STARTER INFORMATION

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

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

1. **Dress**
   a. It is important that you dress professionally. Light-colored shirt (recommend officials purchase the official white track shirt), dress slacks (khaki, gray or black) and baseball type cap are recommended. Shorts or dress shorts (khaki, navy or black) are acceptable in hot weather. Jeans or cutoffs are not acceptable. If there is an Assistant Starter, both should dress similarly. The SDHSAA will issue guidance on the uniform for Starters at the State Meet.
2. **Pre-Meet Duties**
   a. Starters Meeting
      i. Review positions on the track
      ii. Discuss hand/arm signals
      iii. Review starting violations
      iv. Review duties of the Assistant Starter, to include when to halt the starting process
   b. Check the starting and finishing lines, relay staggers, exchange zones, cut line and cut line flags
   c. Confer with announcer to familiarize him/her with the time schedule, plan for preliminary calls and introductions
   d. Confer with Head Finish Judge to assure agreement and understanding of meet procedures
      i. Red and white flags
      ii. Lap counter
      iii. Bell/gun lap
      iv. Procedure if FAT is used
   e. Confer with the Clerk of Course regarding pre-race instructions to the contestants to avoid duplication of this information at the starting line.
      i. Have athletes remove outer garments before moving to the starting line when weather permits.
      ii. Have the next heat ready to move up. If the meet is on time or behind schedule, start them forward as soon as the track is clear on the final lap of the previous race. If the meet is ahead of schedule, hold them until shortly before race time.
   f. Confer with Meet Director. Do we stay on time or is this a "rolling" schedule?
   g. If FAT is in use:
      i. Check it with your pistol.
      ii. Recall procedures if FAT fails. Do they have a pistol?
      iii. Who is responsible for positioning of strobe?
   h. If a speaker system is available for your use, check it out as it may dictate your starting positions.
3. **Pre-Race Duties**
   a. Inspect pistol to be sure it is loaded and direct all attendants and non-competitors to move away from the starting line.
   b. Control environment around starting line area so competitors are able to direct their total concentration to start of race.
   c. Give final instructions (especially in sprints and hurdles). Appropriate information might include the following: "Runners, do not delay in responding to my commands. At the command 'on your marks', I will give you reasonable time to assume your position. When the command 'set' is given, I will expect you to promptly come to your final position and remain motionless until the pistol is fired."
   d. In races of where a waterfall start is used or with more than one runner assigned to a lane, alert runners of possible recall during the first 50 meters.
   e. Following the instructions, signal Head Finish Judge with a whistle that race is about to begin.
   f. When the Head Finish Judge confirms the signal with white flag, ask competitors to remove their warm-up clothes if they have not already done so.

g. Take a position appropriate to the type of race.

