

THE **STARTER'S CASE BOOK**

**Insight from
Top Experts in
Track and
Field Starting**

By: Raymond Pierre

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Written by Raymond Pierre

Edited by Rob Buzaitis, Tom Hott, Eric Zemper

Advancement Training Group

Tom Hott (Chair)
Rich Leutzinger
Michael McCoy
Susan Petrelli
George Young
Larry Zirgibel

USATF Officials Training Subcommittee

Rex Harvey (Chair)
Rob Buzaitis (Secretary)
Mike Armstrong
Dave Bowers
Shirley Connors
Tom Hott
Eric Smith
Linda Melzer (ex-officio)

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About the Author

Raymond Pierre is an ex-world-class 400-meter sprinter, turned starter. It has been his honor to start races alongside several members of this esteemed panel. Creating this book was a difficult but rewarding undertaking, and it is his hope that this book will serve as a useful tool to starters everywhere.

WELCOME

This Starter's Case Book represents an accumulation of no less than 350 years of experience from some of the most renowned starters in the world.

It is unique in that it covers only the subject of starting. Starters at all skill and experience levels and from all areas of the world should find this book useful. However, the intended reader is the moderately experienced starter in the United States.

This case book is intended to provide answers to the most common "case study" problems track and field starters face all around the country and around the world. When faced with a situation not clearly addressed in the rulebook, the starter must rely on past experience and insight to make the choice. But at the end of the day – without expert help, guidance, or input – the starter may leave the stadium never completely sure if the call was the right call, the best call, or the "perfect" call.

So in March 2007, a multi-national starters panel consisting of some of the most decorated starters from the United States, Canada, and England were asked what they would do when faced with the challenges outlined in this case book. Some of the cases are very common; some very rare. And for the first time ever, the phenomenal insight from these panelists has been compiled and summarized in one convenient place.

The panel consists of Olympic starters and highly skilled experts, so the reader can have great confidence that no conclusion in this case book was reached lightly. From now on, when starters face a difficult situation, they are no longer alone. It is our intent that the information in this book will be easy and enjoyable to read, and achieve a significant step toward the goal of uniformity in track and field officiating.

ABOUT THE PANEL

To describe the nine members of the panel as “gurus” would be an understatement. As the saying goes: “These people have ‘forgotten’ more about starting than most people will learn in a lifetime.” The panelists were chosen for their number of years starting, their experience starting the world’s most prestigious meets, and for their tireless ability and willingness to train and teach.

They have started Olympic Games and international championships, given starting clinics and classes around the world, published books and articles, and mentored hundreds of starters in their fine craft. When a starter anywhere in the country or world needs advice, these panelists are the ones they go to for a quick, frank, and accurate discussion.

It is truly a privilege to view so much collective wisdom in one book. Their responses to each case demonstrate a kind, caring, and confident attitude. They clearly want what is best for the athletes they start, and they will passionately defend this interest against anyone who desires otherwise. The advice they share in this book is priceless.

ABOUT THE CASES

The 25 case study questions in this book were pulled from a list of over 50 common dilemmas starters face no matter where they are. These common problems are comprised of two important elements: 1) The starter must make a difficult choice between two or more reasonably justifiable alternatives, and 2) The rulebook provides little or no help in making that choice. It is primarily that second element that fuels this case book.

All situations in this case book are based on actual dilemmas that starters have faced. They range from youth meets to world-class championships. Each case has been laid out in a way that makes reading quick and easy. The cases are unrelated, so the reader is free to jump around from case to case. The facts in each case are given with as much detail as possible, without bias. It starts with a summary, then the facts, then the starter’s ruling, then the arguments for and against the ruling, concluding with a challenge to the reader. Half the cases are considered “common” – meant to test a starter’s decision making ability – and half the cases are considered “rare” – meant to test a starter’s logic and rationale. Because the cases are meant to apply to most levels of competition, very few rulebook references are made.

The cases were then given to the panel to consider and vote on. Most responded by email, some by phone interview. The cases were presented to them exactly as presented here. All responses were independent; no panelist was allowed to see another panelist’s response. Their responses follow each case presentation. It starts with a tally of how the nine panelists voted (Note: Whenever the tally totaled less than nine, it meant a panelist did not respond, or preferred not to vote), and concludes with a treasure chest of comments and advice.

Panel

Alan Bell

(Tyne Wear, England)

31 years starting

Head Starter 17 IAAF Grand Prix,
1997 IAAF World Cup,
IAAF Starters Development Group,
2012 London Olympics

Ken Caouette

(cow-WET – Massachusetts, USA)

40 years starting

Head Starter - 1984 L.A. Olympics,
Officials Coordinator at
1996 Atlanta Olympics

Thomas P. McTaggart

(New York, USA)

35 years starting

1996 Atlanta Olympics,
Head Starter 1998 Goodwill Games
Head Starter 2004 U.S. Olympic Trials,
Head Starter Penn Relays

Bob Podkaminer

(pod-CAM-iner – California, USA)

42 years starting

The U.S.A.’s Top Rules Interpreter,
Head Starter 2000 U.S. Olympic Trials,
IAAF Area Technical Official

Eric D. Zemper, Ph.D.

(Michigan, USA)

33 years starting

Author – USATF Starters Training Monograph
21 IAAF Grand Prix meets
IAAF International Technical Official
(world’s highest officiating level)

Kelly Rankin, Ed.D.

(Washington, USA)

39 years starting

1984 Los Angeles Olympics,
1996 Atlanta Olympics,
1990 Goodwill Games
Author – Track Starters Guide

Bill Von Fabrice

(Arizona, USA)

46 years starting

1996 Atlanta Olympics,
1987 Pan Am,
Former Head Starter of
Millrose Games and Penn Relays

Doris Wahl

(New York, USA)

31 years starting

1996 Atlanta Olympics,
IAAF Grand Prix,
1998 Goodwill Games,
Penn Relays, Millrose Games

Joe Young

(Ontario, Canada)

54 years starting

Head Starter 1976 Montreal Olympics,
Head Starter 1979 World Cup,
1983 World University Games,
Author – One, Two Three, Go!

USING THIS MATERIAL

A major goal of this case book is to help standardize as much as possible the way starters respond to unusual situations by providing a basis for each starter to develop their own decision-making principles, and in turn their “philosophy” of starting. The cases presented here were selected because they were difficult and because they presented more than one possible choice for resolution. And as you will see, even some of the world’s most experienced starters did not always agree on a single solution to many of these problems. You should read each situation and the panel’s responses carefully, paying attention to the rationale presented in each case. See which responses from the panelists and what reasoning resonates with you. It might not always be the majority opinion, and that is okay. Keep in mind that one of the most common comments from the panelists was that their final decision often would depend on the *gestalt* of the situation at that particular time and place; something that is not always possible to present in a written description (i.e., you had to be there to see the whole thing). Given that restriction, it’s not surprising that they didn’t agree 100 percent in many of the cases. But there are common themes that persist throughout, even when they came to different conclusions: That the start team needs to do what is best for all the athletes; and the benefit of the doubt should be given to the athlete.

Consider each set of responses to help you develop or refine your ‘philosophy of starting’ that you apply to your own work. Pay attention to all the details of your situation, because there may be something that leads you to decide differently. And that is all right, if you have a good, solid rationale for doing so. The idea is to develop your own set of principles for making decisions in different situations, considering all the elements of the situation, and not just have a “knee-jerk” reaction. We hope the material presented here will help you further develop your own set of decision-making principles and philosophy of starting.

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1. Athlete Flinches, Causing Other Athletes to False Start

In the 100-meter dash, after "Set," the athlete flinches (jerks forward slightly), but then gets still. But the motion causes other athletes to false start.

Question: Should the flinching athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	National Championship. Early summer, clear skies, slightly hot, and humid, late afternoon, full stadium.
Event:	100-meter dash finals. False start results in disqualification. The athletes in Lanes 2 – 6 are heavy favorites.

Situation

On the command "On your marks," the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command "Set," all athletes promptly come to a set position and get still.

0.30 seconds: After coming to a set position, the athlete in Lane 5 flinches (jerks forward slightly), but his hands do not leave the track surface. He immediately gets still again, without commencing a starting motion.

0.50 seconds: The athlete in Lane 4 commences a start. His hands leave the track and he departs the starting line.

0.65 seconds: The athletes in Lanes 5 and 7 commence a start in the same fashion.

Without firing the gun, the starter says “Stand up.” The three assistants meet with the starter and all conclude that Lane 5 flinched, and the flinch resulted in Lanes 4, 5 and 7 false starting.

The starter rules that the flinching athlete in Lane 5 (ONLY) will be charged with the false start, which in this case results in disqualification. The athlete in Lane 5 appears surprised at the ruling, and reluctantly exits the track as the spectators jeer at the starter’s ruling.

Aftermath

At an appropriate time later that evening, the starter and assistants have a friendly but heated discussion over the ruling. Two of the assistants feel the starter made the incorrect call for these reasons:

- The flinching athlete never commenced a starting motion.
- Just because the other athletes commenced a starting motion in response to the “flinch” doesn’t make the flinching athlete more guilty of a false start.
- In an event as highly “pressurized” as the 100-meter, penalizing an athlete for every little “flinch” is overly harsh. A “warning” is more appropriate.

In response, the starter feels his call was correct for these reasons:

- Although the flinching athlete did not leave the track surface, his flinch was the commencement of a starting motion.
- His action caused enough of a disruption at the starting line to warrant a penalty.

Question

After 30 minutes, both sides reach both exhaustion and a stalemate. They then turn to you for the final word. What was the correct ruling in that situation and why?



1. Athlete Flinches, Causing Other Athletes to False Start

Charge the flinching athlete in Lane 5 with a false start 5 votes

Do not charge anyone, but rather warn all athletes to remain still on “Set” 3 votes

Do not charge the flincher, but rather the athlete (Lane 4) who reacted to the flinch 1 vote

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes slightly favored charging the flinching athlete in Lane 5 with a false start. However, the panel was unanimous on this particular point:

An alert and prudent starter will avoid this dilemma by quickly standing the athletes up and canceling the start.

The above tally assumed the starter failed to do so.

2. The comments in favor of charging the flinching athlete:
 - Had the flinch not apparently caused the other athletes to false start, the flincher would not have been charged. However, when an athlete is responsible for other athletes false starting, that athlete should be charged with a false start.
 - The flincher commenced a start motion after being in a final set position.
 - The “commencement of the starting motion” technically began in the athlete’s mind. Therefore, hands or feet leaving their marks is irrelevant, since those motions take place well after the “commencement of the starting motion.”
 - All later chain reactions to the flinch are irrelevant.

3. The comments in favor of not charging anyone:
 - The starter should have quickly canceled the start and stood the athletes up. Failure to do this is the fault of the starter, not the athlete. It also results in an improperly long hold.
 - The flincher became still, which isn’t sufficient grounds for a false start. All later chain reactions to the flinch are irrelevant.
 - The flinch was unintentional, and thus should not be ruled as a deliberate disruption of the starting sequence (unsportsmanlike conduct).
 - A warning should help encourage the athletes to concentrate better and avoid a future penalty.
4. A comment in favor of charging the one who reacted to the flinch: Since the flincher became still, he did nothing wrong. However, the athlete who reacted to the flinch should have concentrated better.

2. Athlete Immediately Leaves Blocks on “Set” Command

In the 400-meter dash, after “Set,” the athlete never rises to a set position, but instead immediately takes off from the blocks.

