly

In the 400 meter relay, after “Set”, the athlete rises to a set position promptly, and then continues rising slowly until the gun fires.

Question: Should the athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: Collegiate non-championship. Spring, cloudy skies, cool, late-afternoon, full stadium.

Event: 4 x 100 meter relay final. False start results in disqualification. The offending athlete is a heavy favorite.

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command, “Set” all athletes promptly come to a set position and get still – except for the athlete in lane 3. The athlete in lane 3 reaches a proper set position promptly, but then continues to slowly and gently rise until the gun is fired – never getting completely still.

Not noticing lane 3, the starter fires the gun to start the race.

The assistant immediately fires his gun to stop the race, and walks to the starter to explain lane 3’s actions. After hearing the assistant’s explanation, the starter suggests that the athlete be charged with a false start – which in this case would result in disqualification.

The assistant argues that the starter’s ruling is too harsh, and that the athlete should receive a warning. The starter concedes, and furnishes the athlete with a warning.

The start resumes without further incident.

Aftermath: Later, a meet official observing the situation pats the starter on the back and congratulates him on not disqualifying a favorite relay team for such a small infraction. This actually concerned the start group. Did they allow the relay team to remain in the race just because the team was a favorite? After discussing this situation, the start group concluded:

- The athlete was unaware that his failure to be still was a violation of the rulebook. And in this case, warning him instead of penalizing him for this non-deliberate violation was appropriate.
- The athlete immediately corrected his action when the start resumed.
- They would have made this ruling regardless of the team or the meet.

However, in the back of their minds they also had their doubts if they made the correct ruling because:

- Ignorance of the rule is no excuse. A non-deliberate violation is still a violation.
- The athlete reached a set position, and was in motion when the gun went off, which is a false start.
- The fact that the relay was not charged, makes them wonder if they were inadvertently showing favoritism.

Question: What was the correct action to take and why?

5. Standing Start – Athlete Loses Balance.

In the 4 x 400 meter relay, the athlete using a standing start loses her balance with 4 DIFFERENT RESULTS:

- (a) The athlete steps forward and the foot touches the line
- (b) The athlete steps forward and the foot does not touch the line
- (c) The athlete steps sideways.
- (d) The athlete slowly rocks forward and takes a large step over the line.

Question: In each situation, should the athlete be penalized with a false start?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: Youth (High School) non-championship. Spring, sunny skies, hot, early-afternoon, half-full stadium.

Event: 4 x 400 meter relay preliminaries. False start results in disqualification. *In the interest of time, meet management forbids the use of starting blocks.*

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still; some athletes assume a crouch position while others stand. On the command, “Set” the crouched athletes assume their final set position and get still. The standing athletes lean forward, assume a running position, and get still – except for the athlete in lane 6:

- (a) The athlete in lane 6 begins to lean forward too much and is unable to recover. The arms wobble as she struggles to regain her balance, but is unsuccessful. She takes a minor step on the starting line and immediately backs up from the line and gets still.

The starter says, “Stand up” and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

- (b) The athlete in lane 6 begins to lean forward too much and is unable to recover. The arms wobble as she struggles to regain her balance, but she cannot. She takes a minor step forward, but never touches the starting line. She immediately gets still.

The starter says, “Stand up” and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

- (c) The athlete in lane 6 leans forward too much and is unable to recover. As she struggles to regain her balance, she takes a quick step sideways, and does not touch the starting line. She immediately regains her balance and gets still.

The starter says, “Stand up” and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

- (d) The athlete in lane 6 leans forward too much, and loses her balance. As she struggles to regain her balance, her arms wobble violently, and as she bends over farther, in the hopes of getting low enough to balance herself – it just gets worse. She takes a large step over the line.

The starter says, “Stand up” and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

Aftermath: All 3 of the assistants agree with the starter’s ruling in (a). But in (b, c, & d), at least one of the assistants disagrees with the ruling. The assistants’ argument:

- In (b), the athlete did not touch the line, she recovered quickly, and she got still. It should not have been a false start, but a warning.
- In (c), the athlete did not achieve forward motion. A sideways step followed immediately by getting still, should not be ruled a false start. In fact, the starter shouldn’t have stood them up at all.
- In (d), stepping over the line was a false start. However the starter had time to give the “Stand up” command and rescue her before she could take the fatal step.

The starter has no tolerance for motion. His argument:

- Due to the special block requirements of this meet, the athletes were given extra warnings prior to stepping on the track that any motion would result in a false start.
- Not penalizing the moving athlete is unfair to the athletes who remained still.

- The starter has no responsibility to “rescue” anyone who commences a starting motion prior to the gun.

Question: You closely watch all 4 of these scenarios, and the starter and assistants turn to you for the FINAL WORD. What was the correct call in these 4 scenarios, and why?

6. Athlete Rises Promptly, then Slowly Lowers the Body

In the 110 meter hurdles, after “Set”, the athlete rises to a set position promptly, and then slowly lowers himself until the gun fires.

Question: Should the athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: World-Class non-championship. Spring, clear skies, cool, late-afternoon, full stadium.

Event: 110 meter hurdles. *IAAF / USATF false start rule applies.*

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command, “Set” all athletes promptly come to a set position and get still – except for the athlete in lane 4. The athlete in lane 4 promptly reaches a set position, but then slowly and gently lowers himself – never getting completely still.

The athlete in lane 5 false starts just as the gun is fired. The recall gun is immediately fired by two of the assistants.

The assistants meet with the starter and explain that they saw lane 4’s rising/lowering motion, and think the motion caused lane 5 to false start.

The starter did not detect this motion from lane 4, and thus rules that lane 5 will be responsible for the yellow card being shown to the field.

On the 2nd “On your marks,” command, the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command, “Set”, again lane 4 gets set, and then slowly lowers himself until the gun is fired.

This time the race continues without being stopped.

Aftermath: At an appropriate time later in the evening the starters discuss the athlete’s motion in lane 4. The assistants disagreed with the starter’s rulings. The assistants’ argument:

- Lane 4’s motion caused lane 5 to false start.

- Since the athlete in lane 4 never got still when the gun went off, lane 4 should have been charged with a first and 2nd false start.

On the other hand, the starter did not charge the athlete in lane 4 with the false start because:

- The motion was difficult to detect, and the starter and assistants were not in agreement that the athlete in lane 4 was in motion.
- The situation is happening so quickly, that the assistants only realized in hindsight what the athlete was doing.
- This is a difficult athlete to act upon. Standing him up and warning him of this indistinct motion can disrupt the race more than just letting the action go.

In the end, the starter and assistants concluded that this is a rare and difficult situation to properly rule on, and they acted appropriately.

Question: Did the starters act appropriately, and if so / or if not, why?

7. Athlete Performs a Practice Start

In the 200 meter dash, an athlete in a later heat is away from the starting line, but is listening to the starter's commands and performing a practice start.

Question: Should the athlete be disqualified?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: Collegiate Championship. Spring, clear skies, warm, evening, semi-full stadium.

Event: 200 meter dash semi-finals. *The rulebook forbids performing practice starts but is not specific about the penalty for violating the rule.*

Situation: After the starter shoots the gun, she notices out the corner of her eye that an athlete in a future heat was performing a practice start with that race.

The starter has an assistant bring the athlete over to her. The starter informs the athlete that performing practice starts is a violation of the rulebook. The athlete maintains he was not aware of that rule. The starter then disqualifies the athlete from the competition.

The athlete leaves the track shocked, but cooperative. The assistant informs the check-in clerk of the ruling.

Aftermath: At separate times later that evening, the athlete's coach and the meet referee question the starter on why the athlete was disqualified prior to the race. In both cases, the starter is adamant about her ruling that no athlete performs practice starts in her presence. The starter's argument:

- Ignorance of the rule is no excuse. A non-deliberate violation is still a violation.
- Simply warning an athlete after each practice start is a waste of time and effort. Disqualifying the athlete has a greater impact on future occurrences.

In both cases, the discussion ends quickly without further argument. However, the coach and referee think to themselves:

- The disqualification was harsh, and a warning was more appropriate.

- The referee should have been consulted prior to making this type of ruling.

2 Questions: Did the starter act appropriately and why or why not? What, (if any) action should the starter take if there is NO rule in the rulebook forbidding practice starts?

8. Disqualified Athlete Refuses to Leave

Disqualified due to a false start, the athlete displays defiant behavior, with 2 DIFFERENT ACTIONS:

- (a) Athlete refuses to leave the starting line
- (b) Athlete refuses to leave the starting line and charges toward the starter

Question: How should the starter respond?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: Collegiate championship. Spring, clear skies, warm, early evening, full stadium. *No marshal at this meet*

Event: 100 meter dash finals. *The defiant athlete in Lane 4 – a heavy favorite – has already been disqualified due to a false start.*

Situation: After meeting with the assistants, the starter charges the athlete in lane 4 with a false start– which in this case results in disqualification.

