



# **STARTING**

# GUIDELINES



## 1. Introduction

The need to improve the quality and consistency of the Starters' performances during major World Athletics competitions prompted the Council to take initiatives establishing a Panel from which International Starters for major international competitions would be appointed. The Starting Guidelines have been developed with the aim of explaining a standardised starting procedure and thereby developing worldwide consistency in the way the start process is managed.

*Note: It is recommended that Member Federations adopt these Guidelines for the organisation of their own athletics competitions thereby adding to the global improvement and practice of starting procedures.*

## 2. International Starters' Panel

- 2.1 The Council approved the introduction of an International Starters' Panel at the 2005 Helsinki Congress and Rule 11 of the Competition Rules includes reference to the position and responsibilities of an International Starter.
- 2.2 A Panel of International Starters (IS) has been formed and appointments are made to designated World Athletics competitions and Olympic Games from this Panel. International Starters attend workshops conducted by World Athletics.
- 2.3 Candidates to the Panel are proposed as follows:
- Previous experience as Chief Starter at a World Athletics Championships or Olympic Games in the past four years.
  - Recommendation by the International Starter from experience at the event indicated above.
  - Previous experience as a Starter at international events, preferably on an International Starter Panel e.g., at Area level.
  - Recommendation by the World Athletics Technical Delegates from events as an International Starter.
- 2.4 At all competitions under paragraphs 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.6 of the International Competition definition held in the stadium, an IS will be appointed by the World Athletics or the relevant governing body. The IS shall start the races assigned to them (and undertake any other duties) by the Technical Delegate and shall supervise the checking and operation of the Start Information System. The appointed IS should be included by the LOC as a full member of the starting team and included in the full range of starting duties. By being part of the team and performing a range of duties, the IS will be better placed to support local officials and their development and report subsequently on performance.
- 2.5 The deployment of the IS is intended to:
- Add a consistent approach to the start process at all major competitions.

- Ensure the current Rules concerned with starts are correctly and consistently interpreted and implemented at all major competitions.
- Influence the organisation and practice at starts around the world.
- Enhance the way in which the image of the sport is presented.

### 3. Deployment of the International Starter

3.1 The timescale for deployment should allow total familiarisation for the competition and all relevant briefings to take place. A desirable programme would ensure that:

- The IS visits the stadium at least the day before the start of the competition.
- When appropriate, the IS should be included in any test or rehearsal event prior to the competition. The IS is also requested to be present at any training session organised for the competition with the participation of the official start team.
- During that lead-in period, the IS must liaise with the service company responsible for the electronic timing and the Start Information System (SIS). That liaison will include positioning and operating procedures for the team of technicians.
- The IS will ensure the installation is correct and the equipment is operating reliably and correctly. Any doubt regarding the accuracy of the information provided by the SIS must be reported immediately to the Technical Delegate and the Start Referee.
- The IS will meet with the Start Coordinator and the whole start team (Starters, Recallers and Assistants) participating in their briefing sessions, identifying, finalising and agreeing:
  - general patterns of work for that country,
  - specific duties for each team member,
  - the role of the IS,
  - exact interpretations of the Rules.

3.2 The IS should be present at any meetings that the Technical Delegates deem it is useful for them to attend.

- The IS can brief the Technical Delegates about the starting arrangements and competencies before the competition commences.
- The IS can begin to develop a strategy for cooperation with the nationally appointed team members.
- The IS, in cooperation and agreement with the Technical Delegates, can amend local practices that do not meet World Athletics requirements.

3.3 The implementation of this coordinated approach:

- Ensures a consistent, cross-referenced approach to the deployment of an IS.
- Allows the Technical Delegates to have advanced, confidential discussions with the IS about the specific needs of the competition in a particular national environment (this will vary by nation).

- Has the potential for the IS to be in communication with his starting team colleagues well before the event.
- Enables the IS, if necessary, to deliver some level of training and instruction to the home nation team. In doing so, good practice is understood and well established.
- Positions the IS as part of the team and enables them to support local officials and report subsequently on performance.
- **Enables improvement and development needs in a host nation's starting practice to be identified.**

## 4. Structure and Organisation of the Starting Team

- 4.1 Rule 22.1 of the Competition Rules gives responsibility for the organisation and management of the starting team to the Start Coordinator. His role is crucial to the smooth running of the units that make up the starting team and the accurate, consistent implementation of the Rules.

The duties of a Start Coordinator are to:

- Allocate duties to team members (except those duties of the IS that have been allocated under the direction of the Technical Delegates).
- Supervise the duties of each member of the team.
- Control and manage the start process.
- Plan the position and movements at the start area of the Starter, Recallers and **Starter's Assistants by establishing agreed protocols.**
- Be the link to the Competition Management, (Photo) Finish Judges, the Timing Company and, where appropriate, Wind Gauge Operator and the Host Broadcaster.
- Keep the competition to time by working efficiently with the team and all other parties.
- Be the interlocutor between the technical staff of the timing and SIS equipment company and determine the operational protocols with those providers.
- Keep all relevant paperwork.
- Ensure Rule 16.8 of the Technical Rules is observed and followed.