Question: Should the athlete be penalized?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	High School State Championship. Late spring, clear skies, warm, early evening, full stadium.
Event:	400-meter dash finals. False start results in disqualification. The offending athlete is the heavy favorite.

Situation

On the command “On your marks,” the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still.

On the command “Set,” all athletes promptly come to a set position – except the athlete in Lane 4. Instead, the athlete in Lane 4 immediately leaves the blocks and commences a starting motion. After taking a step, she stops, displays a gesture of embarrassment and disgust.

Without firing the gun, the starter says, “Stand up.” The athlete places her face in her hands and begins to cry.

The starter steps down from the rostrum, and talks to the assistant. The assistant feels the athlete should be charged with a false start, which in this case results in disqualification. The starter walks over to the athlete, asks if she is okay, gives her a warning, then returns to the rostrum.

The next start commences without further incident.

Aftermath

While the race is in progress, the starter and assistant have a friendly but heated discussion about the incident. The assistant feels the athlete should have been charged with a false start. The assistant’s argument:

- The athlete commenced a starting motion after “Set,” which is a false start.
- The athlete’s motion – although odd and maybe unintentional – was a start motion, and not charging her is unfair to the other athletes who were complying with the starter’s command.
- The starter was being overly sympathetic to a crying athlete.

The starter’s argument for allowing the athlete to remain in the race:

- A false start can take place only AFTER the athlete reaches a full and final set position and gets still. This athlete never came close to reaching that position.
- Sympathy had nothing to do with it. A warning for her bizarre behavior was appropriate.

Question

What would have been the correct action to take in this situation and why?

2. Athlete Immediately Leaves Blocks on “Set” Command

Charge the athlete with a false start (Unanimous)

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The panel voted unanimously to rule a false start. However, one comment supporting the starter’s decision not to penalize the athlete was made: Since the rulebook provides no restriction or time limit regarding when a start may be canceled, the starter was not expressly forbidden from canceling the start after the athlete made her error.
2. Oftentimes, preventive officiating – standing the athletes up – can save an athlete, but this is likely not one of those times. The athlete false started and unfortunately there was not enough time to rescue her.
3. One consideration is whether the athlete usually rises to a set position as opposed to staying crouched in her set position. Either way, however, the athlete should still be charged with a false start because she left the starting line as if the gun went off.
4. The athlete failed to follow the starter’s command.
5. A blunder like this is inexcusable with an experienced athlete, and the athlete’s coach would probably agree.
6. The athlete’s feelings are irrelevant.
7. Mistake or not, the athlete deliberately attempted to start running after the “Set” command.

8. If the action appeared to be deliberate, the starter might also be justified to disqualify the athlete on the grounds of unsporting behavior.

NOTE: Most of the panelists’ comments would also apply to a similar situation on a two-command start (i.e., where an athlete takes off immediately after the “On your marks” command).

3. Standing Start – Athlete Loses Balance

In the 4 x 400-meter relay, the athlete using a standing start loses her balance with four different results:

- (a) The athlete steps forward and one foot touches the line.
- (b) The athlete steps forward and neither foot touches the line.
- (c) The athlete steps sideways.
- (d) The athlete slowly rocks forward and takes a large step over the line.

Question: In each situation, should the athlete be penalized with a false start?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	Youth (High School) non-championship. Spring, sunny skies, hot, early-afternoon, half-full stadium.
Event:	4 x 400-meter relay preliminaries. False start results in disqualification. <i>In the interest of time, meet management forbids the use of starting blocks.</i>
(Within the United States, the National Federation and NCAA rule books and USATF rules for the youngest Youth age groups do not require use of blocks or a crouch start.)	

Situation

On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still; some athletes assume a crouch position while others stand. On the command “Set,” the crouched athletes assume their final set position and get still. The standing athletes lean forward, assume a running position, and get still – except for the athlete in Lane 6:

- (a) The athlete in Lane 6 begins to lean forward too much and is unable to recover. Her arms wobble as she struggles to regain her balance, but is unsuccessful. She takes a minor step on the starting line and immediately backs up from the line and gets still.
- (b) The athlete in Lane 6 begins to lean forward too much and is unable to recover. Her arms wobble as she struggles to regain her balance, but she cannot. She takes a small step forward but never touches the starting line. She immediately gets still.
- (c) The athlete in Lane 6 leans forward too much and is unable to recover. As she struggles to regain her balance, she takes a quick step sideways but does not touch the starting line. She immediately regains her balance and gets still.
- (d) The athlete in Lane 6 leans forward too much, and loses her balance. As she struggles to regain her balance, her arms wobble violently, and as she bends over farther, in the hopes of getting low enough to balance herself – it just gets worse. She takes a large step over the line.

In each situation, the starter says “Stand up” and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

Aftermath

All three of the assistants agree with the starter's ruling in (a). But in other situations, at least one of the assistants disagrees with the ruling. The assistants' arguments:

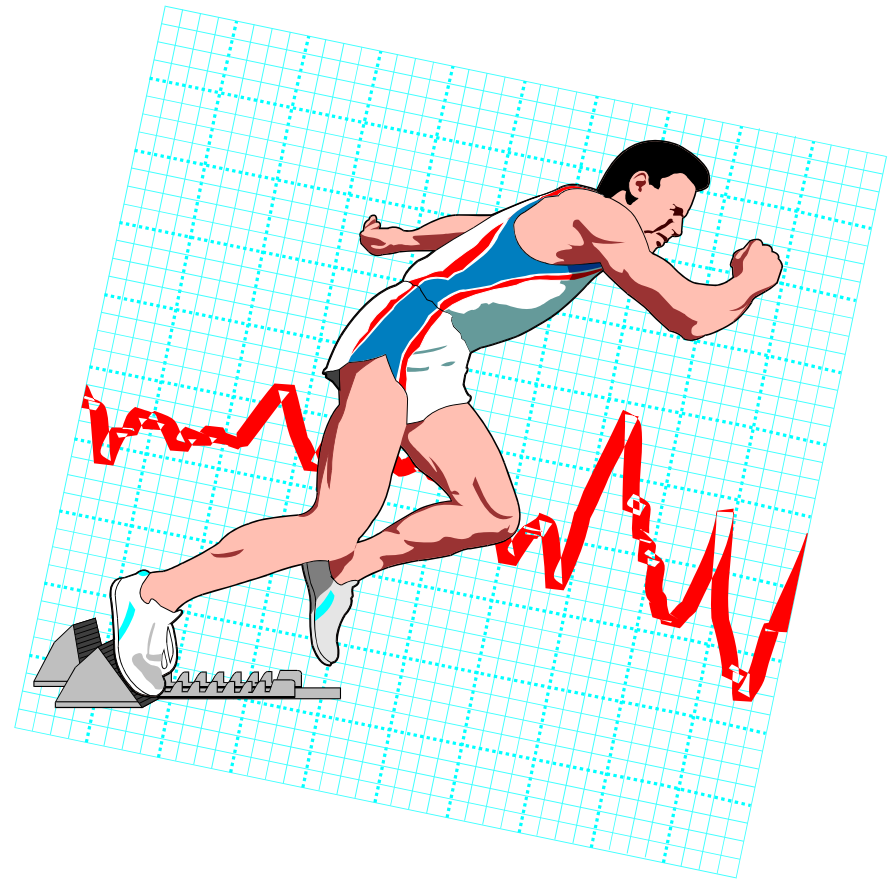
- In (b), the athlete did not touch the line, she recovered quickly, and she got still. It should have been a warning, not a false start.
- In (c), the athlete did not achieve forward motion. A sideways step followed immediately by getting still should not be ruled a false start. In fact, the starter shouldn't have stood them up at all.
- In (d), stepping over the line was a false start. However, the starter had time to give the "Stand up" command and rescue her before she could take the fatal step.

The starter has no tolerance for motion. His argument:

- Because no blocks were permitted at this meet, the athletes were given extra warnings prior to stepping on the track that any motion would result in a false start.
- Not penalizing the moving athlete is unfair to the athletes who remained still.
- The starter has no responsibility to "rescue" anyone who commences a starting motion prior to the gun.

Question

You closely watch all four of these scenarios, and the starter and assistants turn to you for the final word. What was the correct call in these four scenarios, and why?



3. Standing Start, the Athlete Loses Balance

a) <u>Steps forward and the foot touches the line</u>	
False Start.....	7 votes
Warning.....	2 votes
b) <u>Steps forward and the foot does not touch the line</u>	
Warning or simply fire the gun.....	6 votes
False Start.....	3 votes
c) <u>Steps sideways.</u>	
Warning or simply fire the gun.....	7 votes
False Start.....	2 votes
d) <u>Slowly rocks forward and takes a large step over the line.</u>	
False Start.....	5 votes
Warning.....	4 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The standing start is strictly an “American thing.” Outside the United States – blocks or no blocks – the crouch start for sprint races is mandatory, courtesy of the IAAF rulebook. (Editor's Note: The one exception around the world is for Masters competitions, where blocks and the crouch start are optional.)
1. While the votes favor one ruling over another, the panel stressed that all of these situations are strictly judgment calls based on the starter’s own perceptions. “I had to be there” was a common response.
2. Most panelists strongly emphasized this point:
An alert and prudent starter will be especially sensitive to the standing start and quickly cancel the start when they see the athlete having trouble (especially in Situation D).

3. Athlete age and experience level affect how the starter might rule.
4. Comments in favor of the false start:
 - After the “Set” command, stepping on the line, regardless of how brief, is a false start.
 - Even if the line was never touched, taking a step forward is the commencement of the starting motion (it would be the same thing as taking a running start).
 - Right or wrong, the starter’s ruling is final.
5. Comments in favor of the warning or of simply firing the gun:
 - The issue of line infringement and positioning of feet is irrelevant. The relevant issue is movement – which in these cases was caused by an athlete’s inability to assume a final set position.
 - The athlete’s failure to assume a full and final set position is not a false start, but a failure to follow the starter’s “Set” command, resulting in a warning.
 - If the athlete takes a step, but becomes set in a reasonable time, the start process does not necessarily need to be interrupted.
 - No advantage was gained in the sideways step, and the athlete became still.

4. Starting Blocks – Athlete Unsteady

In the 110-meter hurdles, the athlete has an unsteady start in the set position with three different results:

- (a) Athlete's hands leave the track surface but return without touching the starting line.
- (b) Athlete rocks forward and slowly falls over the line.
- (c) Athlete rocks forward and recovers as gun is fired but is last to leave the blocks.

Question: In each situation, what is the starter's proper response?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	Collegiate non-championship. Spring, clear skies, hot, morning, ¼-full stadium.
Event:	110-meter hurdles. False start results in disqualification.

Situation

On the command "On your marks," the athletes take their position and get still. On the "Set" command, the athletes assume their final set position and get still. At this point:

- (a) The athlete in Lane 2 bucks with enough force that his hands leave the track surface. The hands quickly return to the track surface and he never touches the starting line. The starter says "Stand up," and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

- (b) The athlete in Lane 2 bucks with enough force that he loses his balance. His hands never leave the track surface. He slowly rocks forward with enough momentum that he is unable to recover, and he falls over the starting line. The starter says "Stand up," and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

- (c) The athlete in Lane 2 bucks with enough force that he loses his balance. He slowly rocks forward and then rocks backward to regain his balance. During the backward rock, the gun is fired, and the athlete leaves his blocks much later than the other athletes. The assistant shoots the recall gun and stops the race. After explaining to the starter what happened, the starter scolds the assistant for stopping the race.