The athlete, upon learning of this ruling, appears shocked and agitated. The assistants give the athlete sufficient time to leave the starting area on his own, but the athlete simply stands behind his blocks, staring straight ahead angrily, with his hands on his hips. One assistant moves toward the athlete ordering him to leave.

- (a) Without looking at the official, the athlete clearly communicates through his body language and gestures that he refuses to leave. The athlete paces back and forth in his lane, ignores the officials' orders, or responds with a simple shaking of his head, and an occasional obscenity directed at the starters ruling. This demonstration goes on for 5 full minutes.
- (b) The athlete immediately erupts in a flood of obscenities and angry gestures. Every attempt to control the athlete is met with more of the same. This display continues for approximately 2 minutes. The starter patiently waits on the platform for the athlete to get himself under control. Suddenly and abruptly, the athlete walks/jogs toward the starter.

Aftermath: This is by no means a common occurrence. In reflection, the starter could not see a clear solution. Most athletes are balanced and rational in the face of difficulty. This athlete clearly was not.

- (a) The officials patiently tried to reason with the athlete. The athlete eventually left, but at the expense of a near 15-minute delay. By this time, the remaining athletes are clearly suffering, and the eventual winning time showed it. The starters are still scratching their heads today, insisting this situation could have been handled better, even in the absence of meet marshals.
- (b) The starter is both surprised and embarrassed at his response to the charging athlete. Without hesitation, the starter jumped down off his platform, pulled out his gun and shot it in the direction of the athlete. Twice.

No one was hurt, the athlete immediately composed himself, and the entire stadium had excellent dinner conversation when they got home.

Question: How do you feel these two situations could be best handled?

9. 200 Meters Started from Wrong Starting Line

Shortly after the race concludes, the starter realizes he accidentally started the 200 meters from the 800 meter starting line.

Question: Is the race invalid?

Occurrence Rate: Common when meet conditions are as described below.

Meet Conditions: Collegiate non-championship. Spring, cloudy skies, cool, late morning, ¼ -full stadium. *Due to wind direction, the 200 meters starts from the common start/finish line where the 800 meter line is.*

Event: 2nd heat, 200 meter dash prelims. The 1st heat has already concluded.

Situation: After the 1st heat has concluded, the starter is on the track assisting an athlete in the next heat with blocks. As he places the blocks on the track, he realizes he started the previous heat from the 800 meter starting line, rather than the 200 meter line, which is – depending on the lane – significantly different.

The starter tells no one. Instead he simply starts all remaining races from the correct starting line. No one makes mention of his mistake for the entire meet, and the starter essentially gets away with his error. As for the “Heat 1” athletes who qualified for finals – if they noticed that the starting line was different, they never mentioned it.

Aftermath: While the starter was fortunate in that he escaped ridicule and further embarrassment, he was unfortunate in that he violated the golden rule of fairness. The ensuing guilt was difficult at times for him, and he vowed never to make the mistake again. He finally told a fellow official about his folly... weeks later.

Question: YOU were the fellow official he confessed to. And after 15 minutes of doing your best to make him feel even guiltier, you proceeded with the more important issue: What was the best course of action in this situation?

10. Starter Incorrectly Charges Athlete Based on Incomplete False Start Apparatus Information

The starter charges the athlete with a false start based on data from the false start detection apparatus. Later on, further data reveals that the starter's ruling was incorrect.

Question: Can the starter prevent this kind of mishap?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: National Championship. Early summer, rainy skies, warm, afternoon, full stadium.

Event: 100 meter dash prelims. False start results in disqualification. The disqualified athlete is the heavy favorite.

Situation: After the "Set" command and the athletes are still, the starter shoots the gun. Immediately, the computer gives off a tone indicating an athlete has false started.

The gun is immediately fired again, the runners stop and head back to the starting line.

The starter steps down off his platform and visits with the computer technician. The data showed that the athlete in lane 4 commenced a starting motion exactly .09 seconds after to the firing of the gun – which is .01 seconds faster than a legal reaction time.

The starter rules that the athlete in lane 4 will be charged with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification. The athlete appears shocked and devastated by the ruling. The athlete asks to see the data for himself, and the technician complies. After seeing the data, the athlete quickly exits the area without further incident.

The disqualified athlete quickly finds his coach, and together they file a protest with the meet referee claiming that the starter penalized the wrong lane.

The athlete explains to the referee that the reason he “false started” was that he detected motion from the athlete in lane 3. Thus, the athlete in lane 3 is truly guilty.

The referee reviews the computer’s data. The data clearly shows motion from the athlete in lane 3 just prior to lane 4’s false start. Apparently the motion wasn’t forceful enough to trigger a false start tone, but nevertheless there was sufficient motion from lane 3.

From this data, the referee concluded that the motion from the athlete in lane 3 caused the false start in lane 4. The lane 4 athlete wins the protest, and is automatically advanced to the semi-final round. No action is taken against the lane 3 athlete.

Aftermath: Several hours later, the starter and assistants learn of this successful protest. It is during this discussion when 2 of the assistants speak up and confess that they saw motion from the athlete in lane 3 just prior to lane 4’s false start.

The starter asks why the assistants did not speak up earlier. The assistants reasoned that since the apparatus didn’t indicate a false start from lane 3, they shouldn’t say anything.

Later on, the media harshly criticize the start team for incorrectly disqualifying a heavily favored athlete.

Question: What could the starter and assistants have done differently to avoid this situation?

11. False Start Detection Apparatus Detects Questionable False Start.

The false start detection apparatus detects a false start that should have been visible to the naked eye, but wasn't.

Question: Should the starter accept the computer's false start?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: National Championship. Early summer, rainy skies, warm, afternoon, ¾ -full stadium.

Event: 110 meter hurdles finals. False start results in disqualification.

Situation: After the "Set" command and the athletes are still, the starter shoots the gun. Immediately, the computer gives off a tone indicating an athlete has false started.

The gun is immediately fired again, and the runners – after clearing the first 2 rows of hurdles – stop and head back to the starting line.

The starter meets with the assistants, and informs them that he detected no false start. The assistants also report that they detected no false start.

The starter then talks to the computer technician. The computer indicated that the athlete in lane 2 commenced a starting motion exactly .18 seconds prior to the firing of the gun. The starter then goes back to the assistants, who again insist they detected no false start.

The starter rules that the athlete will be charged with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification. The athlete appears shocked at the ruling, but leaves the starting line cooperatively.

Aftermath: At an appropriate time later that evening, two of the assistants confess their opinion that the starter's ruling was incorrect. Their argument against the ruling:

- If an athlete moved .18 seconds prior to the gun, the eyes should have seen it.
- Since the eyes did not see such obvious motion, the apparatus was likely malfunctioning.

- The starter was wrong to blindly accept the computer's possible mistake as the final word. The benefit of the doubt should have favored the athlete, not the computer.

However, the starter (slightly offended by the "blind" comment) and one of the assistants believed the ruling was completely correct. Their defense:

- The fact that our eyes did not detect the false start does not necessarily mean it didn't happen.
- "Possibly, or likely malfunctioning" isn't good enough. The starter can only overrule the computer if it is "clearly malfunctioning".
- There was no "clear" indication of a malfunction in this case, so the starter had no choice but to accept the false start as legitimate.

Question: What was the correct action and why?

12. Speaker Malfunction Delays Race

As a race is about to start, some of the speakers attached to each starting block malfunction, resulting in a considerable delay.

Question: Should the starter wait until the problem is fixed?

Occurrence Rate: Rare for this specific situation. But overall, amplified speaker malfunctions are common.

Meet Conditions: National Championship. Early summer, cloudy, cool, afternoon, semi-full stadium.

Event: 400 meter hurdles semi-finals.

Situation: Attached to each set of starting blocks is a speaker through which the starter's voice can be heard.

The starter says "On your marks", and all athletes promptly get into their blocks. After everyone is still, the starter says "Set". All athletes get into a set position, except lanes 1, 2, and 8. The assistant nearest lane 1 yells "Stand up!".

The starter halts the starting process as all athletes stand up. The assistants walk over to the starter and explain that the speakers in lanes 1, 2, and 8 are not working, and the technicians quickly respond. As the technicians work, they ask the starter to continually speaking through the speakers to test for sound.

5 minutes later, the speaker problem still isn't solved. As the technicians and starter continue working to resolve the problem, one assistant starter becomes impatient. After 8 minutes with no solution, the assistant walks over to the starter and suggests the race be started without the speakers.

The starter declines the assistant's suggestion. 12 minutes later, the speakers are working, and the start resumes without further incident.

Aftermath: At an appropriate time after the race, the starter and assistant have a friendly, but heated discussion over the speaker incident. The assistant

believes the starter was wrong to delay the race until the speakers were working. The assistant's argument:

- A 12 minute delay is unreasonable. It interfered with the athletes' concentration and physical preparedness, and the resulting times showed this.
- The starter was not looking after the athlete's best interest. He should have started the race immediately and dealt with the speaker problem afterward.