4. **Starting the Race**
   a. For races or opening relay legs of less than 800 meters, when all of the competitors are in position, give the "ON YOUR MARKS" command when all competitors are in position.
   b. After a reasonable length of time (sufficient to allow all competitors to become motionless), give the "SET" command. If you believe the time taken to prepare for the "SET" command is unfair, direct the competitors to stand up and warn the offender(s) to arrive at the final set position immediately.
   c. The importance of the Starter's voice control cannot be emphasized too much. A calm voice is one of the most important characteristics of a successful Starter. The Starter's voice commands should be practiced regularly so the volume or tone is consistent from the beginning to the final command. Again, calmness is the key. The "SET" command should never be forcefully spoken or drawn out. It can be quite disconcerting to the runners in the blocks to have a Starter give the "SET" command starting with a low 's' and finishing with a high 't' or the opposite. It should be a crisp, normal, spoken command just loud enough to be easily heard by the runner furthest from the Starter. Yelling the "SET" command also will disrupt the atmosphere at the starting line. Care must be taken to maintain a calm, consistent intonation throughout the command cycle in order for all the competitors to hear and comfortably react. If there seems to be confusion or problems at the starting line, it could be due to the vocal commands of the Starter. After the "SET" command, be certain that all competitors assumte their final position at once and without delay.
   d. The "hold" is the length of time between the "SET" command and the firing of the gun. Any hold of less than 1.5 seconds does not allow the athletes sufficient time to get into the "set" position. There are two activities that require sufficient time to occur between the "SET" command and the firing of the gun. First, the Starter needs to ensure that all the competitors have come to a full and complete set position and have stabilized or are still. This requires a finite amount of time, usually a minimum of 1.5 seconds, to do properly. Second, consider what the athlete must do in sequence. They must hear the "SET" command, respond to it by directing the body to begin rising to the "set" position, sense when the body has reached the correct position, stop body movement, and then refocus on listening for the gun and concentrating on the explosive reaction of the sound of the gun. While this becomes an almost automatic sequence with experience, this still takes a finite amount of time to complete for both the novice and the experienced competitor. If the gun is fired with less than 1.5 seconds of hold time, there is an extremely high probability that at least one runner has not had sufficient time to complete this process and the Starter has created a disadvantage for someone by firing a quick gun. A good hold time will range from 1.8-2.3 seconds. It is adequate to give the Starter the time to view the field and to give the athletes the time to get settled in the "set" position and refocus on reacting to the gun. If a Starter has to wait for an athlete who is slow in coming up or reaching a stable position at about 2.5-2.6 seconds, the Starter should be ready to call the runners up. Practice using voice commands regularly and time yourself from the "SET" command until the trigger is pulled.
   e. For any reason either before or after the "SET" command, the Starter may cancel a start by directing all competitors to stand up. After making the appropriate adjustments, a new start is made.
   f. The use of arm signals with either vocal or whistle commands assists both the competitors and timers.
      i. When competitors are starting from a crouched position, the Starter should raise the gun to the proper overhead position and give the "ON YOUR MARKS" command. At the same time, swing the other arm (starting with the elbow straight and hand at side) backward and upward over the head and then down in front, ending with the hand pointing to the ground in front.
      ii. After a reasonable length of time, sufficient to allow all competitors to become motionless, give the "SET" command, and at the same time, quickly raise the free hand above the head.
      iii. Fire the pistol only after you are certain all competitors are set and motionless. If this interval is too long, call up the competitors and restart the race.
   g. When the starting marks are staggered for two turns or more and a speaker system is not available, the Starter should explain that whistle commands will be used.
      i. After taking a position in front of the runners and inside the race course, the Starter will:
         1. Give five or six short blasts on the whistle. This is the signal for the runners to "stand at their marks".
         2. With the gun raised over the head, give one long blast on the whistle while swinging the other arm over the head (same as for vocal commands). This is the signal for all runners to get "ON YOUR MARKS".
         3. After a reasonable delay, the Starter will sound another long blast while raising the arm over the head at the same time. This is the signal for all runners to come to the "SET" position. When all are set and motionless, fire the gun.
         4. If for any reason, the Starter wishes to call the runners "off their marks", he/she blows five or six short blasts on the whistle while moving the arm in front of the body at the same time.
   h. Individual races or relay legs of 800 meters or longer, the Starter shall use one command, "ON YOUR MARKS".
      i. To alleviate the problem of leaning or movement at the starting line on this preliminary command, ask all competitors to take a position three meters behind the starting line. On the "ON YOUR MARKS" command, all competitors will step up to the starting line without delay and the pistol will be fired once all are "set and motionless".
         1. The Starter will begin will begin this command with the pistol raised over his/her head and the other hand pointing to the ground in front.
         2. While the "ON YOUR MARKS" command is given, the Starter will raise the arm over the head at the same time.
         3. When all are "set and motionless", fire the pistol.

5. **Assistant Starter**

a. The Assistant Starter shall assist the Starter in each race. The Assistant Starter has the same authority as the Starter to ensure a fair start in each race and may recall the competitors if there is an unfair start.
b. A race, including relays, shall be recalled in the first 50 meters when a competitor falls due to contact with another competitor in the following situations:
    1. The race is not started in lanes (waterfall start); OR
    2. Two or more competitors are assigned to a single lane (or alley).
c. During distance races, this official should take a position on the first turn where there may be a fall, which would be cause for recalling the race.
d. Unless a bell is used, the Assistant Starter is assigned the duty of firing a pistol to begin the last lap of individual races of at least 800 meters.

6. Reasons to Halt the Starting Process

a. While not all-inclusive, the following is a list of some examples of when to halt the starting process:
    1. Crowd control
    2. Starting block problems
    3. Obstructions on the track
    4. Slow athlete
    5. Announcer interrupting
    6. Wrong starting line
    7. Inclement weather, outside noises
    8. Slow roll-up
    9. Bad shell/misfire
    10. Flinch or buck or runners having difficulty holding the "set" position
    11. Slipped blocks
    12. Stumble – If the runner stumbles during the first two steps, the race should be recalled since this should be considered an unfair start. If the stumble occurs after the second step, the race should not be recalled since the runner is in his/her stride pattern by this time.
    13. 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 and requesting a delay. This can be for any of several reasons, e.g. blocks not being properly adjusted, dirt or dust blown in an eye, crowd noise, etc.

7. False Starts

a. Starting violations which constitute a false start include:
    1. Failure to comply with the Starter's commands
    2. Having any part of the body in contact with the starting line or running surface beyond the line when the pistol is fired.
    3. Failure to remain motionless after assuming the "set" position prior to the pistol being fired.
    4. Repeated use of disconcerting acts.
    5. Any competitor who commits a false start shall be disqualified.

8. Three-Point Start

a. On the "ON YOUR MARKS" command, the athletes' hands must be on or below the knee of the forward leg.
b. On the "SET" command, the hand opposite the forward foot gently touches the track next to the line. Simultaneously, the opposite arm should be cocked, with the hand positioned next to the forward hip or raised behind the body.
c. If any athlete is slow in taking either position, runners are called up and the athlete is given a warning.
d. A false start in this starting position usually occurs when the athlete starts leaning or falling forward or when the upper arm starts down. The forward arm will start back when the upper arm starts down.