Aftermath

The assistant disagrees with the starter's decision in all three situations. The assistant's argument:

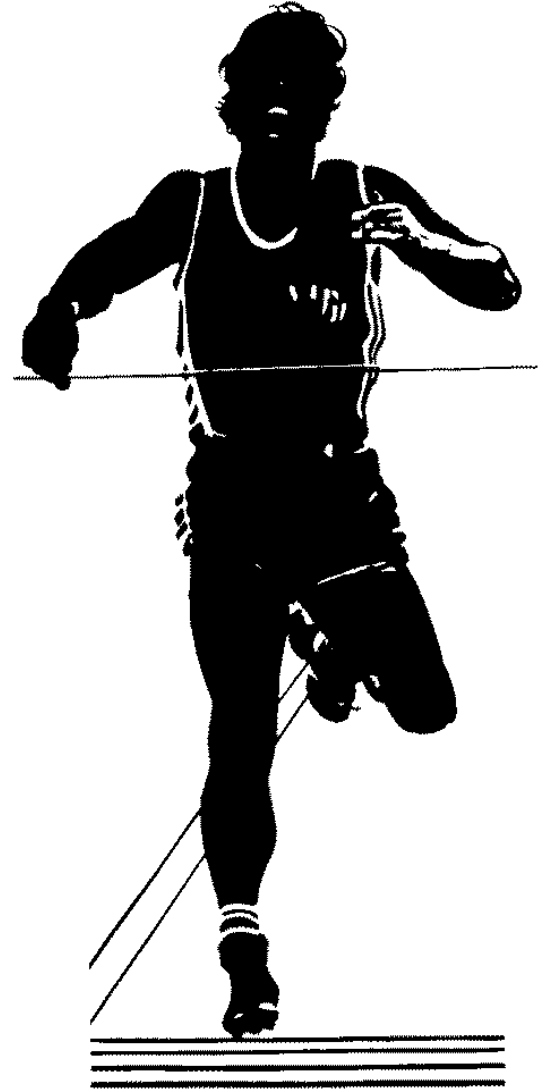
- In (a), the athlete did not cross the line, recovered quickly, and got still. At worst, he should have been issued a warning.
- In (b), falling over the line was a false start. However the starter had sufficient time to give the "Stand up" command and rescue the athlete before the fall.
- In (c), the race should have been recalled because the athlete in Lane 2 had an unfair start.

The starter has no tolerance for motion. His argument:

- Although the athlete didn't cross the starting line in (a), he commenced a starting motion.
- In (b), the starter has no responsibility to "rescue" anyone commencing a starting motion prior to the gun.
- In (c), stopping and restarting the race because of one moving athlete penalizes the athletes who remained still.

Question

You closely watch all three scenarios, and the starter and assistant turn to you for the final word. What was the correct call in these scenarios, and why?



4. Starting Blocks – Athlete Unsteady

- a) **Hands leave the track surface, but return without touching the starting line.**
False Start..... 5 votes
Halt the starting process with or without a warning 2 votes
- b) **Rocks forward and slowly falls over the line.**
False Start..... 5 votes
Stand the athletes up before committing foul (rescue the athlete)..... 3 votes
- c) **Rocks forward and recovers as gun is fired, but is last to leave the blocks.**
Recall the race with or without a warning 2 votes
Do not recall the race – too bad for the athlete 2 votes
Recall the race with a false start charged to the moving athlete 1 vote

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. While the votes favor one ruling over another, the panel stressed that all of these situations are strictly judgment calls based on the starter’s own perceptions. “I had to be there” was a common response – especially in the third situation.
2. In the title, the term “unsteady” is used. The title contradicts the description. “Unsteady” implies that the athlete never got still in the set position – thus the pistol should not have been fired and the start process should have been halted in each situation. Crossing the line is not the issue; motion is.
3. Starters often halt the start process before an athlete can finish committing a foul – thus allowing the athlete to avoid a penalty. This action is often called “rescuing” or “saving” an athlete, which would be incorrect terminology if taken literally.

Creating, promoting and fostering a fair start is the literal intent behind “rescuing” an athlete.

4. The starter should not have scolded the assistant. The assistant was correct to recall a start that to him appeared to be unfair.

5. Athlete False Starts After Hearing Name Called

In the 100-meter hurdles, after “Set,” an athlete hears her name called from elsewhere in the stadium and false starts.

Question: Should the athlete be charged?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	High School Championship. Spring, rainy, cool, afternoon, semi-full stadium.
Event:	100-meter dash finals. False start results in disqualification. <i>Apparently the athlete in Lane 5 is named Jessica.</i>

Situation

On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still. On the “Set” command, the athletes come to a “Set” position and get still.

Immediately after everyone is still, a group of spectators on the far side of the stadium yell “Go Jessica!” The athlete in Lane 5 immediately false starts. Without firing the gun, the starter says “Stand up.”

Over the stadium’s sound system, the announcer requests that the spectators not call the athlete’s name during the start of the race. The starter then rules that the athlete will not be charged with a false start.

The race is restarted without further incident.

Aftermath

At an appropriate time later, the assistant and the starter have a friendly but heated discussion about the incident. The assistant feels the athlete should have been charged with the false start. The assistant’s argument:

- The athlete hearing her name from the far side of the stadium is a weak excuse for losing concentration and false starting.
- The calling of the name didn’t distract any of the other athletes in the race. A start should be considered unfair if all athletes are affected, not just one.
- Not penalizing the false starting athlete is unfair to the other athletes who remained still during the start.

The starter feels his decision was justified for the following reasons:

- If the sound was loud and clear enough for the starter to hear it, then it’s sufficient to interfere with the athlete’s concentration.
- The start was still unfair, even if it was unfair to just one athlete.
- The athlete deserved the benefit of the doubt if the starter was unsure of the fairness of the start.

Question

Did the starter act correctly, and why?

5. Athlete False Starts After Hearing Name Called

No false start, and possibly make a plea to the audience	5 votes
False start	2 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes strongly favor not charging “Jessica” with the false start. However, some panelists stressed that this is strictly a judgment call based on the starter’s own perception of whether the distraction warrants action.
2. The comment in favor of the “no call” is that the benefit of the doubt should always favor the athlete.
3. The comment in favor of the false start: The athlete should totally focus on the race. No excuses.

6. Athlete Rises Very Slowly

In the 100-meter hurdles, after “Set,” the athlete rises to a set position very slowly and eventually gets still.

Question: Should the athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	World-Class non-championship. Mid-summer, cloudy skies, warm, late-afternoon, half-full stadium.
Event:	100-meter hurdles. False start results in disqualification.

Situation

On the command “On your marks,” the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command “Set,” all athletes promptly come to a set position – except the athlete in Lane 6, whose slow rise requires an additional 1.5 seconds to reach a final set position and get still.

Waiting for the slow riser to finally get still, the starter holds the athletes for 3 seconds, and then shoots the gun. Just prior to the firing of the gun, the athlete in Lane 4 false starts. Thus, the gun is immediately fired a second time.

The assistants meet with the starter and point out that Lane 6 was rising too slowly. The starter rules that Lane 4 false started – which in this case results in disqualification. The starter also tells the assistant to ask the athlete in Lane 6 to reach a set position faster.

The start resumes – minus Lane 4. Lane 6 rises slightly faster, but still slowly. The hold is between 2.5 and 3 seconds, and the race commences without further incident.

Aftermath

At an appropriate time later in the evening, the assistants discuss what they feel was an incorrect ruling. They feel Lane 6 was the offending athlete. The assistants' argument:

- Rising slowly violates the “at once and without delay” section of the rulebook.
- Rising slowly unfairly penalizes the athletes who promptly followed the starter’s command.
- Lane 4 false started because the starter held the athletes too long. The only reason the starter held the athletes so long was because Lane 6 was rising so slowly. Thus, the false start was a result of the starter’s failure to control the athlete in Lane 6.

Unfortunately, the starter is a difficult person to confront and openly criticize, so the assistants kept their opinions to themselves. Nevertheless, the starter’s reason for the ruling:

- The athlete rose slowly, but got to a set position and got still in a reasonable amount of time.
- The length of the hold was appropriate and the false starting athlete in Lane 4 should have waited for the gun.
- Honestly, a slow-riser is a difficult person to act upon. Standing her up and warning her often causes more of a disruption to the race than just simply letting her complete her motions and starting the race.

Question

What was the correct action to take in this race and why?



6. Athlete Rises Very Slowly

Warn the slow riser, or all the athletes, to rise to set immediately	6 votes
Charge Lane 4 with a false start	2 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes strongly favored issuing a warning to all athletes, or to the slow riser in Lane 6, but many errors were brought to light by the panel.
2. The comments in favor of the warning:
 - A warning is sufficient unless the athlete was trying to gain an unfair advantage by remaining in motion all the way to the gun.
 - Immediately standing the athletes up and warning the slow riser avoids an unnecessarily long hold – which unfairly penalizes the athletes who remain still.
3. The comments favoring the false start focused more on the fact that, right or wrong, the starter’s ruling is final.
4. One comment in favor of the starter’s ruling to charge Lane 4 with the false start: “Being held too long” is not necessarily a valid excuse for not remaining set and motionless in the blocks.
5. Generally, a 3-second hold is unreasonably long (2.2 – 2.5 seconds is on the back side of the concentration curve). It is better to stand the athletes up immediately, rather than subject them to such a long hold. Penalizing an athlete by permitting such a long hold displays poor officiating by both the starter and the assistants.
6. The starter’s concern that “canceling a start is more disruptive” is invalid. When fairness to the athletes is at stake, canceling the start is less disruptive than forcing an athlete to wait in a set

position for an unreasonable time, or allowing an athlete to gain an unfair advantage.

7. Confronting a starter (even a cranky one) in a professional manner is always appropriate when the welfare of the athletes is at stake.
8. The assistants violated protocol in making a suggestion on how a starter should rule. Offering any opinion on the starter’s ruling is not a global practice and should be avoided at all times.

7. Athlete Rises Promptly, then Continues Rising Slowly

In the 4 x 100-meter relay, after “Set,” the athlete rises to a set position promptly, and then continues rising slowly until the gun fires.

Question: Should the athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	Collegiate non-championship. Spring, cloudy skies, cool, late-afternoon, full stadium.
Event:	4 x 100-meter relay final. False start results in disqualification. The offending athlete is the leadoff leg for a heavily favored team.

Situation

On the command “On your marks,” the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command “Set,” all athletes promptly come to a set position and get still – except for the athlete in Lane 3. The athlete in Lane 3 reaches a proper set position promptly, but then continues to slowly and gently rise until the gun is fired – never getting completely still.

Not noticing Lane 3, the starter fires the gun to start the race.

The assistant immediately fires his gun to stop the race, and walks to the starter to explain Lane 3’s actions. After hearing the assistant’s explanation, the starter suggests that the athlete be

charged with a false start – which in this case would result in disqualification.

The assistant argues that the starter’s ruling is too harsh, and that the athlete should receive a warning. The starter concedes, and furnishes the athlete with a warning.

The start resumes without further incident.

Aftermath

Later, a meet official observing the situation pats the starter on the back and congratulates him on not disqualifying a favorite relay team for such a small infraction. This actually concerned the start group. Did they allow the relay team to remain in the race just because the team was a favorite? After discussing this situation, the start group concludes:

- The athlete was unaware that his failure to be still was a violation of the rulebook. In this case warning him instead of penalizing him for this non-deliberate violation was appropriate.
- The athlete immediately corrected his action when the start resumed.
- They would have made this ruling regardless of the team or the meet.