The starter disagrees. His argument:

- 12 minutes is not unreasonable. The athletes can remain loose during this slight delay.
- A meet of this importance should have proper working equipment.
- The starter was not ignoring the athletes' best interest. On the contrary, he was assuring each athlete had the benefit of a high quality start.

Question: The discussion ends quickly with both sides feeling they had won the argument. You have the FINAL WORD. Did the starter behave appropriately, or should he have behaved differently?

13. Starting Blocks – Athlete Unsteady

In the 110 meter hurdles, the athlete has an unsteady start in the “set” position with 3 DIFFERENT RESULTS:

- (a) Athlete’s hands leave the track surface, but return without touching the starting line.
- (b) Athlete rocks forward and slowly falls over the line.
- (c) Athlete rocks forward and recovers as gun is fired, but is last to leave the blocks.

Question: In each situation, what is the starter’s proper response?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: Collegiate non-championship. Spring, clear skies, hot, morning, ¼-full stadium.

Event: 110 meter hurdles. False start results in disqualification.

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still. On the “set” command, the athletes assume their final set position and get still. At this point:

- (a) The athlete in lane 2 bucks with enough force that his hands leave the track surface. The hands quickly return to the track surface and he never touches the starting line.

The starter says, “Stand up” and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

- (b) The athlete in lane 2 bucks with enough force that he loses his balance. His hands never leave the track surface. He slowly rocks forward with enough momentum that he is unable to recover, and he falls over the starting line.

The starter says, “Stand up” and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

- (c) The athlete in lane 2 bucks with enough force that he loses his balance. He slowly rocks forward, and then rocks backward to regain his balance. During the backward rock, the gun is fired, and the athlete leaves his blocks much later than the other athletes.

The assistant shoots the recall gun and stops the race. After explaining to the starter what happened, the starter scolds the assistant for stopping the race.

Aftermath: The assistant disagrees with the starter's decision in all 3 situations. The assistants' argument:

- In (a), the athlete did not cross the line, he recovered quickly, and he got still. At worst, the athlete should have been issued a warning.
- In (b), falling over the line was a false start. However the starter had sufficient time to give the "Stand up" command and rescue the athlete before the fall.
- In (c), the race should have been recalled because the athlete in lane 2 had an unfair start.

The starter has no tolerance for motion. His argument:

- Although the athlete didn't cross the starting line in (a), he commenced a starting motion.
- In (b), the starter has no responsibility to "rescue" anyone commencing a starting motion prior to the gun.
- In (c), stopping and restarting the race because of one moving athlete penalizes the athletes who remained still.

Question: You closely watch all 3 scenarios, and the starter and assistant turns to you for the FINAL WORD. What was the correct call in these scenarios, and why?

14. Athlete Raises Hand

In the 100 meter dash, the athlete raises her hand in 2 DIFFERENT SITUATIONS:

- (a) In “set” position, athlete loses balance and raises hand to halt the starting process before falling.
- (b) Athlete raises hand and comes out of blocks.

Question: In each situation, should the athlete be penalized with a false start?

Occurrence Rate: Rare for this specific situation. Overall, athletes raising the hand is common.

Meet Conditions: Collegiate non-championship. Spring, cloudy, hot, evening, full stadium.

Event: 100 meter dash. False start results in disqualification.

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still. On the “set” command, the athletes assume their final set position and get still. At this point:

- (a) The athlete in lane 5 bucks, then rocks forward with enough momentum that she is unable to recover. Just before falling over the line, the athlete raises one hand in the air to halt the starting process.

After the athlete falls over the line, the starter says, “stand up”, and immediately charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

- (b) After “set”, there is a sudden loud noise from elsewhere in the stadium. The athlete raises her hand and then exits the blocks before the starter could say “stand up”.

The starter then says “stand up”, and immediately charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

In both situations, the athlete is surprised by the ruling, but exits the track cooperatively.

Aftermath: Shortly afterward, the coach confronts the starter in an angry tone. The starter's sole argument is that the athlete can't exit the blocks until after the starter says so.

However, the coach's argument:

- In (a), the athlete raised her hand, and the starter had sufficient time to give the "Stand up" command and rescue the athlete before falling.
- In (b), amidst the noise, the athlete left her blocks because she thought she heard the starter say, "stand up".
- Even if the starter didn't say "stand up", the noise was sufficient to halt the starting process. The starter should have issued the athlete a warning at the very worst.

Question: What was the correct call in these scenarios, and why

15. Athlete “Wastes” a Free False Start

In a race that allows more than one false start, the athlete appears to false start on purpose, to “waste” the false start.

Question: Should the starter penalize the athlete?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: Youth National Championship. Summer, cloudy, hot, afternoon, half-full stadium.

Event: 200 meter dash semi-finals. There is no disqualification for the 1st false start. The 2nd false start results in disqualification.

Having already run 2 races earlier in this meet, the offending athlete has acquired a reputation for purposely “wasting” the 1st false start.

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still. On the “set” command, the athletes come to a “set” position and get still. Immediately after everyone is still, the athlete in lane 5 false starts.

After leaving the blocks, the athlete sprints hard for 5 meters, jogs another 20 meters, and then casually walks back to his blocks. The athlete’s gestures indicate that he intentionally false started, and the start team is aware of the athlete’s previous reputation for “wasting” the free false start.

Without firing the gun, the starter tells the remaining athletes to “stand up”. The starter descends from his platform and walks over to the false starting athlete.

The starter asks the athlete if he false started on purpose. The athlete replies, “no, the blocks just didn’t feel right.” Unconvinced, the starter responds, “it looks to me like you false started on purpose,” and then disqualifies the athlete.

The athlete is shocked, but cooperates with the starter and leaves.

Aftermath: At an appropriate later time, the other officials around the starting line convey approval for the starter's actions for these reasons:

- The athlete is wasting the meet's time.
- The athlete is abusing a rule intended to protect the athlete.
- The athlete is purposely distracting the fellow athletes.

The athlete and coach protest the starter's ruling. After hearing the protest the meet referee decides that the starter was wrong to disqualify the athlete. The athlete is permitted to remain in the 200 meter event. The referee's reasoning:

- The athlete violated no rule.
- The starter has no right to circumvent the rulebook, just because an athlete's activity is annoying.

Although the starter was unhappy with the referee's final decision, it did have the intended effect: The athlete "wasted" no more false starts.

Question: The unhappy starter has turned to you for the FINAL WORD. What was the appropriate action for the starter?

16. Standing Start – Baton Touches Beyond Starting Line

In the 4 x 400 meter relay, after “set”, the athlete using a standing start rests her weight on the baton beyond the starting line.

Question: Should the athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: Youth (High School) non-championship. Spring, clear, hot, afternoon, half-full stadium.

Event: 4x400 meter relay prelims. False start results in disqualification. *The rulebook forbids resting weight on the baton beyond the starting line, but is not specific about the penalty for violation.*

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still; most athletes are using a standing start. On the command, “Set” the standing athletes lean forward, assume a running position, and get still.

However, the athlete in lane 4 immediately places the end of her baton on the track surface beyond the starting line and rests her weight on it. The starter stands the athletes up and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification

Aftermath: Shortly after the race, the athlete’s coach offers the starter the following argument:

- The athlete was unaware that doing this was a violation
- Penalizing the athlete was overly harsh. A warning would have just as easily solved the problem.

The starter’s argument:

- Ignorance of the rule is no excuse
- Touching the track beyond the starting line is clearly a false start.
- Standing the athletes up to correct the offending athlete penalizes all the athletes who started properly.

Question: After the meet concludes, the starter asks you if the ruling was correct. What was the appropriate action for the starter?

17. Starter Observes a Non-Starting Violation

In the 4x400 meter relay, the starter observes a violation that has nothing to do with starting.

Question: Should the starter take action?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: Youth (High School) Championship. Spring, clear, mild, late evening, full stadium.

Event: 4x400 meter relay finals.

Situation: After starting the race, the starter and assistant casually watch the competition. During a handoff, the starter and assistants notice one of the teams exchanging the baton outside of the legal zone.

The assistant tells the starter what he saw, and the starter agrees. The assistant asks the starter what should be done. The starter replies, "Nothing. We're starters, not umpires. If the umpires didn't catch it, it's not our fault."

Aftermath: The umpires did not catch the exchange violation, and the start team took no action. The athletes got away with the violation.

Question: What was the appropriate action for the starter and assistant to take?

18. Athlete False Starts After Hearing Name Called

In the 100 meter hurdles after “set”, an athlete hears her name called from elsewhere in the stadium and false starts.

Question: Should the athlete be charged?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: Youth (High School) Championship. Spring, rainy, cool, afternoon, semi-full stadium.

Event: 100 meter dash finals. False start results in disqualification.
Apparently the athlete in lane 5 is named Jessica.

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still. On the “set” command, the athletes come to a “set” position and get still.

