



Deck Referee and Starter Protocol for Resolution and Re-setting the Heat after a Fall-In

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Hopefully, we have all read the scenarios in the "What is a False Start?" document posted on the USA Swimming website. Even though these scenarios were developed a while ago, they are still valid guidelines and continue to be used to train starter apprentices and certified starters across the country.

Each scenario presents a situation to demonstrate Rule 101.1.3. The common thread in most of these scenarios is related to when one or more swimmers fall into the pool prior to the starting signal, either with or without the starter issuing a "stand" command, and whether the swimmer is or is not the initial offending swimmer.

Upon further scrutiny and reflection, a critical protocol in false start scenarios two, three, four, and five has not been addressed. The missing information in each of these scenarios is the specific protocol to resolve the situation and re-set the heat, all the while attending to the existing rule and our current practice.

Refer to false start rule 101.1.3A as several of the scenarios do:

101.1.3 False Starts

- A. *Any swimmer initiating a start before the signal may be disqualified if the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation that a violation occurred. Swimmers remaining on the starting blocks shall be relieved from their starting positions with the "stand" command and may step off the blocks.*

In each of scenarios two through five, while continuing to conform to rule 101.1.3 and our current practice, I offer the following protocol and rationale for your consideration for resolution and resetting of the heat after a fall-in:

1. The deck referee and starter should always independently indicate on their heat sheet if they believe any fall-in swimmer(s) committed a false start. This can be done using a circle or mark on the applicable lane. The rationale for this is based upon our current practice where written observation is shared prior to any conversation.
2. If the starter has a potential false start due to a fall-in, they should approach and show their written observation to the deck referee. If ". . . the Referee independently observes and confirms the Starter's observation. . ." then the swimmer(s) is disqualified for a false start. Rule 101.1.3.A clearly states that the starter is to present their (written) observation to the deck referee for a confirmation. Additionally, a coach wanting to advocate for their swimmer should be afforded the opportunity to see the deck referee and starter sheets with the swimmer/lane noting a false start, if confirmed.
3. Once the deck referee and starter have compared their written observations, conversation may be held to determine if there were any issues surrounding the fall-in that might relieve

the swimmer from the disqualification. Consideration is given to the order of incidence, who was the offending swimmer(s), were they set, did another swimmer react to the offending swimmer, did the swimmer(s) react to a sound, etc. If it is mutually determined that there is a violation, then a disqualification is warranted. The heat is told to “step down,” after which the deck referee informs the violating swimmer(s) of their disqualification, and the swimmer(s) is not permitted to swim this event. The deck referee blows another long whistle to initiate the starting sequence again.

4. If the deck referee and starter do not confirm that a swimmer(s) false started, (e.g., not being set, different offending swimmer, was there a sound) then no violation has occurred, and the swimmer(s) is relieved of the potential false start. The deck referee then blows another long whistle to initiate the starting sequence again.