There are two distinct ways that the role can be implemented:

- The Start Coordinator is a supervisory official who manages all aspects of the start process. The Start Coordinator should be a senior Starter with significant experience, but the Start Coordinator never starts a race when in the **Start Coordinator's role for the whole competition.**
- The Start Coordinator continues to implement his managerial role but also acts as **the senior Starter, thus giving an added dimension of expertise to the team's** contributions. When acting as the starter, the Start Coordinator will delegate a team member to co-ordinate the start.

- 4.2 The Starter remains the key person in the starting process. His judgement, supported by any available technology and the start team, is crucial.

The same Starter must start all rounds of the same event and, similarly, must start all heats within a round.

The Starter must ensure that:

- All Athletes have a fair start within the rules of the competition, specifically Rules 22.2, 22.3 and 22.6 of the Competition Rules.
- The Starter is the principal decision maker regarding false starts including occasions when an offence has been committed and the race is recalled by them or any Recaller. Consultation between team members on such decisions is vital. Such consultation should be done as quickly as possible in order to restart the race without undue delay.
- The Starter is positioned so as to have a full visual control over all Athletes during the start procedure and to be able to see all Athletes in a similar and narrow angle of vision.
- The SIS control module is positioned close to the **Starter's position**.
- His commands, the start sound and any recall signals are heard simultaneously by all Athletes (in all major competitions this should be assured by the use of a high quality sound system).
- The Starter personally consults the information produced by the SIS and uses that information as a resource to assist in determining his decision.

- 4.3 The Recaller(s) are deployed to specific positions to give an alternative and enhanced view of a race start. Their role is to support the Starter and identify any offence or technical fault at a start that the Starter may not have observed.

If there is any doubt about the legality or fairness of the start, the Recaller must recall the race. Discussions within the team will determine the subsequent action (if any). After due deliberation, it is the Starter who will decide if an offence has occurred. These deliberations must be efficient and reach a conclusion as quickly as possible.

- 4.4 **The Starter's Assistants play an important role in the management of the Athletes,** particularly in the preparation for the race. They must ensure that the relevant parts of Rule 23 of the Competition Rules and Rule 16 of the Technical Rules are fully observed and implemented. In particular, they should check that:

- Athletes are in the correct heat and lane.
- Athlete bibs and hip number identifications are correct and correspond with the start list.
- Athletes assemble correctly and inform the Starter by an agreed signal so that they can take control of the start.
- Starting blocks, when applicable, are used in accordance with Rule 15 of the Technical Rules.
- Batons are ready for Relay Races.
- Rules 16.3 and 16.4 of the Technical Rules are observed.

- In case of a false or otherwise recalled or stood-up start, Rule 16.8 of the Technical Rules is observed.

**In relation to this last matter, the Starter's Assistant shall, in particular, ensure that:**

- Correct warnings are given and that all Athletes understand the conditions under which subsequent starts will occur i.e. the recall did not warrant a warning (green card shown) or a disqualification has been made for false start (red and black card shown) or a warning was for a specific conduct offence (yellow card – or red if there has been a previous warning for that Athlete – shown by the Start Referee) or in the case of Combined Events, the next false start will accrue a disqualification (yellow and black card shown to all Athletes).
- Any disqualified Athlete immediately leaves the area of competition. If necessary, ensure the Athlete is escorted from the area.

4.5 The Start Referee plays an important role at all starts. Rule 18.1 of the Competition Rules **requires the appointment of a “Track Referee” to oversee the start area. The appointed person should be a specialist and experienced Starter, thus basing his observations on a technically sound background.**

The Start Referee fulfils several obligations, specifically the Start Referee :

- Works alongside and in support of all other members of the starting team.
- Does not interfere or comment on starts - except when issues need addressing.
- Is required to keep an accurate record of all starts.
- In conjunction with the Chief Photo Finish Judge and a Starter, carries out an initial check of the SIS and a zero control test.
- Monitors the operation of SIS.
- Imposes and notifies the imposition to **the Athletes of a “disciplinary” warning or disqualification** under Rule 16.5 of the Technical Rules. The Start Referee must, therefore, also be aware of any previous disciplinary warnings given to Athletes.
- Communicates with the Athletes when appropriate and/or necessary to ensure the good conduct of a competition - including his specific duties to deal with an official protest about a start, the failure of the Starter to recall or abort a start or a warning / disqualification.