Immediately after everyone is still, a group of spectators on the far side of the stadium yell, “Go Jessica!” The athlete in lane 5 immediately false starts. Without firing the gun, the starter says “stand up”.

Over the stadium’s sound system, the starter requests that the spectators not call the athlete’s name during the start of the race. The starter then rules that the athlete will not be charged with a false start.

The race is restarted without further incident.

Aftermath: At an appropriate time later, the assistant and the starter have a friendly, but heated discussion over the incident. The assistant feels the athlete should have been charged with the false start. The assistant’s argument:

- The athlete hearing her name from the far side of the stadium is a weak excuse for losing concentration and false starting.
- The calling of the name didn’t distract any of the other athletes in the race. A start should be considered unfair if all athletes are affected, not just one.
- Not penalizing the false starting athlete is unfair to the other athletes who remained still during the start

The starter felt the ruling was justified for the following reasons:

- If the sound was loud and clear enough for the starter to hear it, then it's sufficient to interfere with the athlete's concentration.
- The start was still unfair, even if it was unfair to just one athlete.
- The athlete deserved the benefit of the doubt if the starter was unsure of the fairness of the start.

Question: Did the starter act correctly, or is the assistant correct, and why?

19. Hold Time – How Long?

Having heard numerous opinions, the starter wants to know what is an appropriate hold time between “set” and the gun.

Question: What is an appropriate hold time?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: Any meet

Event: Any 3-command race. *The starter in this situation traditionally holds athletes between 1.75 and 2.5 seconds.*

Situation: The starter is nearing the final race of the evening and everyone at the meet is happy with her performance. While a distance race is in process, she has an opportunity to have casual conversation with several officials. 2 conversations with 2 separate officials are particularly interesting to her:

- (a) One official, a very experienced starter whose opinion she highly values says the following:
 - You’re doing a great job, but you are holding the athletes too long.
 - Once the athletes are set, shoot the gun and let them go.
 - A long hold causes athletes to lose concentration, increasing the chance of a false start.
- (b) The other official, an equally experienced starter whose opinion she values very highly says the following:
 - You’re doing a great job, and your holds are perfect.
 - You’re not shooting the gun too quickly, and you’re also not holding them too long.
 - Starters who shoot a faster gun are doing a disservice to the athletes and increasing the chance of a false start.

Aftermath: The starter is very adamant that her hold times are consistent and appropriate. Nevertheless, the starter can’t help reflecting on how some athletes, coaches, spectators, even television commentators have complained that her holds are too long. This leaves the starter concerned.

Question: The starter hears conflicting opinions like this all the time, and turns to your wisdom for the FINAL WORD. What is a proper hold time and why?

20. Athlete Fails to Assume Proper Set Position

On “set” command, the athlete fails to raise his body to a proper “set” position.

Question: Should the starter penalize the athlete?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: Youth Championship. Summer, clear, warm, morning, ¼ -full stadium.

Event: 100 meter dash prelims. All athletes are using blocks.

Situation: On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still. On the command, “Set” all athletes come to a set position and get still, except the athlete in lane 6 – who remains in the “on your marks” position.

The starter stands the athletes up, and asks the lane 6 athlete if he heard the command. The athlete responds, “yes”. The starter asks the athlete why he didn’t raise to a set position. The athlete responds that he did raise to a set position – it’s just very low.

The starter issues a warning to the athlete to raise to a higher position so the starter can clearly see him – failure to do so will result in disqualification.

Aftermath: The athlete complies with the starter’s warning and raises much higher the next time. But the athlete wonders to himself if the starter has the right to dictate how an athlete chooses to start.

Question: The athlete describes this situation to you at a later time. Did the starter act appropriately?

21. Starter Does Not Wish to be Corrected by Another Starter

A more skilled starter is attempting to correct a less skilled starter's minor errors, but the less skilled starter does not wish to be corrected.

Question: Can the more skilled starter improve the less skilled starter's mind-set?

Occurrence Rate: Common

Meet Conditions: Youth (High School) championship.

For simplicity's sake:

- *The MORE skilled starter will be named "SEAN".*
- *The LESS skilled starter will be named "PAUL".*
- *Paul, the LESS skilled starter has actually been starting many more years than Sean.*

Event: 800 meter run

Situation: Sean, the better starter has watched the worse starter, Paul start several races earlier in the day. Paul's performance varies from adequate to poor.

Prior to the start of the 800 meter run, Sean reminds Paul, "Remember not to shoot the gun so quickly. Wait until the athletes are steady and motionless, and be sure to check that no feet..."

Sean actually never completes his comments.

Halfway through the remarks, Paul interrupts him and says, "I got it," and turns his back to Sean in a clear signal for Sean to leave.

Slightly annoyed but composed, Sean leaves. Paul proceeds to shoot the gun quickly and doesn't notice lane 3's feet touching the starting line.

Aftermath: Sean's opinion:

- (a) Sean likes Paul as a friend.
- (b) As a fellow starter, Paul is mediocre
- (c) Paul will only improve if he can learn to take instruction and criticism.

Paul's opinion:

- (a) He likes Sean as a friend as well.
- (b) As a fellow starter Sean is a "know-it-all"
- (c) He wishes Sean would just leave him alone so he can start the races and enjoy the meet.

Question: Can the more skilled starter improve the less skilled starter's attitude? If so how, and if not why?

22. Hearing Impaired Athlete Given Unfair Start

In the 400 meter relay, a hearing impaired athlete is started in such a way that gives her an unfair disadvantage.

Question: How should the starter make the event fairer?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: Youth (High School) Championship. Spring, cloudy, mild, evening, semi-full stadium.

Event: 400 meter relay finals. *Prior to the start of the race, the starter is informed of the hearing-impaired athlete in lane 8.*

Situation: When the starter learns of the hearing-impaired athlete in lane 8, he assigns an assistant starter to stand on the outside of the track and give the athlete arm signals.

When the starter says “on your marks”, the assistant points to the blocks and the athlete proceeds to settle into the blocks. The athlete then watches the assistant.

On the “set” command, the assistant points his arm straight up. The athlete raises to a “set” position still watching the assistant.

When the gun is fired, the assistant drops the arm, and the athlete takes off from the blocks.

Aftermath: The starter and assistants felt the start was successful. However, the coach of the hearing impaired athlete felt she was given an unfair disadvantage, and complained to the meet director.

The delay between when the gun was fired and when the assistant reacted by dropping the arm was too long a delay. By the time the athlete reacted to the dropped arm and left the blocks, the other athletes were already 3 strides ahead.

Question: The starter and assistants look to you for a suggestion. What would be a better way to start this hearing impaired athlete?

23. Distance Race – Athletes Fall 40 Meters Out

In the 1500 meter run, several athletes fall due to contact 40 meters into the race.

Question: Does the starter recall the race?

Occurrence Rate: Common.

Meet Conditions: National Championship – *Trials for International Competition*.
Summer, sunny, hot, early afternoon, full stadium.

Event: 1500 meter run finals. 13 athletes in the race. *USATF & IAAF Rulebook applies. Falling within the 1st 100 meters of a distance race is not addressed.*

Situation: Immediately after the gun is fired, several athletes begin bumping and jostling for the inside position. 40 meters into the race, two athlete's legs get entangled, and one athlete falls to the ground. Unable to respond quickly enough, two more athletes fall on top the first athlete. The remaining athletes avoid the collision.

Two assistants immediately shoot the recall gun, and the race is stopped. Three minutes later the race is restarted without further incident.

Aftermath: As the race proceeds, the meet referee scolds the start team for recalling the race. His argument:

- (a) Since the rulebook makes no mention of recalling the race for a fall, the starters have no right to make that decision
- (b) The fact that recalling for a fall within 100 meters is “common practice” by some is irrelevant
- (c) This places the athletes at a disadvantage when preparing for an IAAF competition where such a fall is ignored by the start team.

The starters defended their recall:

- (a) The rulebook says to recall an unfair start, which the starters did
- (b) The “common practice” argument is valid
- (c) Not recalling the race eliminates the athlete's chance of attending the international competition the referee speaks of.

Question: Given your personal background and expertise, what is the appropriate action for the start team?

24. Official Interferes with Start

In the 100 meter hurdles, an umpire's behavior is distracting the athletes and interfering with the start.

Question: What is the starter's best response?

Occurrence Rate: Rare for this specific situation. But an official interfering with other officials is common and expected.

Meet Conditions: Collegiate non-championship. Spring, sunny, warm, early afternoon, semi-full stadium.

Event: 100 meter hurdles semi-finals.

Situation: One umpire is assigned to each row of hurdles. Between heats, the hurdle umpires reset and straighten the hurdles, and then take a seat on the outside of the track so they can watch their assigned row of hurdles. All umpires abide by this procedure except the umpire in charge of row #6.

After umpire #6 sets and straightens the hurdles, he stands in the center of the track – leaning on one of the hurdles – and watches the race, moving out of the athletes' way only after the athletes get really close.

