



**October 1, 2025**

**SITUATION ONE:** After the starter/referee blows the long whistle to indicate the start of the event, spectators and other athletes continue cheering and shouting encouragement to the competitors. The starter/referee refrains from issuing the starting command until the noise subsides. **RULING:** Correct procedure. A relatively quiet environment is essential for the few moments between the command to “take your marks” and the activating of the starting signal.

**State Association:** Any communication to schools regarding behavior at athletic contests in general should include specific mention of the swimming environment and the expectation of quiet for the few moments needed to ensure a fair start for each race. Additionally, associations can remind spectators at swimming meets the enthusiastic support of swimmer while they’re racing is welcomed and encouraged.

**Coaches:** Coaches should train their athletes that they terminate any cheering or other noise once the long whistle is blown.

**Officials:** Officials MUST control the noise at a meet to assure a fair start. With the assistance of the announcer (“quiet for the start”) the starter/referee MUST insist upon quiet for the few moments needed to accomplish the start. Swimmers having to stand on the blocks while their teammates are misbehaving will quickly arouse peer pressure to silence the crowd, and officials can use this as well to assure that there is an appropriately quiet environment after the long whistle is blown. An official positioned opposite the starter may also raise a clipboard or hand above the head to indicate to the crowd to be quiet and, when that side of the pool is sufficiently quiet, lower the arm to indicate it is acceptable to start the heat.

**SITUATION TWO:** Immediately following the command “Take your marks” and just prior to the starting signal, someone standing behind the timers loudly yells “Go, Susie”. The starter/referee orders the swimmers to “stand up” but two swimmers execute their starting dives and enter the water, while a third swimmer moves but is able to remain on the starting platform. The starter/referee does not penalize any of the three, gets all swimmers back on the starting platforms, and accomplishes a fair start. **RULING:** Correct procedure. While Rule 8-1-3d requires disqualification of a swimmer leaving the mark before the starting signal, when external circumstances cause the violation, it is appropriate that there be no sanction.

**State Association:** See #1 above

**Coaches:** See #2 above

**Officials:** Starter/referee discretion is permitted under Rule 8-1-3, giving officials the latitude to assure that athletes are not unfairly or inappropriately penalized when they are unable to control the circumstances surrounding a technical violation of a rule.

**SITUATION THREE:** Immediately following the command “Take your marks” and just prior to the starting signal, someone standing behind the timers loudly yells “Go, Susie”. As the starter is activating the starting signal, two swimmers execute their starting dives and enter the water, while a third swimmer moves but struggles to remain on the starting platform and subsequently dives in and swims the race from well behind the other competitors. At the conclusion of the race, the starter disqualifies all three swimmers for violation of 8-1-3c. **RULING:** While it is accurate that all three swimmers were not stationary at the starting signal, as required by 8-1-3c, it is apparent that the illegal movement of the three swimmers is the result of the noise. In such circumstances, swimmers must not be penalized.

**Coaches:** Coaches, along with school administrators, should clearly admonish their athletes and spectators that it is essential to remain quiet after the long whistle is blown until the starting signal is given in all races.

**Officials:** Ideally, in such a situation, the starter/referee should recall the heat, instruct the crowd that they must remain quiet between the long whistle and the starting command, and then re-start the heat. If the heat cannot be recalled, the race should be re-swum with all of the original competitors participating in that re-swim.

**SITUATION FOUR:** In the boys 50-yard freestyle, the swimmer in Lane 5 remains standing briefly when the starter/referee commands “take your marks”, then slowly moves to his starting position and without becoming completely stationary, rolls forward at the starting signal. **RULING:** Lane 5 should be disqualified for violation of Rule 8-1-3a & c.

**Officials:** Accomplishing a fair start in each race is one of the most significant duties of a starter/meet referee, one that unfortunately is often neglected or trivialized. Proper starting mechanics must especially be focused on during the time period between the blowing of the long whistle to indicate the beginning of the event through the departure of the swimmers at the starting signal.

There is NO rule requirement that swimmers must respond in unison to the “take your marks” command BUT every swimmer should respond to that command without delay and immediately assume a stationary position. Any perceived failure to accomplish that on the part of any swimmer in the heat should result in an immediate instruction from the starter/referee to “stand up.” Once the starter/referee is satisfied that all swimmers are able to hear the official’s commands, and swimmers have been reminded not to delay in assuming a stationary position, the heat should again be commanded to “take your marks.” At that point, if a swimmer does not respond appropriately, the heat should again be instructed to “stand up,” and the offending swimmer should be charged with a false start and removed from the heat (see Rule 8-1-3a and PEN 1a)

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