In this context and in accordance with Rule 8.4.1 of the Technical Rules, the Start Referee can allow an Athlete, who immediately protests, to run the race, subject to the protest being considered afterwards. Similarly, in accordance with Rule 8.4.2 of the Technical Rules, the Start Referee may be asked to consider a protest based on the failure of the Starter to recall a false start or in accordance with Rule 16.5 of the Technical Rules, to abort a start.

When considering protests as to whether a start contravened the Rules or was **otherwise unfair, the Start Referee's judgement is crucial.** The Start Referee may:

- **If in any doubt, allow Athletes to run “under protest”** [Rule 8.4.1 of the Technical Rules] if the SIS indicates an illegal start and there is good reason to suggest that the information is inaccurate, or there is an equipment malfunction. No protest should be allowed if the SIS is working correctly, and a false start has been indicated. However, it is acknowledged that when the reaction time is close to the allowed limit, any movement could be hardly visible and, in this case, if in the opinion of the Start

Referee it would require further study of the technological evidence, the Start Referee may decide to allow the athlete run under protest to preserve the rights of all concerned.

Referees and others must be aware that it is possible that the SIS may be working **correctly but “incorrectly” indicate a false start** – because motion by an Athlete that **does not include or result in the Athlete’s foot / feet leaving contact with the foot plate / plates of the starting blocks, or the Athlete’s hand / hands losing contact** with the ground, shall not be considered the commencement of the start.

- Retrospectively disqualify an Athlete [Rule 8.4.2 of the Technical Rules] for a false start or warn / disqualify an Athlete under Rule 16.5 of the Technical Rules when a race is completed, a protest is lodged about the start, and it is upheld. The SIS (where available) must be considered.
- **If a protest is based on an Athlete’s incorrect exclusion from a race** and it is upheld, after the race, the Athlete should be afforded the opportunity to run on his own to record a time in the event and, if applicable, be advanced to subsequent rounds.
- Consider if there are other irregularities at the start that can merit an **“allowable protest”** i.e., blocks slipping or crowd disturbance.
- In the need for justice, declare a race void and order a re-run when the SIS is faulty, and a false start appears to have been committed.
- When no SIS is in place, the Start Referee must make his own judgement on the legality of each start. This reinforces the importance to the background of the Start Referee as an experienced Starter.

4.6 The success of a good start procedure depends on how the team works together and ensures that the process is efficient, fair and within the relevant rules for competition. The team should know the roles they are all playing. They should understand the signals they are to use and what they indicate and, above all, they should relay all information they have to each other to ensure the start is conducted fairly.

## 5. Team Positioning

The Start Coordinator must ensure that all team members know their role and assume positions that allow them to implement the Rules.

### 5.1 *Crouch starts*

Ideally, there should be three Starters per race. One will take up a position with a clear view of all Athletes. This is the Starter. The other two will act as Recalls and position themselves as allocated to oversee assigned lanes (usually from different angles of vision to the Starter). The team of three will rotate through those duties throughout a competition as determined by the Start Coordinator. For the 4 × 200m and 4 × 400m Relays, it is recommended to use three Recalls.

**The Starter’s Assistants** will position themselves, in good time before the first command, to ensure a clear view of the position Athletes take before and during the start procedure.



For straight starts, this will require at least three Assistants – one to observe front line positions and two to watch for rear infringements concerned with feet contacts on starting blocks (Rule 16.3 of the Technical Rules).

For staggered starts, this will require at least three Assistants (one more for 4 × 200m and 4 × 400m Relays) – each one to observe both the positioning of the hands behind the start line and the feet contacts on starting blocks in the lanes assigned to them.

### 5.2 *Staggered standing starts*

Same positioning of the Starters (including the Recalls) as at the staggered crouch start. **Two or three Starter's Assistants are required to observe the feet positions of the Athletes after the "On your marks" command.**

### 5.3 *Group starts*

There should be two Starters per race. For single curve starts, the Starter will take up a position with a clear view of the start line and all the Athletes assembled for the start. The Recaller will be positioned in a different angle to the Starter, ideally on the opposite side.

**The two Starter's Assistants have to check that the Athletes are placed in the correct order of the start list and about 3m behind the start line. After the command "On your marks" and once it is confirmed to the Starter that the Athletes are positioned according to the rules and ready, the Assistants should move outside the track. (Being aware of not obstructing advertising material.)**

In races with two curved start lines, one more Recaller and one more Assistant will be necessary. Each Recaller will only oversee the Athletes starting from the curved start line assigned to them. At the start line assigned to them, each Assistant will act as at the single curve start.

## 6. The Start

- 6.1 In events up to and including 400m, on receipt of the agreed signals that all parties (Athletes, (Photo) Finish Judges, the Timing Company, Competition Management, Track Officials and, where appropriate, the Wind Gauge Operator and the Host Broadcaster) are ready, the Start Coordinator will inform the Starter to issue the first command – **"On your marks"**.