An assistant starter notices this umpire's activity, and initially does nothing. None of the athletes complain until heat #4, when the starter says, "on your marks", and an athlete in lane 6 mentions that an official is standing on the track.

At this point, the assistant takes action. She orders the athletes to "stand up" – with the starter's permission. She then stands in the middle of the track and yells to the official 50 meters away to get off the track. The official is facing the start line, but doesn't respond.

The assistant continues yelling and waving at the official until the official finally exits the track in a slow fashion.

The race resumes without further delay. As the race is concluding the assistant notices that the exited umpire is quickly making his way toward the starting line. The assistant prepares herself for the Aftermath...

Aftermath: Upon arriving at the starting line, the umpire confronts the assistant and makes it clear in a raised voice that:

- He does not like being yelled at
- In his many years working this meet, he has never been treated so disrespectfully.

The assistant fires back in an equally raised voice that:

- She wouldn't have yelled if he had complied with her wishes
- He shouldn't have been on the track interfering with the start in the first place

Although that umpire never again stood in the middle of the track during the start of a race, the umpire and the assistant – who are two generally nice people – are now lifetime adversaries.

Question: How could the assistant have obtained the official's cooperation with a more positive outcome?

25. Athlete Falls or Drops Baton Immediately After Leaving Starting Blocks

In the 400 meter relay, as the gun fires and the athlete is leaving the blocks, 2 DIFFERENT THINGS GO WRONG:

- (a) The athlete immediately falls to the track. The blocks don't appear to have slipped.
- (b) The athlete immediately drops the baton in the process of taking off from the blocks.

Question: Should the starter recall the race?

Occurrence Rate: Rare

Meet Conditions: Collegiate Championship. Spring, rainy, cool, evening, full stadium.

Event: 400 meter relay finals.

Situation: On the command "set," the athletes get in a set position and get still. As the gun is fired and the athletes leave the starting blocks:

- (a) The athlete in lane 2 immediately stumbles and falls flat onto the track. He quickly gets up and proceeds to run the race – enormously disadvantaged. The blocks don't appear to have slipped.

The starter shoots the gun again and stops the race. The athlete wasn't injured, and on further investigation, the blocks don't appear to have moved.

- (b) The athlete in lane 2 immediately loses grip of the baton and it goes flying out of his hand. He stops, chases the baton down, picks it up and resumes the race – enormously disadvantaged.

The starter shoots the gun again and stops the race.

Aftermath: At an appropriate time later in the evening, the assistant conveys his disagreement at the starter's decision in each situation to fire the gun and stop the race.

The starter feels he acted correctly because:

- In (a), it's possible the blocks could have slipped and we just didn't detect it. The benefit of the doubt should favor the athlete.
- In (a) and (b), an unfair start for just one athlete is still an unfair start.

The assistant disagrees, arguing that:

- In (a) if there is no indication that the blocks slipped, the gun shouldn't have fired just because the athlete was clumsy.
- In (a) if there was indication that the blocks had slipped, the assistant would have noticed it before the starter did.
- In (a) and (b), stopping the race unfairly penalizes the athletes who were not clumsy.

Question: What is the appropriate call in each situation?

1. Athlete Flinches, Causing Other Athletes to False Start

Charge the flinching athlete in lane 5 with a false start (5 votes)

Do not charge anyone, but rather warn all athletes to remain still on “set” (3 votes)

Do not charge the flincher, but rather he athlete who reacted to the flinch (1 vote)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes slightly favored charging the flinching athlete in lane 5 with a false start. However, the panel was unanimous on this particular point: An alert and prudent starter will avoid this dilemma by quickly standing the athletes up and canceling the start. The above tally assumed the starter failed to do so.
2. The arguments in favor of charging the flinching athlete:
 - a. Had the flinch not apparently caused the other athletes to false start, the flincher would not have been charged. However, when an athlete is responsible for other athletes false starting, that athlete should be charged with a false start.
 - b. The flincher commenced a start motion after being in a final set position.
 - c. The “commencement of the starting motion” technically began in the athlete’s mind. Therefore, hands or feet leaving their marks is irrelevant, since those motions take place well after the “commencement of the starting motion”.
 - d. All later chain reactions to the flinch are irrelevant.
3. The arguments in favor of not charging anyone:
 - a. The starter should have quickly canceled the start and stood the athletes up. Failure to do this is the fault of the starter, not the athlete. It also results in an improperly long hold.
 - b. The flincher became still, which isn’t sufficient grounds for a false start. All later chain reactions to the flinch are irrelevant.
 - c. The flinch was unintentional, and thus should not be ruled as a deliberate disruption of the starting sequence (unsportsmanlike conduct).
 - d. A warning should help encourage the athletes to concentrate better and avoid a penalty.
4. The argument in favor of charging the one who reacted to the flinch: Since the flincher became still, he did nothing wrong. However, the athlete who reacted to the flinch should have concentrated better.

2. Athlete Immediately Leaves Blocks on “Set”

Charge the athlete with a false start (Unanimous)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The panel voted unanimously to rule a false start. However, one argument was raised in favor of the starter’s decision not to penalize the athlete: Since the rulebook provides no restriction or time limit regarding when a start may be canceled, the starter was not expressly forbidden from canceling the start after the athlete made her error
2. One consideration is whether the athlete usually rises to a “set” position as opposed to staying crouched in her “set” position. Either way however, the athlete should still be charged with a false start because she left the starting line as if the gun went off.
3. Oftentimes, preventive officiating – standing the athletes up – can save an athlete, but this is likely not one of those times. The athlete false started and unfortunately there was not enough time to rescue her.
4. Mistake or not, the athlete deliberately attempted to start running after the “set” command
5. The athlete failed to follow the starter’s command
6. A blunder like this is inexcusable with an experienced athlete, and the athlete’s coach would probably agree.
7. The athlete’s feelings are irrelevant.
8. If the action was deliberate, the starter might also be justified to disqualify the athlete on the grounds of unsportsmanlike behavior.
9. Most of the panelists’ arguments would also apply to a 2-command start, where an athlete takes off immediately after the “On your marks” command.

3: Athlete Rises Very Slowly

Warn the slow riser, or all the athletes, to rise to “set” immediately (6 votes)

Charge lane 4 with a false start (2 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes strongly favored issuing a warning to all athletes, or to the slow riser in lane 6, but many errors were brought to light by the panel.
2. The arguments in favor of the warning:
 - a. A warning is sufficient unless the athlete was trying to gain an unfair advantage by remaining in motion all the way to the gun
 - b. Immediately standing the athletes up and warning the slow riser avoids an unnecessarily long hold – which unfairly penalizes the athletes who remain still.
3. The arguments favoring the false start focused more on the fact that, right or wrong, the starter’s ruling is final.
4. The assistants violated protocol in making a suggestion on how a starter should rule. Offering any opinion on the starter’s ruling, is illegal, is not a global practice and should be avoided at all times.
5. Generally, a 3-second hold is unreasonably long (2.2 – 2.5 seconds is on the back side of the concentration curve). It is better to stand the athletes up immediately, rather than subject them to such a long hold. Penalizing an athlete by permitting such a long hold displays poor officiating by both the starter and the assistants.
6. The starter’s concern that “canceling a start is more disruptive” is invalid. When fairness to the athletes is at stake, canceling the start is less disruptive than forcing an athlete to wait in a set position for an unreasonable time, or allowing an athlete to gain an unfair advantage.
7. Confronting a starter (even a cranky one) in a professional manner is always appropriate when the welfare of the athletes is at stake.
8. One argument in favor of the starter’s ruling to charge lane 4 with the false start: “Being held too long” is not necessarily a valid excuse for not remaining set and motionless in the blocks.

4. Athlete Rises Promptly, then Continues Rising Slowly

Charge the athlete with a false start (5 votes)

Give the athlete a warning (3 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes slightly favored charging the slow-rising athlete with a false start. The argument in favor of the false start: The athlete was in motion at the firing of the gun.
2. The most compelling factor in the starters ruling should be the distinction made between “motion” and “forward motion”. If the athlete is simply in “motion” with no clear advantage gained, then a warning seems more appropriate. If the athlete is commencing a “forward motion” or “starting motion”, then the false start seems more appropriate.
3. The argument in favor of the warning: Since the current description doesn’t seem to indicate forward motion, or a “roll” out of the blocks, a warning is sufficient.
4. Right or wrong, the starter has the final say. IAAF rules forbid assistants from contradicting the starter. It is not a global practice, and should be avoided in the U.S. The assistant’s job is to act as an additional set of eyes/ears and to report to the starter observations only, without any suggestions or opinions on a ruling.

That said, it is improper for the starter to accept the opinion of the assistants on a ruling. It is also improper for assistants to

- a. volunteer any opinion on the starter’s ruling, or
- b. linger around a starter while the starter is ruling

as both of these actions give the appearance of indecisiveness by the start team

5. Suffering from doubt, or being affected by comments from spectators or anyone else not directly involved in the starting process is inexcusable.
6. The assistant should have stood the athletes up upon noticing the slow riser. It is not unusual for an assistant to delay standing the athletes up to allow the athlete time to stabilize. But when the athlete failed to stabilize in a reasonable time, stopping the race was the correct action.