However, in the back of their minds they also had their doubts about whether they made the correct ruling because:

- Ignorance of the rule is no excuse. A non-deliberate violation is still a violation.
- The athlete reached a set position, and then was in motion when the gun went off, which is a false start.
- The fact that the relay team was not charged makes them wonder if they inadvertently showed favoritism.

Question

What was the correct action to take and why?

7. Athlete Rises Promptly, then Continues Rising Slowly

Charge the athlete with a false start	5 votes
Give the athlete a warning	3 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes slightly favored charging the slow-rising athlete with a false start. The comment in favor of the false start: The athlete was in motion at the firing of the gun.
2. The most compelling factor in the starter's ruling should be the distinction made between "motion" and "forward motion." If the athlete is simply in "motion" with no clear advantage gained, then a warning seems more appropriate. If the athlete is commencing a "forward motion" or "starting motion," then the false start seems more appropriate.
3. The comment in favor of the warning: Since the current description doesn't seem to indicate forward motion, or a "roll" out of the blocks, a warning is sufficient.
4. The assistant should have stood the athletes up upon noticing the slow riser. It is not unusual for an assistant to delay standing the athletes up to allow the athlete time to stabilize. But when the athlete failed to stabilize in a reasonable time, stopping the race was the correct action.
5. Contradicting the starter's ruling is not a global practice and should be avoided in the U.S. The assistant's job is to act as an additional set of eyes/ears and to report to the starter observations only, without any suggestions or opinions on a ruling. Right or wrong, the starter has the last and only word.

That said, it is improper for the starter to accept the opinion of the assistants on a ruling. It is also improper for assistants to

- a) volunteer any opinion on the starter's ruling, or
 - b) linger around a starter while the starter is ruling
- as both of these actions give the appearance of indecisiveness by the start team.

6. Suffering from doubt, or being affected by comments from spectators or anyone else not directly involved in the starting process is inexcusable.

8. Athlete Rises Promptly, then Slowly Lowers the Body

In the 110-meter hurdles, after “Set,” the athlete rises to a set position promptly, and then slowly lowers himself until the gun fires.

Question: Should the athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	World-Class non-championship. Spring, clear skies, cool, late-afternoon, full stadium.
Event:	110-meter hurdles. <i>IAAF / USATF false start rule applies.</i>

Situation

On the command “On your marks,” the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command “Set,” all athletes promptly come to a set position and get still – except for the athlete in Lane 4. The athlete in Lane 4 promptly reaches a set position, but then slowly and gently lowers himself – never getting completely still.

The athlete in Lane 5 false starts just as the gun is fired. The recall gun is immediately fired by two of the assistants.

The assistants meet with the starter and explain that they saw Lane 4’s rising/lowering motion, and think the motion caused Lane 5 to false start.

The starter did not detect this motion from Lane 4, and thus rules that Lane 5 will be responsible for the yellow card being shown to the field.

On the second “On your marks” command the athletes settle into the blocks properly and get still. On the command “Set,” Lane 4 again gets set and then slowly lowers himself until the gun is fired.

This time the race continues uninterrupted.

Aftermath

At an appropriate time later in the evening the starters discuss the athlete’s motion in Lane 4. The assistants disagree with the starter’s ruling. The assistants’ argument:

- Lane 4’s motion caused Lane 5 to false start.
- Since the athlete in Lane 4 never got still when the gun went off, Lane 4 should have been charged with the first and a second false start.

On the other hand, the starter did not charge the athlete in Lane 4 with the false start because:

- The motion was difficult to detect, and the starter and assistants were not in agreement that the athlete in Lane 4 was in motion.
- The situation is happening so quickly, that the assistants only realized in hindsight what the athlete was doing.
- This is a difficult athlete to act upon. Standing him up and warning him of this indistinct motion can disrupt the race more than just letting the action go.

In the end, the starter and assistants conclude that this is a rare and difficult situation to properly rule on, and they acted appropriately.

Question

Did the starters act appropriately, and why or why not?

8. Athlete Rises Promptly, then Slowly Lowers the Body

Warning to the “slowly lowering” athlete in Lane 4	4 votes
Restart without a warning	3 votes
Both athletes – Lanes 4 and 5 – false started	1 vote
Athlete in Lane 5 false started	1 vote

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes split four ways – demonstrating how especially difficult this scenario was. Several panelists believe the start team showed poor and inconsistent practice.
2. The entire start team should have been alert to the potential of infringement – especially on the restart – and should have recalled the race since the athlete in Lane 4 was in motion as the gun fired.
3. The three things the panelists found most disturbing about this case:
 - The starter did not trust his assistants when they said they saw motion – especially considering more than one saw it.
 - The starter fired the gun while the athlete in Lane 4 was in motion.
 - On the restart, the assistants were reluctant, hesitant, or maybe even “scared” to recall the race, even after seeing Lane 4’s body-lowering motion again.
4. Comments raised in the Aftermath, such as “difficult to detect,” “indistinct,” and “more disruptive” are irrelevant when dealing with a “world-class starter at a world-class meet.”

9. Athlete Does Not Rise To Proper Set Position

On the “Set” command, the athlete fails to raise his body to a proper set position.

Question: Should the starter penalize the athlete?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	Youth Championship. Summer, clear, warm, morning, quarter-full stadium.
Event:	100-meter dash prelims. All athletes are using blocks.

Situation

On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still. On the command “Set,” all athletes come to a set position and get still, except the athlete in Lane 6 – who remains in the “on your marks” position.

The starter stands the athletes up, and asks the Lane 6 athlete if he heard the command. The athlete responds, “Yes.” The starter asks the athlete why he didn’t raise to a set position. The athlete responds that he did raise to a set position – it’s just very low.

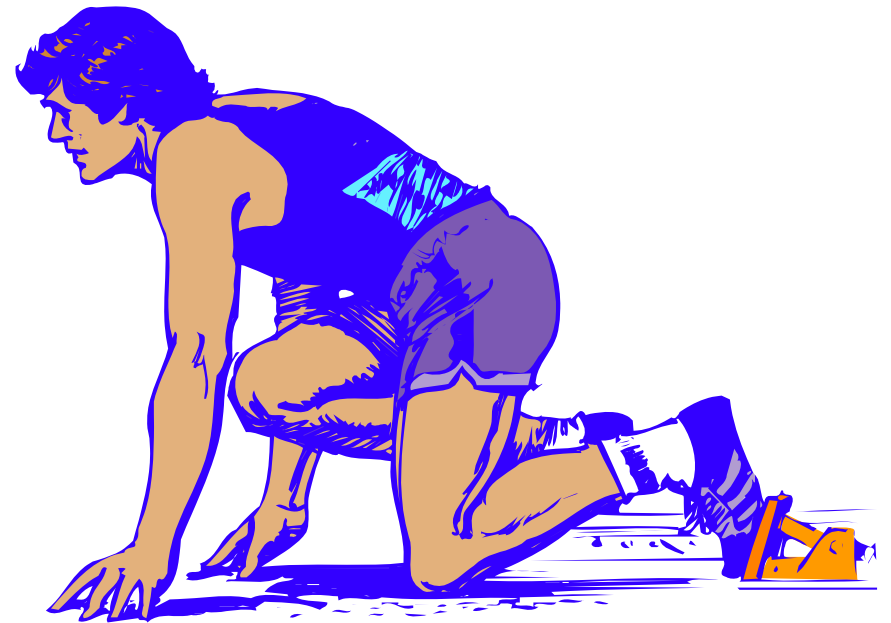
The starter issues a warning to the athlete to rise to a higher position so the starter can clearly see him and that failure to do so will result in disqualification.

Aftermath

The athlete complies with the starter’s warning and rises much higher the next time. But the athlete wonders to himself if the starter has the right to dictate how an athlete chooses to start.

Question

The athlete describes this situation to you at a later time. Did the starter act appropriately?



9. Athlete Does Not Rise To Proper Set Position

The starter was wrong to command a higher set..... 6 votes

The starter was correct to command a higher set..... 3 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes favored the athlete's contention that the starter should not dictate how high the athlete may rise.
2. The comments why the starter was "wrong" to tell the athlete to raise higher:
 - If the athlete's technique is not violating the rules, the starter has no right to influence the athlete's technique. It is the starter who should adapt to the athlete, not vice-versa.
 - If the athlete remained completely at the "On your marks" position, then a warning is justified. However, there is nothing in the rules about how high an athlete has to rise to attain a full and final set position. However, there should be some movement.
 - The athlete would be wise to warn future starters of the technique.
3. The comments favoring the starter's decision to warn the athlete to rise higher:
 - The rule says full, upright position -- end of discussion.
 - On the next failure to rise sufficiently, the athlete can have a discussion in the bleachers with the coach about a better start technique.

10. Athlete Raises Hand

In the 100-meter dash the athlete raises her hand in two different situations:

- (a) In set position, athlete loses balance and raises hand to halt the starting process before falling.
- (b) Athlete raises hand and comes out of blocks.

Question: In each situation, should the athlete be penalized with a false start?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare for this specific situation. Overall, athletes raising the hand is common.
Meet Conditions:	Collegiate non-championship. Spring, cloudy, hot, evening, full stadium.
Event:	100-meter dash. False start results in disqualification.

Situation

On the command "On your marks," the athletes take their position and get still. On the "Set" command, the athletes assume their final set position and get still. At this point:

- (a) The athlete in Lane 5 bucks, then rocks forward with enough momentum that she is unable to recover. Just before falling over the line, the athlete raises one hand in the air to halt the starting process.

After the athlete falls over the line the starter says "Stand Up" and immediately charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

(b) After “Set,” there is a sudden loud noise from elsewhere in the stadium. The athlete raises her hand and then exits the blocks before the starter can say “Stand up.”

The starter then says “Stand up,” and immediately charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

In both situations, the athlete is surprised by the ruling, but exits the track cooperatively.

Aftermath

Shortly afterward, the coach confronts the starter in an angry tone. The starter’s sole argument is that the athlete can’t exit the blocks until after the starter says so.

However, the coach’s argument:

- In (a), the athlete raised her hand, and the starter had sufficient time to give the “Stand up” command and rescue the athlete before falling.
- In (b), amidst the noise, the athlete left her blocks because she thought she heard the starter say, “Stand up.”
- Even if the starter didn’t say “Stand up,” the noise was sufficient to halt the starting process. The starter should have issued the athlete a warning at the very worst.

Question

What was the correct call in these scenarios, and why?



10. Athlete Raises Hand

a) Loses balance and raises hand before falling.

Stand the athletes up with or without a warning..... 5 votes

False Start..... 4 votes

b) Raises hand and leaves blocks without permission.

Stand the athletes up with or without a warning..... 7 votes

False start 2 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. In the first situation the votes slightly favor rescuing the athlete before a false start can be completed. In the second situation, the vote strongly favors not charging a false start, even though the athlete exited the blocks without permission.
2. Comments in favor of not charging the athlete for standing without permission:
 - In both situations the letter of the rule favors charging, but the spirit behind the rule favors always giving the benefit of the doubt to the athlete.
 - In the first situation, if you remove the “raised hand” from the equation, you are still left with an athlete who couldn’t steady herself and had an unfair start.
 - In the second situation the distraction is the primary factor behind not charging. A distraction at least partly justified the athlete’s behavior. If the distraction did not exist, or was not as apparent, raising the hand and leaving the blocks may have resulted in a false start charge. *See note.*

**Note: Shortly after this panel had concluded, an IAAF and USATF rule change requires an athlete to be charged with improper conduct by the referee if the athlete raises the hand and/or interrupts the starting process without good cause.*

3. Some panelists felt that the raised hand does not automatically entitle the athlete to have the start halted. If the athlete raises the hand simply to cover up for a lack of control, the starter has a legitimate right to charge a false start anyway.