When all Athletes are clearly settled, correctly positioned (as indicated by the Starter's Assistants) and still, the Starter will issue the second command – **"Set"**. When the Athletes have all assumed their final starting position, and are steady, the gun will be fired.

In events of 800m and over, once the Athletes have all assumed their final starting position after the **"On your marks"** command, and are steady, the gun will be fired.

6.2 There is no perfect holding time in the set position. In reality, there must be a discernible hold to ensure all Athletes are steady, focussed and in the correct starting position.

The Starter must abort a start or recall a race if:

- The Starter is not satisfied that all is ready for the start when the Athletes are on their marks or in their final starting position.
- In the Starter's judgement, an Athlete causes the start to be aborted, fails to comply with the start commands or disturbs other Athletes.
- The Starter observes that an Athlete, after assuming a full and final starting position, commences his start before receiving the report of the gun (Rule 16.7 of the Technical Rules).
- The Starter receives a signal from the SIS.
- The Starter observes that the start was otherwise unfair (Rule 16.10 of the Technical Rules).
- Any Recaller observes an irregularity with a start.

The reference in Rule 16.10 of the Technical Rules to a fair start does not relate solely to cases of a false start. This rule should also be interpreted as applying to other situations such as blocks slipping, a foreign object interfering with one or more Athletes during a start, etc.

**In addition, not all movements in the "set" position are to be regarded as "commencing the start" and thereby potentially leading to a false start.**

As mentioned previously, motion by an Athlete that does not include or result in the **Athlete's foot / feet leaving contact with the foot plate / plates of the starting blocks, or the Athlete's hand(s) losing contact with the ground, shall not be considered the commencement of the start.**

Such instances should be dealt with either by standing the field up or they may constitute a violation of Rule 16.5.2 or 16.5.3 of the Technical Rules invoking the disciplinary provisions.

When it is available, the wave form images must be consulted to avoid an incorrect disqualification (or warning in the case of a first false start in Combined Events), particularly in cases of movement that does not result in loss of hand or foot contact.

Starters and Referees – while ensuring compliance with Rule 16.4 of the Technical Rules – should avoid being over-zealous in the application of the **"zero false start rule" to those events not started from a crouch start, i.e., for events longer than 400m.** Athletes starting races in a standing position are more prone to over-balance than those starting from a crouch position. If considered accidental, such a start should be regarded as **"unsteady" and the Athletes should be "stood up" and the start process commenced again.**

If an Athlete is pushed or jostled over the line before the start, the Athlete should not be penalised. (However, if the action was considered wilful / deliberate, the "pusher" might be subject to a disciplinary warning or disqualification.) If such a movement was

considered to be accidental, the Starter and Referee are encouraged to first consider **calling the start “unsteady” before taking any more severe action.**

Repeat practices during the same event may, of course, entitle the Starter and/or Referee to consider applying either the false start or disciplinary procedures, as might best be applicable in the situation.

- 6.3 In theory, a Starter can award a false start to several Athletes if it is indicated that their movement was more or less simultaneous. Otherwise, the false start must go to the Athlete observed or indicated as making the first movement. (See note to Rule 16.8 of the Technical Rules.)

In all cases, the team must:

- Consider all evidence readily available including the SIS analysis.
- Show the correct coloured warning cards to demonstrate the decision.

- 6.4 The Starter shall abort the start if in his judgement an Athlete causes the start to be aborted, i.e., by holding up his hand or standing / sitting up, deliberately delays in response to the commands or moves or makes noise after the Athletes have settled into **the “On your marks” or “Set” position thus disturbing the concentration of fellow Athletes.** In these cases, the Start Referee may award a personal warning (for improper conduct) to that Athlete who will be shown a yellow card (or red card in the case of a second disciplinary offence in that competition). The Start Referee must be satisfied that **the Athlete’s action was not justified by an acceptable reason** i.e., crowd noise, block movement or external interruption. In this case, all Athletes will be shown a green card by a Starter’s Assistant.

In all cases, the showing of any card must be seen by all Athletes so that no-one is in doubt about the consequences of further rule violations. The recommended minimum size of the warning / disqualification cards is A5, double sided.

**In the case of a false start warning / disqualification, the “corresponding indication” on the lane marker box required by Rule 16.9 of the Technical Rules remains full yellow / red.**

- 6.5 For deaf only Athletes, who are participating in competitions under World Athletics rules, the use of lights at the start should be allowed and not considered assistance. For international competitions, it should, however, be the obligation of the National Federation of the Athlete to supply / finance such equipment unless the technical partner can provide it. For other competitions, the provision shall be the responsibility of the Athlete.