5. Standing Start, the Athlete Loses Balance and...

a) **Steps forward and the foot touches the line**

False Start	7 votes
Warning	2 votes

b) **Steps forward and the foot does not touch the line**

Warning or Simply fire the gun	6 votes
False Start	3 votes

c) **Steps sideways.**

Warning or Simply fire the gun	7 votes
False Start	2 votes

d) **Slowly rocks forward and takes a large step over the line.**

False Start	5 votes
Warning	4 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. While the votes favor one ruling over another, the panel stressed that all of these situations are strictly judgment calls based on the starter's own perceptions. "I had to be there" was a common response.
2. Arguments in favor of the False Start:
 - a. After the "Set" command, stepping on the line, regardless of how brief, is a false start.
 - b. Even if the line was never touched, taking a step forward is the commencement of the starting motion (it would be the same thing as taking a running start).
 - c. Right or wrong, the starter's ruling is final.
3. Arguments in favor of the Warning or of Simply Firing the Gun:
 - a. The issue of line infringement and positioning of feet is irrelevant. The relevant issue is movement – which in these cases was caused by an athlete's inability to assume a final set position.
 - b. The athlete's failure to assume a full and final set position is not a false start, but a failure to follow the starter's "Set" command, resulting in a warning.
 - c. If the athlete takes a step, but becomes set in a reasonable time, the start process does not necessarily need to be interrupted.
 - d. No advantage was gained in the sideways step, and the athlete became still.
4. Most panelists strongly emphasized this point: An alert and prudent starter will be especially sensitive to the standing start and quickly cancel the start when they see the athlete having trouble – especially in Situation D).
5. Athlete age and experience level affects how the starter might rule.
6. The standing start is strictly an "American thing". Outside the US – blocks or no blocks – the crouch start for sprint races is mandatory, courtesy of the IAAF rulebook.

6. Athlete Rises Promptly, then Slowly Lowers the Body

<u>Warning to the “slowly lowering” athlete in lane 4</u>	(3 votes)
<u>Restart without a warning</u>	(3 votes)
<u>“Slowly lowering” athlete in lane 4 false started</u>	(1 vote)
<u>Both athletes – lanes 4 and 5 – false started</u>	(1 vote)
<u>Athlete in lane 5 false started</u>	(1 vote)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes split 5 ways – demonstrating how especially difficult this scenario was. Several panelists believe the start team showed poor and inconsistent practice.
2. The entire start team should have been alert to the potential of infringement – especially on the restart – and should have recalled the race since the athlete in lane 4 was in motion as the gun fired.
3. The three things the panelists found most disturbing about this case:
 - a. The starter did not trust his assistants when they said they saw motion – especially considering more than one saw it
 - b. The starter fired the gun while the athlete in lane 4 was in motion
 - c. On the restart, the assistants were reluctant, hesitant, maybe even “scared” to recall the race, even after seeing lane 4’s body-lowering motion again.
4. Arguments raised in the Aftermath, such as ‘difficult to detect’, ‘indistinct’ and ‘more disruptive’ are irrelevant when dealing with a ‘world class starter at a world class meet’.

7. Athlete Performs a Practice Start

**The starter should have simply warned the athlete,
AND the referee should have been consulted about
the warning** (7 votes)

**The starter should have simply warned the athlete
AND the referee need NOT be consulted** (1 vote)

**The starter was right to disqualify the athlete
AND the referee need NOT be consulted** (1 vote)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes strongly favored notifying the referee, or perhaps (in the interest of time) handing the athlete a warning on the referee's behalf and then notifying the referee.
2. As a rule violation, performing practice starts is strictly an "American thing". Thus, the international starters had little to say about this case.
3. The panelists who felt the disqualification was wrong, believe the starter's authority begins and ends at the starting line. All violations not taking place at the starting line fall in another official's jurisdiction, such as the referee's. The practice start is such a violation.
4. To say the penalty in the rulebook for performing a practice start is "not specific" is incorrect. The simple fact is there is no penalty. When no penalty is prescribed, the only official who can hand over a ruling is the referee (or games committee).
5. Many panelists had very strong feelings about this scenario. Some of the responses:
 - a. "Ignorance of the rule is no excuse" applies to the starter as well
 - b. Leave your ego at home
 - c. This kind of stuff drives me nuts
 - d. Some of these questions [*this document is rated "G"*] me off!
 - e. The starter is just being a bully. Why don't they stay home and kick their *own* children instead?

8. Disqualified Athlete Refuses to Leave

Do everything possible to diffuse the situation as quickly as possible (Unanimous)

Remedies suggested by the Panel:

1. Remove the blocks from the lane
2. If the athlete does not leave, have the athlete escorted from the competition area
3. If the athlete continues defiance, bring others to the starting line, including:
 - a. Referee
 - b. Coach
 - c. Security
 - d. Civil Authorities
4. If the athlete becomes confrontational, get down off the stand and blend in with the crowd. Get off the “authority” platform, and just look like another official.
5. Last resort: Run the race with the disqualified athlete. Inform the other athletes and referee that the athlete is permitted to run, but will be disqualified upon completion of the race.

What Else the Panel Had to Say:

1. Firing the gun in the direction of the athlete is just plain crazy. That is one of the easier ways to land in jail.
2. The starter’s job ended at the point of disqualification. At that point the athlete was under the control of the referee and security personnel.
3. Maintaining a calm attitude and voice is essential. An official’s job is to help diffuse the situation as quickly as possible. Equally strong defiance from an official only adds fuel to the fire.
4. The athlete will likely calm down when outnumbered.
5. Resolve the situation as quickly as possible. The quicker attention is diverted from the athlete and this situation, the better.

9. 200 Meters Started from Wrong Starting Line

Admit the error to the track referee as soon as possible **(Unanimous)**

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. In truth, only 7 of the 9 panelists made the comment above, but the remaining 2 implied it in their response. This starter's "cover up" infuriated at least a couple of the panelists.
2. Once the starter explained the mistake to the referee, the referee has several options including:
 - a. Start the remaining races from the correct line and re-run the first heat – after sufficient recovery.
 - b. Take no action if there were no close finishes for qualifying spots, if the finish was for place and not time, and/or if there were no protests.
 - c. Don't re-run the first heat and start all remaining heats from wrong starting line.
3. The starter need take no action beyond alerting the proper officials
4. The starter was not the only official at fault. Proper placement of the athletes at the starting line is as much a responsibility of the start clerk (assistant) as the starter. Learn the starting lines prior to competition, to avoid these mistakes.
5. Human beings make mistakes. The "guilt trip" after the fact is pointless. Let it go. The only true lapse in intelligence was in failure to immediately correct the situation simply to avoid criticism or embarrassment. Make it right, and make it right immediately.

10. Starter Incorrectly Charges Athlete Based on Incomplete False Start Apparatus Information

The assistants should have reported the additional movement they detected from lane 3 (7 votes)

For the most part, nothing. The start team acted properly according to the rules. (1 vote)

Ignore the apparatus and re-run – particularly after receiving the report from the assistants (1 vote)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes indicate most panelists believe the assistants were wrong not to notify the starter of the detected movement. On any recall, each assistant should approach the starter one at a time, report what was observed (even if it was nothing), and then quickly return to their positions, so it doesn't look like a "committee decision".
2. An argument favoring the original ruling: A false start is to be charged for illegal movement – not all movement. Oftentimes, upper body movement will not trigger the sensor on the blocks. If an athlete's motion does not trigger the apparatus, and if no advantage is gained, then the movement is legal.
3. The athlete should not be allowed to view the computerized graph until a formal protest is lodged.
4. The start team should have been more familiar with the capabilities of the false start apparatus. It is imperative that National Championship start teams be well trained on how to verify wave graphs.
5. The false start apparatus is merely an "aid" to the human eye not a replacement. Some panelists admitted having little faith in the apparatus. Nevertheless, it's intended to assure that:
 - a. All apparent false starts are detected,
 - b. Judgment by humans can be confirmed, and
 - c. Errors made by subtle and possibly non-detectable motion are avoided.
6. It is unfortunate that so many athletes/coaches are unaware of the rule allowing disqualified athletes to compete "under protest". In this case, the athlete could have competed and the ruling made later. The evidence was not going anywhere, but the athlete's chance to advance was.