11. Athlete “Wastes” a Free False Start

In a race that allows more than one false start, the athlete appears to false start on purpose (i.e., to “waste” the false start).

Question: Should the starter penalize the athlete?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	Youth National Championship. Summer, cloudy, hot, afternoon, half-full stadium.
Event:	200-meter dash semi-finals. There is no disqualification for the first false start. The second false start by the same individual results in disqualification.

Having already run two races earlier in this meet, the offending athlete acquired a reputation for purposely “wasting” the first false start.

Situation

On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still. On the “Set” command, the athletes come to a set position and get still. Immediately after everyone is still the athlete in Lane 5 false starts.

After leaving the blocks the athlete sprints hard for 5 meters, jogs another 20 meters and then casually walks back to his blocks. The athlete’s gestures indicate that he intentionally false started, and the start team is aware of the athlete’s previous reputation for “wasting” the free false start.

Without firing the gun, the starter tells the remaining athletes to “stand up.” The starter descends from his platform and walks over to the false starting athlete.

The starter asks the athlete if he false started on purpose. The athlete replies, “No, the blocks just didn’t feel right.” Unconvinced, the starter responds, “It looks to me like you false started on purpose.” and then disqualifies the athlete.

The athlete is shocked, but cooperates with the starter and leaves.

Aftermath

At an appropriate later time the other officials around the starting line convey approval for the starter’s actions for these reasons:

- The athlete is wasting the meet’s time.
- The athlete is abusing a rule intended to protect the athlete.
- The athlete is purposely distracting the fellow athletes.

The athlete and coach protest the starter’s ruling. After hearing the protest the meet referee decides that the starter was wrong to disqualify the athlete. The athlete is permitted to remain in the 200-meter event. The referee’s reasoning:

- The athlete violated no rule.
- The starter has no right to circumvent the rulebook just because an athlete’s activity is annoying.

Although the starter was unhappy with the referee’s final decision, it did have the intended effect: The athlete “wasted” no more false starts.

Question

The unhappy starter has turned to you for the final word. What was the appropriate action for the starter?

11. Athlete “Wastes” a Free False Start

Starter was wrong to disqualify the athlete.....	6 votes
Starter was right to disqualify the athlete, but went about it incorrectly	3 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The panel was unanimous that the starter acted incorrectly.
2. The panelists who felt the starter was wrong to disqualify made the following comments:
 - While it may be difficult at times, it is imperative that the start team not go into a race with preconceived notions about an athlete. All athletes should essentially be considered “anonymous” in the starter’s eyes – identified only by Lane.
 - The panel was almost entirely in agreement that the athlete’s actions were annoying. Nevertheless, if the athlete has a legal right to perform an annoying act, it is not the starter’s place to judge intent.
3. The panelists who felt the disqualification was correct also felt the starter followed improper protocol. The first two comments – wasting meet time and abusing the false start rule – are irrelevant. The third argument – the athlete purposely disturbed the other athletes through this repetitive act – is grounds for an unsporting or improper conduct disqualification. Here is what the starter could have done to put an end to the athlete’s legal but unfavorable ritual:
 - When the pattern first becomes apparent, warn the athlete of improper conduct, and make it clear that further disturbing of the athletes will be grounds for disqualification. *Note: You can further instruct the athlete to raise the hand if something is wrong (i.e., “blocks don’t*

feel right”), but emphasize that this will only be tolerated once.

- Notify the referee of the warning (or better yet, involve the referee in the warning). *Note: It would be better to discuss this potential problem with the referee in advance, to be certain everyone is in agreement.*
- This should be sufficient to break the athlete’s habit. If the athlete unwisely ignores the warning and continues the activity, the starter now has the referee’s approval to remove the athlete from the race.

12. Standing Start – Baton Touches Beyond Starting Line

In the 4 x 400-meter relay, after “Set,” the athlete using a standing start rests her weight on the baton beyond the starting line.

Question: Should the athlete be charged with a false start?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	High School non-championship. Spring, clear, hot, afternoon, half-full stadium.
Event:	4 x 400-meter relay prelims. False start results in disqualification. <i>The rulebook forbids resting weight on the baton beyond the starting line, but is not specific about the penalty for violation.</i>

Situation

On the command “On your marks,” the athletes take their position and get still; most athletes (including Lane 4) are using a standing start. On the command “Set,” the standing athletes lean forward, assume a running position, and get still.

The athlete in Lane 4 immediately places the end of her baton on the track surface beyond the starting line and rests her weight on it. The starter stands the athletes up and charges the athlete with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification

Aftermath

Shortly after the race, the athlete’s coach offers the starter the following argument:

- The athlete was unaware that doing this was a violation.
- Penalizing the athlete was overly harsh. A warning would have just as easily solved the problem.

The starter’s argument:

- Ignorance of the rule is no excuse.
- Touching the track beyond the starting line is clearly a false start.
- Standing the athletes up to correct the offending athlete penalizes all the athletes who started properly.

Question

After the meet concludes, the starter asks you if the ruling was correct. What was the appropriate action for the starter?

12. Standing Start – Baton Touches Beyond Starting Line

Warn the athlete 4 votes

Charge the athlete with a false start 3 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes for this scenario slightly favored warning the athlete, but either option appears correct. Comments favoring a warning:
 - Before the gun is fired is the time to correct problems. When part of a finger or foot (or in this case baton) touches or advances the line, we warn, not disqualify.
 - This will so rarely occur that the athlete's ignorance of the rule can be excused. No one is hurt by simply warning the athlete.
2. In favor of the false start, the panel gave only one comment, shared by nearly all panelists no matter which way they voted: The coach should have known better and should have properly taught the athlete the rules.

13. Athlete Performs a Practice Start

In the 200-meter dash, an athlete in a later heat is away from the starting line, but is listening to the starter's commands and performing a practice start.

Question: Should the athlete be disqualified?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	Collegiate Championship. Spring, clear skies, warm, evening, semi-full stadium.
Event:	200-meter dash semi-finals. <i>The rulebook forbids performing practice starts in the start area with the starter's commands for prior heats, but is not specific about the penalty for violating the rule.</i>

Situation

After the starter shoots the gun, she notices out of the corner of her eye that an athlete in a future heat was performing a practice start with that race.

The starter has an assistant bring the athlete over to her. The starter informs the athlete that performing practice starts is a violation of the rulebook. The athlete maintains he was not aware of that rule. The starter then disqualifies the athlete from the competition.

The athlete leaves the track shocked, but cooperative. The assistant informs the check-in clerk of the ruling.

Aftermath

At separate times later that evening, the athlete's coach and the meet referee question the starter on why the athlete was disqualified prior to the race. In both cases, the starter is adamant about her ruling that no athlete performs practice starts in her presence. The starter's argument:

- Ignorance of the rule is no excuse. A non-deliberate violation is still a violation.
- Simply warning an athlete after each practice start is a waste of time and effort. Disqualifying the athlete has a greater impact in preventing future occurrences.

In both cases the discussion ends quickly without further argument. However, the coach and referee think to themselves:

- The disqualification was harsh, and a warning was more appropriate.
- The referee should have been consulted prior to making this type of ruling.

Question

Did the starter act appropriately, and why or why not?



13. Athlete Performs a Practice Start

The starter should have simply warned the athlete, AND the referee should have been consulted about the warning 7 votes

The starter should have simply warned the athlete AND the referee need NOT be consulted 1 vote

The starter was right to disqualify the athlete AND the referee need NOT be consulted 1 vote

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. As a rule violation, performing practice starts is strictly an “American thing.” Thus, the non-American starters had little to say about this case.
2. To say the penalty in the rulebook for performing a practice start is “not specific” is incorrect. The simple fact is there is no penalty. When no penalty is prescribed, the only official who can make a ruling is the referee (or games committee).
3. The votes strongly favored notifying the referee, or perhaps (in the interest of time) warning the athlete on the referee’s behalf and then notifying the referee.
4. A few panelists who felt the disqualification was wrong believe the starter’s authority begins and ends at the starting line. All violations not taking place at the starting line fall in another official’s jurisdiction, such as the referee. The practice start is such a violation.
5. There were comments strongly emphasizing the responsibility of coaches to educate the athletes about the rules.

14. Starter Observes a Non-Starting Violation

In the 4 x 400-meter relay, the starter observes a violation that has nothing to do with starting.

Question: Should the starter take action?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	Youth (High School) Championship. Spring, clear, mild, late evening, full stadium.
Event:	4 x 400-meter relay finals.

Situation

After starting the race, the starter and assistant casually watch the competition. During a handoff, the starter and assistants notice one of the teams exchanging the baton outside of the legal zone.

The assistant tells the starter what he saw, and the starter agrees. The assistant asks the starter what should be done. The starter replies, “Nothing. We’re starters, not umpires. If the umpires didn’t catch it, it’s not our fault.”

Aftermath

The umpires did not observe the exchange violation, and the start team took no action.

Question

What was the appropriate action for the starter and assistant to take?

14. Starter Observes a Non-Starting Violation

Notify the head umpire or meet referee	5 votes
Do nothing	4 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes slightly favored notifying an appropriate official.
2. The panel was unanimous on one point: Outside of starting, no member of the start team should take it upon themselves to disqualify or rule in any way. If a starter chooses to report an observation, they should conduct themselves as an assistant starter would to a head starter – report what they saw, then quickly retreat (unless there are further questions).
3. Comments favoring notifying the appropriate official:
 - Are we not all track officials? Starters, just like all other officials, are still responsible for the proper conduct of the meet
 - The report by any official observing a violation is prudent. Frequently when a protest is filed, the referee looks for any official who saw the violation.
4. Comments favoring taking no action:
 - It is not the starter’s jurisdiction. The high jump officials and umpires don’t (or should not) come and tell us how to start!
 - Unless asked by an umpire or referee, it is best not to impose your view of what happened.

15. Official Interferes with Start

In the 100-meter hurdles, an umpire’s behavior is distracting the athletes and interfering with the start.

Question: What is the starter’s best response?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare for this specific situation. But an official interfering with other officials is common and expected.
Meet Conditions:	Collegiate non-championship. Spring, sunny, warm, early afternoon, semi-full stadium.
Event:	100-meter hurdles semi-finals.

Situation

One umpire is assigned to each row of hurdles. Between heats, the hurdle umpires reset and straighten the hurdles, and then take a seat on the outside of the track so they can watch their assigned row of hurdles. All umpires abide by this procedure except the umpire in charge of flight #6.

After umpire #6 sets and straightens the hurdles, he stands in the center of the track – leaning on one of the hurdles – and watches the race, moving out of the athletes’ way only after the athletes get really close.

An assistant starter notices this umpire’s activity, and initially does nothing. None of the athletes complain until heat #4, when the starter says “On your marks,” and an athlete in Lane 6 mentions that an official is standing on the track.

At this point the assistant takes action. She orders the athletes to “Stand up” – with the starter’s permission. She then stands in the middle of the track and yells to the official 50 meters away to get off the track. The official is facing the start line, but doesn’t respond.

The assistant continues yelling and waving at the official until the official finally exits the track in a slow fashion.

The race resumes without further delay. As the race is concluding the assistant notices that the excited umpire is quickly making his way toward the starting line. The assistant prepares herself for the aftermath...

Aftermath

Upon arriving at the starting line, the umpire confronts the assistant and makes it clear in a raised voice that:

- He does not like being yelled at.
- In his many years working this meet, he has never been treated so disrespectfully.

