

# Swim Meet Timing



Swim Meet on-deck Participants (beside swimmers & coaches):

**The Timers** – Usually two per lane.

**The Referee** – this is the person with the whistle that signals the swimmers (and timers) at the beginning of each race before handing them over to the starter. The meaning of the signals is covered below.

**The Starter** – this is the person with the microphone, giving the instructions and starting each race.

**The Runner** – this is the person(s) that retrieve the timing sheets after each event from the timers and collect the disqualification slips from the meet officials.

**Head Timer** – organizes the timers and starts extra stopwatches at the beginning of each heat. If, as a timer, you miss a start the head timer has an extra for you. (Remember there are only two extra watches per heat so it is important that you try to get each start.)

- **The “Starting Horn”** – this is the box behind the starter on the wall (at some meets it is a pole next to the starter). In addition to the horn to start each race there is also a strobe light. It is the flash of this light, not the horn that signals the timers to start their watches.
- **Starting Signals** –
  - While most of the swimmers will know what these signals mean it is also useful for the timers to know them. In some cases the starters can prompt the swimmers, particularly the youngest of the swimmers, to respond correctly to these signals.
  - For Freestyle, Breaststroke, Butterfly, and Freestyle Relays there are 4 signals:
    1. Five short whistle blasts – next up/call to the blocks
    2. One long whistle blast – step up onto the blocks
    3. Verbal – ‘Take your mark’
    4. Starter horn – to start the race
  - For Backstroke and Medley Relays there are 5 signals:
    1. Five short whistle blasts – next up/call to the blocks
    2. One long whistle blast – enter the water/get in
    3. One long whistle blast – place hands and feet on the wall
    4. Verbal – ‘Take your mark’
    5. Starter horn – to start the race

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- **Timers and the Timing System – The timing system at a meet has four key components, three of which are operated by the timers.**

1. Touch pads – these are the automatic timing devices that are located on the wall under the starting blocks in each lane. When everything works correctly, the official time will automatically begin when the starter's horn sounds and will end when the swimmer touches the pad at the end of their race. As a timer you normally do not have to do anything with the touch pads. When operating correctly the touch pads are the primary timing device and you are only its backup.
2. Plungers (aka Pickle) – these are the push-button that you will find for each lane. You will find one for each lane located near the blocks, the exception is for 25 yard races
3. Stopwatches – there will be two stopwatch operators in each lane. For each heat you should start the watch on the strobe flash located on the starting horn. Timers stop the watch at the moment the swimmer touches the wall at the completion of their race. After each heat the time on the watch is recorded next to the swimmers name on the event form. Do not clear the time on the watch until you are certain that the time has been recorded. The stopwatch is the backup to the plunger (in other words it is the backup to the backup). If there are only two timers in your lane one will operate the plunger along with a stopwatch and the other will manage the clipboard and paperwork (described below) along with a stopwatch. If there are three timers one will only operate a stopwatch.
4. Clipboards and Paperwork – This is the responsibility of the timer not operating the plunger. Whomever, takes care of the clipboard and paperwork is responsible to:
  - a) See that the correct swimmer is in place for the heat. The name of the swimmer, or swimmers in the event of a relay, will be printed on the event sheet for each heat and the recorder should check with the swimmer(s) to verify that they are the person listed.
  - b) Record the stopwatch time on the spaces provided next to the swimmer's name for the heat just completed. Occasionally it will be obvious that the swimmer did not touch the touch pad or did not touch it first, this is often the case in the backstroke where the swimmer may hit the top of the wall rather than the touchpad. In these instances there is a box labelled soft touch and it should be checked. It gives the administrators running the timing system a heads up if the touch pad time seems to vary greatly from the plunger and stopwatch times.
  - c) Give the completed event sheet (once all heats are completed and recorded) to the runner.

- **Other Notes:**

- Timing is an important part of running a swim meet. While we always hope that the backup systems are never needed, they invariably are only when it is important and a swimmer has just achieved a personal best or a qualifying standard.
- Timer will get wet. Come prepared with clothing and shoes that you don't mind getting wet. Shorts or pants that can be rolled up and shoes, sandals or other footwear that can get wet is important.
- When timing, it is important that **you stand at the edge of the pool** looking straight down the wall to see the swimmer actually touch the wall in order to get an accurate time.
- When operating a stopwatch or plunger it is often suggested that you use your index finger rather than your thumb, as the index finger supposedly has the fastest reaction time. Use whichever digit you are the most comfortable with. However, use the same digit to start and stop the watch. By using the same finger (or thumb) the issue of reaction time tends to even out.
- Remember to clear(reset) your watch after each heat and to start the watch on the flash of the starting horn strobe not the sound. Being a good starter does require a certain amount of concentration and attention, starting lines can become noisy and confusing especially during relays and it is easy to miss the start. **If you do miss the start, the head timer** can provide you with a replacement watch for that heat. Just raise your hand!
- Flyover starts are normally used at our swim meets. This means that the swimmer that just completed a race stays in the water until after the start of the next race. The exception is backstroke starts which require the racer to leave the pool so the next racer can start in the water. Please ask the just completed racer to stay near the wall in the corner next to the lane line and have them exit the pool as soon as the next race has started.
- Timer etiquette: do not judge the swimmer time especially if it is slower than the entry time. A real example: coach made up an entry time on a very young swimmer as he never swam the event (100 Fly!). He ended up adding a few seconds. The timer made a comment that he did poorly since he added many seconds, the swimmer felt terrible and hated that particular event and refused to swim that for a long time!