9. Other Duties and General Thoughts

a. Be responsible for avoiding unnecessary delay in continuance of events.
b. Observe and assist in ruling on relay exchanges and finishes.
c. Starters are to create fair starts and keep the meet moving. Do not make the position more glorified than it is or call undue attention to the position or yourself. Be smooth in giving starting commands.
d. Track layouts may dictate different positioning, so be flexible enough to allow various necessary adjustments.
e. In all cases, fairness to all runners should be the primary consideration.
f. Professionalism and good common sense should get the job done properly.

STARTER CHECKLIST

HEAD STARTER

- ☐ Arrive a minimum of one hour before the meet is to start
- ☐ Look over the facility and study the color codes for the starting lines, 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 200m Dash start, is background too light that the timers cannot see the smoke? If so, may need to adjust 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 used for staggered starts, be sure all speakers are working and that it can be heard easily from each lane.
- ☐ Establish Starter and Assistant Starter positions for straight and staggered races.
- ☐ Determine how the "all clear' will be received from each exchange zone before the start of the 400 Meter Relay.
- ☐ If a photo timer is being used, check out the system with the operator (i.e. ensure sensor is operating correctly at each starting line).
- ☐ Discuss duties and responsibilities with the Assistant Starter(s).
- ☐ Pick up shells from host coach. Always check to make sure the shells are black powder, not smokeless.
- ☐ Do not discard used shells in the track area. Keep them on your person until you can properly dispose of them.
- ☐ If using headphones to communicate with the Finish Line and Photo Timer, check to make sure they are operating correctly.

ASSISTANT/RECALL STARTER

- ☐ Arrive early with the Starter before the meet
- ☐ Look over the facility and study the color codes for the starting lines, etc.
- ☐ Discuss with the Starter the conduct and signals to be used during the meet.
- ☐ Obtain the time schedule for the meet.
- ☐ Identify the positions the Starter wishes the Assistant Starter(s) 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, quickly check hands and see if there are any problems when the runners are in their blocks. If you spot a problem, call the runners up.
- ☐ For distance races, if you are on the line, quickly check to see that toes are behind the line. Call the runners up and reset them if there is a problem. If a photo timer is being used, help move the cables.
- ☐ Have either a .22 caliber, .32 caliber, or 9mm pistol available for recalling.
- ☐ Establish whether or not the Assistant Starter(s) is responsible for firing a gun or ringing a bell to signal the "gun lap" on distance races.

STARTER & ASSISTANT STARTER POSITIONING

STRAIGHTAWAY (100m Dash, 100/110m Hurdles)

- Starter – on inside of track, about 5-7 yards from start line. Will observe lanes 5-6-7-8.
- Assistant – on outside of track, about 3-5 yards from start line and in view of Starter. Will observe lanes 1-2-3-4, checking foot placement and for false starts.
- Signal – After "ON YOUR MARKS" command, Assistant raises off gun arm parallel to the track when all runners he/she is responsible for have complied with the command.

ONE-TURN STAGGER (800m Run, 1600m Run, 3200m Run, 3200m Relay)

- Starter – on infield, equidistant from all runners. Will observe lanes 1-2-3-4.
- Assistant – outside of lane 8 and in view of Starter. Will observe lanes 5-6-7-8, checking foot placement and for false starts.
- Signal – Assistant starts with off arm parallel to the track. After "ON YOUR MARKS" command and all runners in lanes 5-5-7-8 have moved up to the starting line and are set and motionless, Assistant raises off arm above head. When arm starts up, Starter can fire pistol if his/her runners are also set.

ONE-TURN STAGGER (200m Dash, 300m Hurdles)

- Starter – on infield equidistant from all runners. Will observe lanes 1-2-3-4.
- Assistant – on infield, slightly ahead of lane 1 and in view of Starter. Will observe lanes 5-6-7-8, checking foot placement and for false starts.
- Signal – After "ON YOUR MARKS" command, Assistant raises off gun arm parallel to the track when all runners have complied with this command. After "SET" command and all runners in lanes 5-6-7-8 are set, raises off gun arm above head. When arm starts up, the Starter can fire the pistol if his/her runners are also set.

TWO-TURN STAGGER (400m Dash, 400m Relay)
THREE-TURN STAGGER (Sprint Medley Relay, 1600m Relay)
FOUR-TURN STAGGER (800m Relay)

- Starter – on infield equidistant from all runners. Will use whistle commands if speaker system is not available and will observe lanes 1-2-3-4.
- Assistant – behind runner in lane 4 in view of Starter. Will observe lanes 5-6-7-8, checking hand placement and for false starts.
- Signal – After "ON YOUR MARKS" command, assistant raises off gun arm parallel to the track when all runners in lanes 5-6-7-8 have complied with the command. After "SET" command and all runners in lanes 5-6-7-8 are set, raises off gun arm above head. When arm starts up, Starter can fire pistol if his/her runners are also set.