The assistant fires back in an equally raised voice that:

- She wouldn’t have yelled if he had complied with her instructions.
- He shouldn’t have been on the track interfering with the start in the first place.

Although that umpire never again stood in the middle of the track during the start of a race, the umpire and the assistant – who are two generally nice people – are now lifetime adversaries.

Question

How could the assistant have obtained the official’s cooperation with a more positive outcome?



15. Official Interferes with Start

The assistant starter could have handled it better 8 votes

The assistant starter handled it correctly..... 1 vote

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The umpire has forgotten that a primary objective of a track and field official is to leave the stadium unnoticed.
2. The panel was unanimous that the umpire needed to be removed from the place of interference. Nearly all felt the way the assistant starter went about it could have been handled better.
3. All track meets are professional environments. Never yell. Remain calm and diplomatic. Walk down the track, and simply explain that the umpire is distracting the athletes. It's okay if you delay the race a minute or two.
4. A majority of panelists suggested not dealing with the umpire at all. Send a marshal, or if necessary, work up the chain of command – starting with the chief umpire, then referee, then meet director. Again, emphasize that the official is disturbing the athletes.
5. The starter should always take a look down the track to see that everything is clear just before starting the command cycle. Had the starter done this, the situation would have been noticed and corrected on the first hurdle race of the day.

16. Distance Race – Athletes Fall 40 Meters From Start

In the 1500-meter run, several athletes fall due to contact 40 meters into the race.

Question: Does the starter recall the race?

Occurrence Rate:	Common.
Meet Conditions:	National Championship – <i>Trials for International Competition</i> . Summer, sunny, hot, early afternoon, full stadium.
Event:	1500-meter run finals. 13 athletes in the race. <i>USATF & IAAF Rulebook applies. Falling within the first 100 meters of a distance race is not addressed.</i>

Situation

Immediately after the gun is fired, several athletes begin bumping and jostling for the inside position. Forty meters into the race, two athletes' legs get entangled, and one athlete falls to the ground. Unable to respond quickly enough, two more athletes fall on top of the first athlete. The remaining athletes avoid the collision. Two assistants immediately shoot the recall gun, and the race is stopped. Three minutes later the race is restarted without further incident.

Aftermath

As the race proceeds, the meet referee scolds the start team for recalling the race. His argument:

- Since the rulebook makes no mention of recalling the race for a fall, the starters have no right to make that decision.

- The fact that recalling for a fall within 100 meters is “common practice” by some is irrelevant.
- This places the athletes at a disadvantage when preparing for an international competition where such a fall will likely be ignored by the start team.

The start team defends their recall:

- The rulebook says to recall an unfair start, which the starters did.
- The “common practice” argument is valid.
- Not recalling the race eliminates the athlete’s chance of attending the international competition the referee speaks of.

Question

Given your personal background and expertise, what is the appropriate action for the start team?



16. Distance Race – Athletes Fall 40 Meters From Start

Recall 5 votes

Do not recall..... 4 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. Prudence suggests the starter discuss with the referee in advance how to rule on these kinds of situations.
2. The panel unanimously agreed that the race should be recalled for a spill. How far from the starting line was a subject of dispute.
3. The practice of recalling a race for a fall within 100 meters is purely an “American thing.” The panelists who voted against the recall believed 10 meters was more than sufficient. Forty meters was too far.
4. An alternative suggested by a panelist: Position the runners on the assembly line so that the runners nearest the curb can run straight ahead and not be bumped into the infield. Position a recall assistant ten paces in front of the starting line.

17. Starter Incorrectly Charges Athlete Based on Incomplete False Start Apparatus Information

The starter charges the athlete with a false start based on data from the false start detection apparatus. Later, further data reveals that the starter’s ruling was incorrect.

Question: Can the starter prevent this kind of mishap?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	National Championship. Early summer, rainy skies, warm, afternoon, full stadium. False start detection equipment is in use.
Event:	100-meter dash prelims. False start results in disqualification. The disqualified athlete is the heavy favorite.

Situation

After the “Set” command and the athletes are still, the starter shoots the gun. Immediately, the computer gives off a tone indicating an athlete has false started.

The recall gun is immediately fired, the runners stop and head back to the starting line.

The starter steps down off his platform and visits with the computer technician. The data shows that the athlete in Lane 4 commenced a starting motion exactly .09 seconds after the firing of the gun – which is .01 seconds faster than a legal reaction time.

The starter rules that the athlete in Lane 4 will be charged with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification. The athlete appears shocked and devastated by the ruling. The athlete asks to see the data for himself, and the technician complies. After seeing the data, the athlete quickly exits the area without further incident.

The disqualified athlete quickly finds his coach, and together they file a protest with the meet referee claiming that the starter penalized the wrong Lane.

The athlete explains to the referee that the reason he “false started” was that he detected motion from the athlete in Lane 3. Thus, the athlete in Lane 3 is truly guilty.

The referee reviews the computer data. The data clearly shows motion from the athlete in Lane 3 just prior to Lane 4’s false start. Apparently the motion wasn’t forceful enough to trigger a false start tone, but nevertheless there was sufficient motion from Lane 3.

From this data, the referee concludes that the motion from the athlete in Lane 3 caused the false start in Lane 4. The Lane 4 athlete wins the protest and is automatically advanced to the semi-final round. No action is taken against the Lane 3 athlete.

Aftermath

Several hours later, the starter and assistants learn of this successful protest. It is during this discussion when two of the assistants speak up and confess that they saw motion from the athlete in Lane 3 just prior to Lane 4’s false start.

The starter asks why the assistants did not speak up earlier. The assistants reason that since the apparatus didn’t indicate a false start from Lane 3, they shouldn’t say anything.

Later on, the media harshly criticize the start team for incorrectly disqualifying a heavily favored athlete.

Question

What could the starter and assistants have done differently to avoid this situation?

17. Starter Incorrectly Charges Athlete Based on Incomplete False Start Apparatus Information

The assistants should have reported the movement they detected from Lane 3 7 votes

For the most part, nothing. The start team acted properly according to the rules..... 1 vote

Ignore the apparatus and re-run – particularly if receiving the report from the assistants 1 vote

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The votes indicate most panelists believe the assistants were wrong not to notify the starter of the detected movement. On any recall each assistant should approach the starter one at a time, report what was observed (even if it was nothing) and then quickly return to their positions so it doesn't look like a "committee decision."
2. A comment favoring the original ruling: A false start is to be charged for illegal movement – not all movement. Oftentimes, upper body movement will not trigger the sensor on the blocks. If an athlete's motion does not trigger the apparatus, and if no advantage is gained, then the movement is legal.
3. The start team should have been more familiar with the capabilities of the false start apparatus. It is imperative that National Championship start teams be well trained on how to verify wave graphs.
4. The athlete should not be allowed to view the computerized graph until a formal protest is lodged.

5. Some panelists admitted having little faith in the false start apparatus. The apparatus is merely an "aid" to the human eye, not a replacement. It is intended to ensure that:
 - All apparent false starts are detected,
 - Judgment by humans can be confirmed, and
 - Errors made by subtle and possibly non-detectable motion are avoided.
6. It is unfortunate that so many athletes/coaches are unaware of the rule allowing disqualified athletes to compete "under protest." In this case, the athlete could have competed and the ruling made later. The evidence was not going anywhere, but the athlete's chance to advance was.

18. False Start Detection

Apparatus Detects Questionable False Start

The false start detection apparatus detects a false start that should have been visible to the naked eye, but wasn't.

Question: Should the starter accept the computer's false start?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	National Championship. Early summer, rainy skies, warm, afternoon, nearly-full stadium.
Event:	110-meter hurdles finals. False start results in disqualification.

Situation

After the "Set" command and the athletes are still, the starter shoots the gun. Immediately, the computer gives off a tone indicating an athlete has false started.

The recall gun is immediately fired, and the runners – after clearing the first two flights of hurdles – stop and head back to the starting line.

The starter meets with the assistants, and informs them that he detected no false start. The assistants also report that they detected no false start.

The starter then talks to the computer technician. The computer indicates that the athlete in Lane 2 commenced a starting motion exactly 0.18 seconds prior to the firing of the gun. The starter then goes back to the assistants, who again insist they detected no false start.

The starter rules that the athlete will be charged with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification. The athlete appears shocked at the ruling but leaves the starting line cooperatively.

Aftermath

At an appropriate time later that evening, two of the assistants confess their opinion that the starter's ruling was incorrect. Their argument against the ruling:

- If an athlete moved 0.18 seconds prior to the gun, the eyes should have seen it.
- Since the eyes did not see such obvious motion, the apparatus was likely malfunctioning.
- The starter was wrong to blindly accept the computer as the final word. The benefit of the doubt should have favored the athlete, not the computer.

However, the starter (slightly offended by the "blind" comment) and one of the assistants believe the ruling was completely correct. Their defense:

- The fact that our eyes did not detect the false start does not necessarily mean it didn't happen.
- "Possibly or likely malfunctioning" isn't good enough. The starter can only overrule the computer if it is "clearly malfunctioning."
- There was no "clear" indication of a malfunction in this case, so the starter had no choice but to accept the false start as legitimate.

Question

What was the correct action, and why?

18. Apparatus Detects Questionable False Start

Reject the machine's data and not charge a false start..... 4 votes

Accept the machine's data and charge a false start..... 4 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. The fact that the panel was evenly divided on this issue indicates a need for the starter to determine on a case-by-case basis how he/she wishes to apply the rule on using false start apparatus.
2. Comments favoring rejecting the machine's data:
 - The machine is an aid to confirm what the starters see, not a replacement for the human eye.
 - While the rule indicates the starter normally must accept the false start apparatus's information, the starter also has the right to overrule the machine if the data appears faulty. (Note: This was a critical rule change that occurred after some of the panel had retired.)
 - Some panelists agreed that movement 0.18 seconds prior to the gun should have been easily detected visually, and therefore the machine must have malfunctioned.
 - When evidence is overwhelming that the false start occurred, then it should be charged. When evidence is less than overwhelming, the benefit of the doubt should favor the athlete. In this case, the evidence is less than overwhelming.
3. Comments favoring accepting the machine's data:
 - There was little reason given in the facts to believe the machine was malfunctioning. Overruling would be justified if the graph was inconclusive, the technician was inconclusive, or perhaps there was lightning activity within the last hour.

- It is not our right to say what "should have been detectable." Concentrate on the facts and evidence, and leave the theories to the scientists who created the device.
- Why would meet management spend thousands of dollars on the machine if starters are not going to use it?

19. Speaker Malfunction

Delays Race

As a race is about to start, some of the speakers attached to each starting block malfunction, resulting in a considerable delay.

Question: Should the starter wait until the problem is fixed?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare for this specific situation. But overall, amplified speaker malfunctions are common.
Meet Conditions:	National Championship. Early summer, cloudy, cool, afternoon, semi-full stadium.
Event:	400-meter hurdles semi-finals.

Situation

Attached to each set of starting blocks is a speaker through which the starter's voice can be heard.

The starter says "On your marks," and all athletes promptly get into their blocks. After everyone is still, the starter says "Set." All athletes get into a set position, except Lanes 1, 2, and 8. The assistant nearest Lane 1 yells "Stand up!"

The starter halts the starting process as all athletes stand up. The assistants walk over to the starter and explain that the speakers in Lanes 1, 2, and 8 are not working, and the technicians quickly respond. As the technicians work, they ask the starter to continually speak through the speakers to test for sound.