11. Apparatus Detects Questionable False Start.

Overrule the machine and not charge a false start (4 votes)

Accept the machine's ruling and charge a false start (4 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. A *perfect tie* indicates that either decision is correct.
2. Arguments favoring the machine overrule:
 - a. While the rule indicates the starter must accept the false start apparatus's info, the starter also has the right to overrule the machine if the data appears faulty.
 - b. Some panelists agreed that 0.18 seconds prior to the gun should have been detected, and the machine must have malfunctioned.
 - c. When evidence is overwhelming that the false start occurred, then it should be charged. When evidence is less than overwhelming, the benefit of the doubt should favor the athlete. In this case, the evidence is less than overwhelming.
 - d. The machine is an aid, not a replacement for the human eye.
3. Arguments favoring accepting the machine's ruling:
 - a. There was little reason to believe the machine was malfunctioning. The overrule would be justified if the graph was inconclusive, or the technician was inconclusive, or perhaps there was lightning activity within the last hour.
 - b. It is not our right to say what "should have been detectable". Concentrate on the facts and evidence, and leave the theories to the scientists who created the device.
 - c. The rule is clear – if the machine picked it up, the starter had to accept it.
 - d. Why did meet management entrust thousands [of US \$] on the machine if we are not going to use it?

12. Speaker Malfunction Delays Race

Start the race prior to fixing the speakers (5 votes)

Delay until speakers are fixed (3 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. While the votes favored starting the race prior to fixing the speakers, both sides had the exact same motive, question, and argument: What is in the best interest of the athlete?
2. A common point stressed by many panelists was the importance of immediately consulting the meet referee or meet management when facing choices like this. Ultimately, they have the final word on which option the start team should choose. It is not “passing the buck”; it is using power appropriately.
3. The panelists who favored starting the race prior to fixing the speakers suggested using the human voice, the stadium’s PA system, or a portable amplified system. They further argued that starting races with the human voice worked just fine prior to the invention/utilization of speaker technology.

13. Starting Blocks – Athlete Unsteady

- a) **Hands leave the track surface, but return without touching the starting line.**
- | | |
|---|---------|
| False Start | 5 votes |
| Halt the starting process with or without a warning | 2 votes |
- b) **Rocks forward and slowly falls over the line.**
- | | |
|---|---------|
| False Start | 5 votes |
| Stand the athletes up before committing foul (rescue the athlete) | 3 votes |
- c) **Rocks forward and recovers as gun is fired, but is last to leave the blocks.**
- | | |
|--|---------|
| Recall the race with or without a warning | 2 votes |
| Do not recall the race – too bad for the athlete | 2 votes |
| Recall the race with false start to moving athlete | 1 vote |

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. While the votes favor one ruling over another, the panel stressed that all of these situations are strictly judgment calls based on the starter's own perceptions. "I had to be there" was a common response – especially in the 3rd situation.
2. In the title, the term "unsteady" is used. The title contradicts the description. "Unsteady" implies that the athlete never got still in the "set" position – thus the pistol should not have been fired and the start process should have been halted in each situation. Crossing the line is not the issue; motion is.
3. Starters commonly use the term "rescuing or saving" an athlete to mean halting the start process before the athlete can finish committing the foul – thus allowing the athlete to avoid a penalty. One panelist emphasized that "rescuing" would be improper terminology if taken literally. Creating, promoting and fostering a fair start is the literal intent behind "rescuing" an athlete.

14. Athlete Raises Hand

- a) **Loses balance and raises hand before falling.**
Stand the athletes up with or without a warning 5 votes
False Start 4 votes
- b) **Raises hand and leaves blocks without permission.**
Stand the athletes up with or without a warning 7 votes
False start 2 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. In the 1st situation, the votes are slightly in favor of rescuing the athlete before a false start can be completed. In the 2nd situation, the vote is strongly in favor of not charging the false start, even though the athlete exited the blocks without permission.
2. The arguments in favor of not charging the athlete for standing without permission:
 - a. In both situations, the letter of the rule favors charging, but the spirit behind the rule favors always giving the benefit of the doubt to the athlete.
 - b. In the 1st situation, remove the “raised hand” from the equation, and we are still left with an athlete who couldn’t steady herself, and should have been rescued.
 - c. In the 2nd situation, the distraction is the primary factor behind not charging. A distraction at least partly justified the athlete’s behavior. If the distraction did not exist, or was not as apparent, raising the hand and leaving the blocks may have resulted in a false start charge. *See note.*

****Note: Shortly after this panel had concluded, an IAAF and USATF rule change requires an athlete to be charged with unsportsmanlike conduct if the athlete raises the hand and/or interrupts the starting process without good cause.***

3. Some panelists felt that the raised hand does not automatically halt the start:
 - a. If the athlete raises the hand simply to cover up for a lack of control, the starter has a legitimate right to charge a false start anyway.
 - b. If the athlete waves, the starter has the right to wave back, and continue with the starting process.

15. Athlete “Wastes” a Free False Start

Starter was wrong to disqualify the athlete (6 votes)

Starter was right to disqualify the athlete but went about it incorrectly (3 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. 2/3^{rds} of the panel voted that the starter acted incorrectly.
2. The panelists who felt the starter was wrong to disqualify argued:
 - a. While it may be difficult at times, it is imperative that the start team not go into a race with preconceived notions about an athlete. All athletes should essentially be considered “anonymous” in the starter’s eyes – identified only by lane.
 - b. The panel was almost entirely in agreement that the athlete’s actions were annoying. Nevertheless, if the athlete has a legal right to perform an annoying act, it is not the starter’s place to judge according to intentions.
3. The panelists who felt the disqualification was correct, also felt the starter followed improper protocol. The first 2 arguments – wasting meet time and abusing the false start rule – are irrelevant. The 3rd argument – the athlete purposely disturbed the other athletes through this repetitive act – is legal grounds for an unsportsmanlike conduct disqualification. Here is what the starter could have done to put an end to the athlete’s legal, but unfavorable ritual:
 - a. When the pattern first becomes apparent, warn the athlete of unsportsmanlike conduct, and make it clear that further disturbing of the athletes will be grounds for disqualification. *Note: You can further instruct the athlete to raise the hand if something is wrong (i.e. “blocks don’t feel right”), but emphasize that this will only be tolerated once.*
 - b. Notify the referee of the warning (or better yet, involve the referee in the warning). *Note: It would be better to discuss this potential problem with the referee in advance, to be certain everyone is in agreement.*
 - c. a. and b. should be sufficient to break the athlete’s habit. If the athlete unwisely ignores the warning, and continues the activity, the starter now has the referee’s approval to remove the athlete from the race.

16. Standing Start – Baton Touches Beyond Starting Line

Warn the athlete (4 votes)

Charge the athlete with a false start (3 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes for this scenario slightly favored warning the athlete, but either option appears correct. The arguments in favor of the warning:
 - a. Before the gun is fired is the time to correct problems. When part of a finger or foot (or in this case baton) touches or advances the line, we warn, not disqualify.
 - b. This will so rarely occur, the athlete's ignorance of the rule can be excused. No one is hurt by simply warning the athlete.
2. In favor of the false start, the panel gave only one argument, shared by nearly all panelists: The coach should have known better.

17. Starter Observes a Non-Starting Violation

Notify the head umpire or meet referee (5 votes)

Do nothing (4 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes slightly favored notifying an appropriate official, but either action appears to be correct.
2. The panel was unanimous on one point: Outside of starting, no member of the start team should take it upon themselves to disqualify or rule in any way. If a starter chooses to report an observation, they should conduct themselves as an assistant starter would to a head starter – report what they saw, then quickly retreat (unless there are further questions).
3. The arguments in favor of notifying the appropriate official:
 - a. Are we not all track officials? Starters, just like all other officials, are still responsible for the proper conduct of the meet
 - b. The report by any official observing a violation is prudent. Frequently when a protest is filed, the referee looks for any official who saw the violation.
4. The arguments favoring taking no action:
 - a. It is not the starter's jurisdiction. The high jump officials and umpires don't come and tell us how to start!
 - b. Unless asked by an umpire or referee, it is best not to impose your view of what happened.

18. Athlete False Starts After Hearing Name Called

No false start, and possibly make a plea to the audience. (5 votes)

False start (2 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes strongly favor not charging “Jessica” with the false start. However some panelists stressed that this is strictly a judgment call based on the starter’s own perception of what type of distraction warrants action.
2. The argument in favor of the “no call” is that the benefit of the doubt should always favor the athlete.
3. The argument in favor of the false start: the athlete should totally focus on the race. No excuses.

19. Hold Time – How Long?

No vote. Just enjoy reading 350 years of super-condensed wisdom on the subject of “Hold Time”:

Panelist #1:

Hold times are personal and individual. The key issue is the hold should be sufficient to allow all athletes to be still and concentrating.

Panelist #2:

Your holds are just fine. Too much longer than 2.5 is on the backside of the concentration curve. After 3 seconds it all starts going downhill. “A held start is a fair start”. You have to put the athlete’s reaction elements together: Hear, React, Get set, Wait – and the waiting mode is at least 1.5 and 1.7/1.8 seconds in a perfect situation when they’re all up quickly and still. But athletes rarely all come up perfectly, which is what delays the hold to 2 or 2.5 seconds. Different schools of thought are expected. But ignore the comments about “too long”. Don’t change.

