



# **IAAF Starting Guidelines**

For IAAF World Athletics Series Competitions

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# IAAF STARTING GUIDELINES

## 1 Introduction

The need to improve the quality and consistency of the starters' performances during major IAAF competitions prompted the IAAF Council to take initiatives establishing a Panel from which International Starters for major international competitions would be appointed and the development of these Guidelines which have the purpose of explaining a standardised starting procedure and thereby developing worldwide consistency in the way the start process is managed.

*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 IAAF Council approved the introduction of an International Starters' Panel at the 2005 Helsinki Congress and Rule 118 now includes reference to the position and responsibilities of an International Starter.

2.2 A Panel of International Starters has been formed and appointments are made by the IAAF to designated IAAF competitions from this Panel. All of the nominated International Starters have attended a workshop conducted by the IAAF in Valencia in March 2008.

2.3 The appointed International Starter should be included by the LOC as a full member of the Starting Team and included in the whole range of starting duties. The International Starter will take direction about his duties from the IAAF appointed Technical Delegates for the meeting. By being part of the team and performing a range of duties, the International Starter will be better placed to support local officials and report subsequently on performance.

2.4 The deployment of the International Starter is intended to:

- Add a consistent approach to the start process at all major competitions.
- Ensure the current Technical Rules concerned with starts are correctly 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 Structure and Organisation of the Starting Team

3.1 Rules 129.1 and 129.7 give responsibility for the organisation and management of the starting team to a 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 Technical Rules.

The duties of a **Start Coordinator** are to:

- Allocate duties to team members (the duties of the International Starter, will be allocated under the direction of the Technical Delegates, in consultation with the Start Coordinator).
- Control and manage the start process.
- Plan the position and movements at the start area of the Starter, Recallers and Starter's Assistants.
- Be the link to the Competition Management and the Photo Finish Judges, Timekeepers, Finish Judges, Wind Gauge Operator and, where appropriate, the television staff.
- Keep the competition to time by working efficiently with the team and all other parties.

- Be the link to the providers of the automatic false start equipment and other technology used for the start procedures and determine the operational protocols with those providers.
- Keep all relevant paperwork.
- Ensure Rule 162.8 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. He should be a senior starter with significant experience but he 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. In this case, the Start Coordinator will delegate a team member to co-ordinate when he is starting.

3.2 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 should start all rounds of the same event and 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 129.2, 129.3 and 129.6.
- He is the sole decision maker regarding false starts including occasions when an offence has been committed and the race is recalled by him or any recallers. 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.
- He is positioned so that he can see all athletes in a similar, narrow angle of vision.
- The false start equipment control module is positioned close to him.
- His commands and the start 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).
- He personally consults the information produced by the false start equipment and use that to confirm a false start.

3.3 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, the starter will decide if an offence has occurred.

3.4 The **Starters' Assistants** play an important role in the management of the athletes, particularly in the preparation for the race. They must ensure that Rules 130 and 162.8 are fully implemented and check that:

- Athletes are in the correct heat and lane.
- Bib number and hip number identification are correct and correspond with the start list.
- The use of starting blocks is legal as defined in Rule 161.
- Batons are ready for relay races.

Furthermore, they must ensure that:

- Rules 162.3 and 162.4 are observed.
- Athletes assemble correctly before the Starter takes control of the start.

- Correct warnings are given and that all athletes understand the condition 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.

3.5 The **Start Referee** plays an important role at all starts. Rule 125.2 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 he:

- Is not a member of the start team.
- Works alongside the start team.
- Does not interfere or comment on starts, except when issues need addressing.
- Is required to keep an accurate record of all starts.
- Ensures the Start Coordinator carries out an initial check of the false start equipment and a zero gun test.
- Monitors the operation of false start equipment.
- Communicates with athletes only as a result of an official protest about a start or a warning / disqualification. In this context and in accordance with Rule 146.4(a), the Start Referee can allow an athlete, who immediately protests, to run the race, subject to the protest being considered afterwards.
- Imposes and notifies the imposition to the athletes of a “disciplinary” warning. The Start Referee must also be aware of any previous disciplinary warnings given to athletes.

When considering protests, the Start Referee’s judgement is crucial. The Referee must:

- Allow athletes to “run under protest” (Rule 146.4(a)) if the false start equipment indicates an illegal start and there is good reason to suggest that the information is inaccurate, or there is an equipment malfunction. No protest will be allowed if the false start equipment is working correctly and a false start has been indicated. Other irregularities at the start can merit an “allowable protest” i.e. blocks slipping or crowd disturbance.
- Retrospectively disqualify an athlete for a false start (Rule 146.4(b)) when a race is completed, a protest is lodged about the start and it is upheld. The false start equipment (where available) must be considered.
- In the need for justice, declare a race void and order a re-run when the false start detection system is faulty and a false start appears to have been committed.
- When no false start equipment is in place, make his own judgement on the legality of a start. This adds greater importance to the background of the Start Referee as an experienced starter.

3.6 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 role 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.

## 4 Team Positioning

4.1 How the members of the team work together is crucial. The **Start Coordinator** must ensure that all team members know their role and assume positions that allow them to implement the Rules.

4.2 Ideally, there should be three Starters per race. One will take up a position in which he has a clear view of all athletes. He is the **Starter**. The other two will act as **Recallers** and position themselves as allocated to oversee assigned lanes (usually from different angles of vision from the Starter). The team of three will rotate through those duties throughout a competition.

For the 4 x 400m Relays, it is recommended to use three Recallers.

4.3 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. In practice, this will require at least three people – one to observe front line positions and two to watch for rear infringements concerned with foot contacts on starting blocks (Rule 162.3).

In races which start on the curve (200m, 400m, 800m), the Starter's Assistants should be positioned on the outside of the track.

In races which do not start in lanes (over 800m), the Starter's Assistant should check that the athletes are placed about 3m behind the start line and in the correct order. Once confirmed the athletes are ready, the Starter's Assistant should then move outside the track.

## 5 The Start

5.1 In events up to and including 400m, on receipt of the agreed signals that all parties (athletes, Photo Finish Judges, Competition Management, the timing company, track officials and 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, legally 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 set 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.

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

The Starter must stop a race if:

- An athlete, after assuming a full and final set position, commences his start before receiving the report of the gun (Rule 162.6).
- He receives a signal from the false start equipment.
- Any Recaller observes an irregularity with a start.

The reference in Rule 162.9 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. 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 block, or the athlete's hand / hands 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 162.5(b) or (c) invoking the disciplinary provisions.

Starters and Referees – while ensuring compliance with Rule 162.4 – 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 genuinely over-balance than those starting from a crouch position.

If an athlete were pushed or jostled over the line before the start, he 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, starters and referees 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.

5.3 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 indicated as making the first movement. (See note to Rule 162.8)

In all cases, the team must:

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

5.4 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 and he will be shown a yellow card (or red card in the case of a second disciplinary offence in that competition) followed by a green card shown by a Starter’s Assistant for all. 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 162.8 remains full yellow / red.

5.5 For deaf only athletes, who are not regarded as disabled and are participating in competitions under IAAF rules, the use of lights at the start should be allowed and not considered assistance. 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.