Five minutes after the "Stand Up" command the speaker problem still isn't solved. As the technicians and starter continue working to resolve the problem, one assistant starter becomes impatient. Eight minutes after the "Stand Up" command no solution has been reached. The assistant walks over to the starter and suggests the race be started without the speakers.

The starter declines the assistant's suggestion. Twelve minutes after the "Stand Up" command, the speakers are working, and the start resumes without further incident.

Aftermath

At an appropriate time after the race, the starter and assistant have a friendly but heated discussion over the speaker incident. The assistant believes the starter was wrong to delay the race until the speakers were working. The assistant's argument:

- A 12-minute delay is unreasonable. It interfered with the athletes' concentration and physical preparedness, and the resulting times showed this.
- The starter was not looking after the athletes' best interest. He should have started the race immediately and dealt with the speaker problem afterward.

The starter disagrees. His argument:

- The starter was not ignoring the athletes' best interest. On the contrary, he was ensuring each athlete had the benefit of a high quality start.
- A meet of this importance (national championship) should have proper working equipment.
- Twelve minutes is not unreasonable. The athletes can remain loose during this slight delay.

Question

The discussion ends quickly with both sides feeling they had won the argument. You have the final word. Did the starter behave appropriately?

19. Speaker Malfunction Delays Race

Start the race prior to fixing the speakers 5 votes

Delay until speakers are fixed..... 3 votes

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. While the votes favored starting the race prior to fixing the speakers, both sides had the exact same motive, question, and comment: What is in the best interest of the athletes?
2. A common point stressed by many panelists was the importance of immediately consulting the meet referee or meet management when facing choices like this. Ultimately, they have the final word on which option the start team should choose. It is not “passing the buck;” rather it is using power appropriately.
3. The panelists who favored starting the race prior to fixing the speakers suggested using the human voice, the stadium’s PA system, or a portable amplified system. They further commented that starting races with the human voice worked just fine prior to the utilization of speaker technology.

20. Disqualified Athlete Refuses to Leave

Disqualified due to a false start, the athlete displays defiant behavior, with two different actions:

- (a) Athlete refuses to leave the starting line.
- (b) Athlete refuses to leave the starting line and charges toward the starter.

Question: How should the starter respond?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	Collegiate championship. Spring, clear skies, warm, early evening, full stadium. <i>No marshal at this meet.</i>
Event:	100-meter dash finals. <i>The defiant athlete in Lane 4 – a heavy favorite – has already been disqualified due to a false start.</i>

Situation

After meeting with the assistants, the starter charges the athlete in Lane 4 with a false start – which in this case results in disqualification.

The athlete, upon learning of this ruling, appears shocked and agitated. The assistants give the athlete sufficient time to leave the starting area on his own, but the athlete simply stands behind his blocks, staring straight ahead angrily, with his hands on his hips. One assistant moves toward the athlete ordering him to leave.

- (a) Without looking at the official, the athlete clearly communicates through his body language and gestures that

he refuses to leave. The athlete paces back and forth in his Lane, ignores the officials' orders, or responds with a simple shaking of his head, and an occasional obscenity directed at the starter's ruling. This demonstration goes on for five full minutes.

- (b) The athlete immediately erupts in a flood of obscenities and angry gestures. Every attempt to control the athlete is met with more of the same. This display continues for approximately two minutes. The starter patiently waits on the rostrum for the athlete to get himself under control. Suddenly the athlete walks/jogs toward the starter. Without hesitation, the starter jumps down off his platform, pulls out his gun and shoots it in the direction of the athlete. Twice.

Aftermath

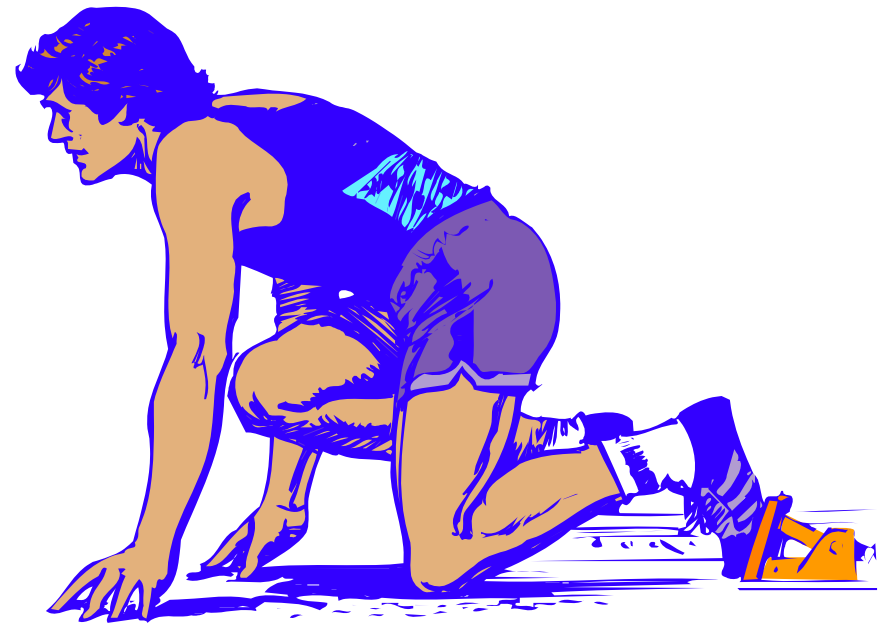
This is by no means a common occurrence. Upon reflection, the starter could not see a clear solution. Most athletes are balanced and rational in the face of difficulty. This athlete clearly was not.

In (a), the officials patiently try to reason with the athlete. The athlete eventually leaves, but at the expense of a near 15-minute delay. By this time the remaining athletes are clearly suffering, and the eventual winning time shows it. The starters are still scratching their heads today, insisting this situation could have been handled better, even in the absence of meet marshals.

In (b), the starter is both surprised and embarrassed at his response to the charging athlete. No one is hurt, the athlete immediately composes himself, and the entire stadium has excellent dinner conversation when they get home.

Question

How do you feel these two situations could be best handled?



20. Disqualified Athlete Refuses to Leave

Do everything possible to defuse the situation as quickly as possible Unanimous

Remedies suggested by the Panel:

1. Remove the blocks from the Lane.
2. If the athlete does not leave, have the athlete escorted from the competition area.
3. If the athlete continues defiance, bring others to the starting line, including the Referee, coach, or security or other civil authorities.
4. If the athlete becomes confrontational, get down off the rostrum and blend in with the crowd. Get off the “authority” platform and just look like another official.
5. Last resort: Run the race with the disqualified athlete. Inform the other athletes and referee that the athlete is permitted to run, but will be disqualified upon completion of the race.

What Else the Panel Had to Say:

1. Resolve the situation as quickly as possible. The quicker attention is diverted from the athlete and this situation, the better.
2. The starter’s job ended at the point of disqualification. At that point, the athlete was under the control of the referee and security personnel.
3. The athlete will likely calm down when outnumbered.

4. Maintaining a calm attitude and voice is essential. An official’s job is to help defuse the situation as quickly as possible. Equally strong defiance from an official only adds fuel to the fire.
5. Firing the gun in the direction of the athlete is just plain crazy. That is one of the easier ways to land in jail.

21. 200-Meter Race Started from Wrong Starting Line

Shortly after the race concludes, the starter realizes he accidentally started the 200-meter from the 800-meter starting line.

Question: Is the race invalid?

Occurrence Rate:	Common when meet conditions are as described below.
Meet Conditions:	Collegiate non-championship. Spring, cloudy skies, windy, cool, late morning, quarter-full stadium. <i>Due to wind direction, the 200-meter starts from the common start/finish area where the 800-meter start lines are in each Lane.</i>
Event:	Second heat, 200-meter dash preliminaries. The first heat has already concluded.

Situation

After the first heat concludes, the starter is on the track assisting an athlete in the next heat with blocks. As he places the blocks on the track, he realizes he started the previous heat from the 800-meter starting line, rather than the 200-meter line, which is – depending on the Lane – significantly different.

The starter tells no one. Instead he simply starts all remaining races from the correct starting line. No one makes mention of his mistake for the entire meet, and the starter essentially gets away with his error. As for the “Heat 1” athletes who qualify for finals –

if they noticed that the starting line was different, they never mention it.

Aftermath

While the starter was fortunate in that he escaped ridicule and further embarrassment, he was unfortunate in that he violated the golden rule of fairness. The ensuing guilt was difficult at times for him, and he vows never to make the mistake again. He finally tells a fellow official about his folly... weeks later.

Question

You are the fellow official he confesses to. And after 15 minutes of doing your best to make him feel even more guilty, you proceed with the more important issue: What was the best course of action in this situation?

21. 200-Meter Race Started from Wrong Starting Line

Admit the error to the track referee as soon as possible. Unanimous

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. In truth, only seven of the nine panelists made the comment above, but the remaining two implied it in their response. This starter's "cover up" infuriated at least a couple of the panelists.
2. Once the starter explained the mistake to the referee, the referee had several options including:
 - Start the remaining races from the correct line and then re-run the first heat – after sufficient recovery.
 - Take no action if there were no close finishes for qualifying spots, if the finish was for place and not time, and/or if there were no protests.
 - Don't re-run the first heat and start all remaining heats from wrong starting line.

Note: The theoretical options listed above, not all of which are necessarily good options, are for informational purposes only and do not fall within the authority of the starter. The starter need take no action beyond alerting the proper officials.

3. The starter was not the only official at fault. Proper placement of the athletes at the starting line is as much a responsibility of the start clerk (or starter's assistant) as the starter. Learn the starting lines prior to competition to avoid these mistakes.
4. Human beings make mistakes. A "guilt trip" after the fact is pointless. Let it go. The only true lapse in intelligence was the starter's failure to immediately correct the situation simply to avoid criticism or embarrassment. Make it right, and make it right immediately.

22. Hearing-Impaired Athlete Given Unfair Start

In the 4 x 100-meter relay, a hearing-impaired athlete is started in such a way that gives her an unfair disadvantage.

Question: How should the starter make the event fairer?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	Youth (High School) Championship. Spring, cloudy, mild, evening, semi-full stadium.
Event:	4 x 100-meter relay finals. <i>Prior to the start of the race, the starter is informed of the hearing-impaired athlete in Lane 8.</i>

Situation

When the starter learns of the hearing-impaired athlete in Lane 8, he assigns an assistant starter to stand on the outside of the track and give the athlete arm signals.

When the starter says "On your marks," the assistant points to the blocks and the athlete proceeds to settle into the blocks. The athlete then watches the assistant.

On the "Set" command, the assistant points his arm straight up. The athlete rises to a set position still watching the assistant.

When the gun is fired, the assistant drops the arm, and the athlete takes off from the blocks.

Aftermath

The starter and assistants feel the start was successful. However, the coach of the hearing-impaired athlete feels she was given an unfair disadvantage, and complains to the meet director.

The coach argues that the delay between when the gun is fired and when the assistant reacts by dropping the arm was too long a delay. By the time the athlete reacts to the dropped arm and leaves the blocks, the other athletes are already three strides ahead.

Question

The starter and assistants look to you for a suggestion. What would be a better way to start this hearing impaired athlete?