Panelist #3:

The proper hold time is long enough to get into the set position and stay there until the starter scans from left to right and back to the middle. How long is this? I have no idea but it’s the right time. As long as your times are consistent continue with what you are doing. Forget about the complaints especially from the television people. These motor mouths don’t like “dead air” and they blame the starters for everything. I have been booed by 80,000 people. [A well-known tv commentator] once questioned if I knew how to use the starter’s pistol. Would have loved to put it up [this document is rated “G”]. I know when I have a good start and don’t care who agrees.

Panelist #4:

Official (a) is wrong, official (b) is correct. 1.8 to 2.5 seconds is generally considered optimum. There may occasionally be times when everyone is up and still very quickly, in which case the gun can be fired sooner than 1.8 seconds, but this doesn't happen very often. A quick gun generally will increase the chance of a false start.

Panelist #5:

If the time taken for the slowest athlete to get "set" is reasonable (in the starters opinion) then that is the 'hold' time.

Panelist #6:

I would agree with the advice given by "b". Give the athletes time to get set, then go. Quit worrying on what others feel and go with your gut. If they're still and in control, let ‘em go.

Panelist #7:

Pay attention to the meet director and direct supervisors. If they don’t like you, then you know you should change. If they like you, and keep inviting you back, then you’re doing fine. Do what you feel comfy with. Don’t worry about the others.

Panelist #8:

An appropriate hold time is relative. There is no one absolute magic moment. There is also no such thing as ‘you are doing a great job, but’. A hold that is too long or too short is not doing a great job. In general, there is an amount of time needed to determine that the competitors are set, and this is very difficult to accomplish in less than 1.5 seconds given that there is a human reaction, [and] a start and an end of motion [which can range from] .25 to 1.25 seconds. One indication of a great job is the demand for service. Another relates to the request for either advice or approval from others. They help in the ‘reflecting’ process regarding performance.

Panelist #9

The gun should fire when ALL the athletes have gotten their final set position and ALL the athletes have had the opportunity to mentally prepare to respond to the pistol, AND the starter is sure that they are ALL primed and ready to explode out. THERE IS NO MAGIC “HOLD TIME” NUMBER HERE, but research tends to say that optimally it is somewhere between 1.6 to 2.2 seconds. Sometimes the response to “set” is rapid and solid. There is no need for a further hold if it is not mitigated. Sometimes (especially in echelon starts in 200 and 400) the athletes respond to “set” slower or more erratic, so the hold might be longer. The hold time should be instinctive and not mechanical. Early in their careers, starters are generally less patient, a bit scared, and tend to shoot too fast. They have to become mechanical for a while about developing a 1.7 to 2.2 second hold time just to mature. When that range of hold time becomes habitual and you have greater confidence, then you can relax and be more instinctive. That aspiring starter shouldn’t care what the TV commentators are saying – they have no idea at all what you are trying to accomplish, and you sure don’t tell them how to announce! Your optimum holding time depends on YOU. What works for YOU.

20. Athlete Fails to Assume Proper Set Position

The starter was wrong to command a higher “set” (6 votes)

The starter was correct to command a higher “set” (3 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes favored the athlete’s contention that the starter should not dictate how high the athlete may rise.
2. The arguments why the starter was “wrong” to tell the athlete to raise higher:
 - a. If the athlete’s technique is not violating the rules, the starter has no right to influence the athlete’s technique. It is the starter who should adapt to the athlete, not vice-versa.
 - b. If the athlete remained completely at the “on your marks” position, then a warning is justified. However, there is nothing in the rules about how high an athlete has to rise to attain a full and final “set” position. There should be some movement however.
 - c. The athlete would be wise to warn future starters of the technique.
3. The argument favoring the starter’s decision to warn the athlete to rise higher:
 - a. The rule says full, upright position, end of discussion.
 - b. On the next failure to rise sufficiently, the athlete can have a discussion in the bleachers with the coach about a better start technique.

21. Starter Does Not Wish to be Corrected by Another Starter

Yes, a mentoring environment is possible. But the attitude of both parties may need adjusting. (Unanimous)

What the Panel Had to Say Regarding the More Skilled Starter – Sean:

1. Work on presentation. Be diplomatic, supportive and encouraging.
2. Discuss the less skilled starter's actions at the end of the meet, when all actions can be summarized and analyzed as a whole. Speak to him in private, perhaps in a less threatening environment away from the track completely, or have him accompany you to a starter clinic.
3. Teach through example. Offer suggestions in a positive and friendly manner, like, "Did you ever try _____". Feed the information slowly.
4. Be clear on the difference between correcting a minor error, and offering a "personal preference". There is more than one acceptable method utilized by starters – even if you don't agree with them. Save personal preference for theoretical discussions and clinics.
5. If the "old dog won't learn new tricks", either stop working with him, recommend that meet management stop hiring him as a starter (your reputation is at stake as well), or simply tolerate him.

What the Panel Had to Say Regarding the Less Skilled Starter – Paul:

1. A mentoring process only works if both parties cooperate.
2. Place the ego aside and accept suggestions. Adamantly refusing to accept performance suggestions works against the entire start team.
3. Understand that learning never stops. The moment you stop learning from others you becomes a "shooter", rather than a starter.

22. Hearing Impaired Athlete Given Unfair Start

The start team acted correctly (5 votes)

I would have done it differently (4 votes)

Alternate Suggestions by the Panel for Starting Hearing Impaired Athletes:

1. Whenever possible, discuss the planned starting procedure in advance with coach. The referee should participate in the discussion as well.
2. Place a strobe light – attached to the gun sensor – in the athlete’s view. Or place yourself somewhere where the athlete can see the flash/smoke of the gun.
3. Position yourself partially on the track. Use a red flag or starter’s sleeve (or simply the arm) as a visual aid. Hold it in the non-gun hand. “On your marks,” place left arm in front of you, holding the flag at waist level. “Set,” raise the flag straight overhead. “Fire the Gun,” drop the arm simultaneously. No false starts.
4. The assistants could have used a thumb up on set and open palm when gun goes off, which offers a faster reaction than dropping the arm.
5. A comprehensive procedure for starting the deaf is described in the back of the USATF Rulebook in a section entitled, “Special Section Adaptations to USA Track & Field Rules of Competition for Individuals with Disabilities” (Section V, Pertaining to Rule 162).

23. Distance Race – Athletes Fall 40 Meters Out

Recall (5 votes)

Do not recall (4 votes)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The panel unanimously agreed that the race should be recalled for a spill. How far from the starting line was a subject of dispute.
2. The practice of recalling a race for a fall within 100 meters is purely an “American thing”. The panelists who voted against the recall believed 10 meters was more than sufficient. 40 meters was too far.
3. An alternative suggested by a panelist: Position the runners on the assembly line so that the runners nearest the curb can run straight ahead and not be bumped into the infield. Position a recall assistant 10 paces in front of the starting line.
4. Prudence suggests the starter discuss with the referee in advance how to rule on these kinds of situations.

24. Official Interferes with Start

The starter could have handled it better (8 votes)

The starter handled it correctly (1 vote)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The Panel was unanimous that the umpire needed to be removed from the place of interference. Nearly all felt the way the starter went about it could have been handled better.
2. All track meets are professional environments. Never yell. Remain calm and diplomatic. Walk down the track, and simply explain that the umpire is distracting the athletes. It's okay if you delay the race a minute or two.
3. A majority of panelists suggested not dealing with the umpire at all. Send a marshal, or if necessary, work up the chain of command – starting with the chief umpire, then referee, then meet director. Again, explain that the official is disturbing the athletes.
4. The umpire has forgotten that a primary objective of a track & field official is to leave the stadium unnoticed.
5. Some of the panelists' more colorful comments
 - a. Explain you weren't yelling at him to be disrespectful. You were just trying to be heard. Then [*this document is rated "G"*].
 - b. Boo-Hoo-Hoo! I got "yelled at". You're so mean!! Maybe by getting him a barco-lounger to sit on after she [*this document is rated "G"*]?? Perhaps she can give him his veteran's pin and escort him to the stands where there are reserved seats for retired officials? That would probably be the best move.

25. After Leaving Starting Blocks, Athlete ...

a) **Immediately falls to the track**

Recall the race	4 votes
Do not recall	4 votes

b) **Immediately drops the baton**

Do not recall	8 votes
Recall the race	1 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. A *perfect tie* in Situation A) indicates that either decision is correct when the athlete takes an early spill. The nearly unanimous vote in Situation B) indicates that the race should not be recalled for a dropped baton.
2. Arguments favoring the recall
 - a. The benefit of the doubt should always favor the athlete. Very often you don't know immediately if the spill was due to slipped blocks. And slipped blocks is typically the reason.
 - b. "Fair starts" are purely a judgment call. If the starter judges a start unfair, then it is.
3. Arguments against the recall
 - a. Do not assume. If no one detected block motion, then you cannot govern clumsiness. If a future examination reveals slipped blocks, then you have the option (not the obligation) to inform the referee.
 - b. There was no interference.