22. Hearing Impaired Athlete Given Unfair Start

The start team acted correctly 5 votes

I would have done it differently 4 votes

Alternate Suggestions by the Panel for Starting Hearing Impaired Athletes:

1. Whenever possible, discuss the planned starting procedure in advance with coach. The referee should participate in the discussion as well.
2. A comprehensive procedure for starting the deaf is described in the back of the USATF Rulebook in a section entitled, “Special Section Adaptations to USA Track & Field Rules of Competition for Individuals with Disabilities” (Section V, Pertaining to Rule 162).
3. Place a strobe light – attached to the gun sensor – in the athlete’s view. Or place yourself somewhere where the athlete can see the flash/smoke of the gun.
4. Position yourself partially on the track. Use a red flag or starter’s sleeve (or simply the arm) as a visual aid. Hold it in the non-gun hand. On the command “On your marks,” place left arm in front of you, holding the flag at waist level. On the command “Set,” raise the flag straight overhead. When you fire the gun, drop the arm simultaneously.
5. The assistant could have used a thumb up on set and open palm when gun goes off, which offers a faster reaction than dropping the arm.

23. Athlete Falls or Drops Baton Immediately After Leaving Starting Blocks

In the 4 x 100-meter relay, as the gun fires and the athlete is leaving the blocks, two different things go wrong:

- (a) The athlete immediately falls to the track. The blocks don’t appear to have slipped.
- (b) The athlete immediately drops the baton in the process of taking off from the blocks.

Question: Should the starter recall the race?

Occurrence Rate:	Rare
Meet Conditions:	Collegiate Championship. Spring, rainy, cool, evening, full stadium.
Event:	4 x 100-meter relay finals.

Situation

On the command “Set,” the athletes get in a set position and get still. As the gun is fired and the athletes leave the starting blocks:

- (a) The athlete in Lane 2 immediately stumbles and falls flat onto the track. He quickly gets up and proceeds to run the race – enormously disadvantaged. The blocks don’t appear to have slipped.

The starter shoots the gun again and recalls the race. The athlete isn’t injured, and on further investigation, the blocks don’t appear to have moved.

- (b) The athlete in Lane 2 immediately loses grip of the baton and it goes flying out of his hand. He stops, chases the baton down, picks it up and resumes the race – enormously disadvantaged.

The starter shoots the gun again and recalls the race.

Aftermath

At an appropriate time later in the evening, the assistant conveys his disagreement at the starter's decision in each situation to fire the gun and stop the race.

The starter feels he acted correctly because:

- In (a), it's possible the blocks could have slipped and we just didn't detect it. The benefit of the doubt should favor the athlete.
- In (a) and (b), an unfair start for just one athlete is still an unfair start.

The assistant disagrees, arguing that:

- In (a), if there is no indication that the blocks slipped, the gun shouldn't have fired just because the athlete was clumsy.
- In (a), if there was indication that the blocks had slipped, the assistant would have noticed it before the starter did.
- In (a) and (b), stopping the race unfairly penalizes the athletes who are not clumsy.

Question

What is the appropriate call in each situation?



23. Athlete Falls or Drops Baton Immediately After Leaving Starting Blocks

a) Immediately falls to the track

Recall the race..... 4 votes

Do not recall..... 4 votes

b) Immediately drops the baton

Do not recall..... 8 votes

Recall the race..... 1 vote

What the Panel Had to Say:

1. In (a), the panel was evenly divided on whether to recall the race, indicating that either decision may be correct when the athlete takes an early spill. The nearly unanimous vote in (b) indicates that the race should not be recalled for a dropped baton.
2. Comments favoring the recall for (a):
 - The benefit of the doubt should always favor the athlete. Very often you don't know immediately if the spill was due to slipped blocks. And slipped blocks is typically the reason.
 - "Fair starts" are purely a judgment call. If the starter judges a start unfair, then it is.
3. Comments against the recall:
 - (For (a)) Do not assume. If no one detected block motion, then you cannot govern clumsiness. If a future examination reveals slipped blocks, then you have the option (not the obligation) to inform the referee.
 - (For (b)) There was no interference.

24. Starter Does Not Wish to be Corrected by Another Starter

A more-skilled starter is attempting to correct a less-skilled starter's minor errors, but the less-skilled starter does not wish to be corrected.

Question: Can the more skilled starter improve the less skilled starter's mind-set?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	Youth (High School) championship.
Event:	800-meter run

For simplicity's sake:

- *The more-skilled starter will be named "Mo."*
- *The less-skilled starter will be named "Les."*
- *Les has actually been starting many more years than Mo.*

Situation

Mo watches Les start several races throughout the day. Les's performance varies from adequate to poor.

Prior to the start of the 800-meter run, Mo reminds Les, "Remember not to fire the gun so quickly. Wait until the athletes are steady and motionless, and be sure to check that no feet..." Mo actually never completes his comments.

Halfway through the remarks, Les interrupts Mo and says, "I got it." and turns his back to Mo in a clear signal for Mo to leave.

Slightly annoyed but composed, Mo leaves. Les proceeds to fire the gun quickly and doesn't notice Lane 3's feet touching the starting line.

Aftermath

Mo's opinion:

- Mo likes Les as a friend.
- As a fellow starter, Les is mediocre.
- Les will only improve if he can learn to take instruction and constructive criticism.

Les's opinion:

- He likes Mo as a friend as well.
- As a fellow starter Mo is a "know-it-all."
- He wishes Mo would just leave him alone so he can start the races and enjoy the meet.

Question

Can the more-skilled starter improve the less-skilled starter's attitude? How or why not?



24. Starter Does Not Wish to be Corrected by Another Starter

Yes, a mentoring environment is possible. But the attitude of both parties may need adjusting..... Unanimous

What the Panel Had to Say Regarding the More-Skilled Starter – Mo:

1. Work on presentation. Be diplomatic, supportive, and encouraging.
2. Discuss the less-skilled starter's actions at the end of the meet, when all actions can be summarized and analyzed as a whole. Speak to him in private, perhaps in a less threatening environment away from the track completely, or have him accompany you to a starter clinic.
3. Teach through example. Offer suggestions in a positive and friendly manner, like, "Did you ever try _____?" Feed the information slowly.
4. Be clear on the difference between correcting a minor error, and offering a "personal preference." There is more than one acceptable method utilized by starters – even if you don't agree with them. Save personal preference for theoretical discussions and clinics.
5. If the "old dog won't learn new tricks," either stop working with him, recommend that meet management stop hiring him as a starter (your reputation is at stake as well), or simply tolerate him.

What the Panel Had to Say Regarding the Less-Skilled Starter – Les:

1. A mentoring process only works if both parties cooperate.
2. Place the ego aside and accept suggestions. Adamantly refusing to accept performance suggestions works against the entire start team.
3. Understand that learning never stops. The moment you stop learning from others you become a "shooter," rather than a starter.

25. Hold Time – How Long?

Having heard numerous opinions, the starter wants to know what is an appropriate hold time between “Set” and the gun.

Question: What is an appropriate hold time?

Occurrence Rate:	Common
Meet Conditions:	Any meet
Event:	Any 3-command race.

The starter in this situation traditionally holds athletes between 1.75 and 2.5 seconds.

Situation

The starter is nearing the final race of the evening and everyone at the meet is happy with her performance. While a distance race is in process, she has an opportunity to have casual conversation with several officials. Two conversations with two separate officials are particularly interesting to her:

- (a) One official, a very experienced starter whose opinion she highly values says the following:
 - You’re doing a great job, but you are holding the athletes too long.
 - Once the athletes are set, shoot the gun and let them go.
 - A long hold causes athletes to lose concentration, increasing the chance of a false start.

- (b) The other official, an equally experienced starter whose opinion she also values very highly says the following:
 - You’re doing a great job, and your holds are perfect.

- You’re not shooting the gun too quickly, and you’re also not holding them too long.
- Starters who shoot a faster gun are doing a disservice to the athletes and increasing the chance of a false start.

Aftermath

The starter is very adamant that her hold times are consistent and appropriate. Nevertheless, the starter can’t help reflecting on how some athletes, coaches, spectators, even television commentators have complained that her holds are too long. This leaves the starter concerned.

Question

The starter hears conflicting opinions like this all the time, and turns to your wisdom for the final word. What is a proper hold time and why?

25. Hold Time – How Long?

No vote. Just enjoy reading over 350 years of super-condensed wisdom on the subject of “Hold Time.”

Panelist #1:

Hold times are personal and individual. The key issue is the hold should be sufficient to allow all athletes to be still and concentrating.

Panelist #2:

Your holds are just fine. Too much longer than 2.5 is on the backside of the concentration curve. After 3 seconds it all starts going downhill. “A held start is a fair start.” You have to put the athlete’s reaction elements together: Hear, React, Get set, Wait – and the waiting mode is at least 1.5 to 1.8 seconds in a perfect situation when they’re all up quickly and still. But athletes rarely all come up perfectly, which is what delays the hold to 2.0 to 2.5 seconds. Different schools of thought are expected. But ignore the comments about “too long.” Don’t change.

Panelist #3:

The proper hold time is long enough to get into the set position and stay there until the starter scans from left to right and back to the middle. How long is this? I have no idea but it’s the right time. As long as your times are consistent, continue with what you are doing. Forget about the complaints, especially from the television people. These motor mouths don’t like “dead air” and they blame the starters for everything. I have been booed by 80,000 people. [A well-known tv commentator] once questioned if I knew how to use the starter’s pistol. I know when I have a good start and don’t care who agrees.

Panelist #4:

Official (a) is wrong, official (b) is correct. 1.8 to 2.5 seconds is generally considered optimum. There may occasionally be times when everyone is up and still very quickly, in which case the gun

can be fired sooner than 1.8 seconds, but this doesn't happen very often. A quick gun generally will increase the chance of a false start.

Panelist #5:

If the time taken for the slowest athlete to get set is reasonable (in the starter’s opinion), then that is the “hold” time.

Panelist #6:

I would agree with the advice given by (b). Give the athletes time to get set, then go. Quit worrying about what others feel and go with your gut. If they're still and in control, let ‘em go.

Panelist #7:

Pay attention to the meet director and direct supervisors. If they don’t like you, then you know you should change. If they like you, and keep inviting you back, then you’re doing fine. Do what you feel comfy with. Don’t worry about the others.

Panelist #8:

An appropriate hold time is relative. There is no one absolute magic moment. There is also no such thing as “you are doing a great job, but . . .” A hold that is too long or too short is not doing a great job. In general, there is an amount of time needed to determine that the competitors are set, and this is very difficult to accomplish in less than 1.5 seconds given that there is a human reaction, [and] a start and an end of motion [which can range from] .25 to 1.25 seconds. One indication of a great job is the demand for service. Another relates to the request for either advice or approval from others. They help in the “reflecting” process regarding performance.

Panelist #9:

The gun should fire when ALL the athletes have gotten into their final set position, and ALL the athletes have had the opportunity to mentally prepare to respond to the pistol, AND the starter is sure that they are ALL primed and ready to explode out. THERE IS

NO MAGIC “HOLD TIME” NUMBER HERE, but research tends to say that optimally it is somewhere between 1.6 to 2.2 seconds. Sometimes the response to “Set” is rapid and solid. There is no need for a further hold if it is not mitigated. Sometimes (especially in echelon starts in 200 and 400) the athletes respond to “Set” slower or more erratic, so the hold might be longer. The hold time should be instinctive and not mechanical. Early in their careers, starters are generally less patient, a bit scared, and tend to shoot too fast. They have to become mechanical for a while about developing a 1.7 to 2.2 second hold time just to mature. When that range of hold time becomes habitual and you have greater confidence, then you can relax and be more instinctive. That aspiring starter shouldn’t care what the TV commentators are saying – they have no idea at all what you are trying to accomplish, and you sure don’t tell them how to announce! Your optimum holding time depends on YOU. What works for YOU.