

^a “**The primary responsibility is to affect and ensure a fair start.** And when this does not occur, do something. That leaves the door open to many solutions, including the one that provides the greatest number of solutions—if appropriate and possible—cancelling the start.” Bob Podkaminer

Rule 3.6.1 The starter shall have full responsibility for the competitors on the starting line and during the start. The starter and assistant starter(s) shall decide, without protest, whether a start is fair and legal, or which competitor(s) shall be charged with a false start. The starter, charging a competitor with a false start, is disqualifying the competitor from the event. The starter is also responsible for avoiding unnecessary delay in the continuance of events and shall start the track events promptly after the competitors have been assigned their positions and given appropriate information/instruction by the clerk of the course. The starter, or any official designated by the starter, shall give a signal at the beginning of the last lap in each individual race of two laps or more.

Please refer to the Head Starter and Assistant Starters sections in the NFHS Officials Manual for responsibilities before the meet, prior to each race, at the start, and for recalls. See <https://www.pausatf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2019-Starters-Monograph.pdf> for a starters monograph with recommendations.

For races or opening relay legs of **less than 800 meters**, there will be two verbal commands and then the gun to start the race. “Please stand behind your blocks or within your lane, and when I give the command ‘**ON YOUR MARKS,**’ come forward and get settled into your blocks. When everyone is settled, I will give the ‘**SET**’ command. Come up to a full set position without any hesitation or slow roll-ups, and then hold steady and wait for the gun. I will not surprise you with a quick gun; I will hold you until I am satisfied everyone is still and in control. React to the gun; do not try to anticipate it.” The interval between the set command and the firing of the starting device is usually 1.5 to 2.5 seconds. Any hold of less than 1.5 seconds does not give the athlete time to get into the set position. After the starter gives the order, “SET,” if any competitor is in motion, the starter shall not fire the starting device. The starter may for any reason, either before or after the “SET” command, cancel a start by directing all competitors to “**STAND UP.**” Note: A calm voice is one of the most important aspects to starting. Be decisive but not brusque. Use a soft “SET” command. Instill confidence in the runners.

In individual races or relay legs of **800 meters and longer** outdoors, or 600 meters indoors, the starter shall use one command and then the gun. Ask competitors to take a position at least three meters behind the starting line or on the dashed arc behind the line. On the command, “ON YOUR MARKS,” all competitors will, without delay, step up to the starting line, and when all are set and motionless, the starting device will be fired.

Note: Some Starters use the following protocol, some do not. Raising the free hand alerts the timers that the starting device will be fired in approximately one to two seconds. Raise the starting device to the proper over-the-head position and give the command “ON YOUR MARKS.” At the same time, swing the other arm, starting with the elbow straight and hand at side, backward and upward over the head and then down in front, ending with the hand pointing to the ground in front. After a reasonable length of time sufficient to allow all competitors to become comfortable and motionless, give the command “SET.”

Rule 5.7.4 Starting violations which constitute a false start include:

- a. Failure to comply with the starter’s commands.
- b. Having any part of the body in contact with the starting line or running surface beyond the line when the starting device is fired. [NOTE: the baton, but not the hand, can be over the line.] Hair does not count.
- c. Failure to remain motionless after assuming the set position prior to the starting device being fired (or is in motion when the starting device is fired).
- d. Failure to place starting blocks within the respective competitor’s lane.
- e. Repeated use of disconcerting acts (e.g., a competitor repeatedly delays in assuming the final position).

PENALTY: A competitor who commits a false start shall be disqualified (by the starter).

What to do after a false start or race recall - Use of the Starter/Referee cards (green, yellow, red). A green card, indicating that there is no violation, is held above the starter’s head as the starter walks across the start line and back to their starters position. A yellow card is raised above the starter’s head while in front of the runner receiving the warning. A red card is raised above the starter’s head while standing in front of the runner who is being disqualified; the runner must leave the track immediately. While these cards are not mentioned in the rule book, they provide the athletes, timing crew, coaches, and spectators a visual message of the result of a recall or “stand up.”

It is suggested that the starter arrive one hour prior to the first race to inspect the track and blocks, ask if there is a “block crew” to assist you in moving the blocks from one start line to another, remove any debris on the track, ensure the areas one meter outside the track are free of hazards, confirm with the timing crew how they will signal the starter when they are ready, introduce yourself to the announcer and coaches, ask coaches if there are any special-needs athletes competing, and confirm the order of the races and how the schedule will be adhered to (sticking to the time noted for each race or using a rolling schedule).

If there is an **Announcer**, it is always a good idea for the starter to meet with the announcer and ask that the announcer not talk over the start of any race. Ask the announcer to state - “the gun is up” - this helps quiet the crowd. The announcer’s introductions of athletes should be performed prior to the start of sprint races, whereas introductions for longer races can be done after the gun.

In the 800-meter race, up to 12 runners may run in lanes, with Runners 9 through 12 doubling up in lanes 8, 6, 4, and 2 (preferably the same for each heat: Runner 9 in lane 8, Runner 10 in lane 6, Runner 11 in lane 4, and Runner 12 in lane 2). Inform the Chief Umpire if

runners are doubled up in any lanes. Another option for 800-m races is a waterfall start. Check with meet management which method they wish to use.

The 1500-, 1600-, 3000- and 3200-meter races use a **waterfall start**. Line up runners in order of their hip numbers (1 closest to the curb). Runners may cut in immediately but must do so safely, without interfering with other runners.

Alley lanes waterfall from lane one to outer lanes. If there are more than 16 (suggested) runners on the first waterfall line, utilize a second waterfall start line, which is located from lane five to outer lanes. Two-thirds of the runners begin in the lane-one waterfall, and one-third begin in the lane-five waterfall. Athletes starting in the lane-five waterfall must not step from lane 5 line into lane 4 until crossing the **break line** used for the 800-meter run. Use small, 4" orange cones, spaced approximately 9' apart, along the outside of lane 4 to give runners a visual reminder to remain in the outside lanes until crossing the break line.

Rule 3.6.2 The starter shall receive a whistle or white-flag (*the most common method*) signal from the head finish judge (*or timing company*) that the judges and timers are ready. When the judges and timers are not ready, the finish judge shall use an overhead wig wag motion of an extended arm or red-flag (*the most common method*) signal and without the use of the whistle.

Rule 3.6.3 The assistant starter(s) or recall judge may stop the race and recall competitors if there is an unfair start or a spill during the first 100 meters due to contact with another competitor. The use of an assistant starter is especially recommended for "staggered" starts where it is difficult for one starter to observe all competitors. During distance races, the assistant starter should take a position on the first turn where there may be a spill, which would be a cause for recalling the race.

Rule 3.6.4 The head starter (or designee) shall inspect all starting blocks used in running events. *Note: Check that all blocks have a complete set of spikes, so the blocks do not slip. Some starters bring extra spikes to replace missing ones.*

Rule 5.7.5 For an unfair start, the starter or assistant/recall starter shall recall the competitors by firing the starting device.

Rule 5.7.6 A race shall be recalled in the first 100 meters when a competitor falls due to contact with another competitor in the following situations:

- a. The race is not started in lanes (waterfall start) or.
- b. Two or more competitors are assigned to a single lane (*as noted for the 800-meter race*).

Rule 5.7.7 If a competitor's starting blocks are slipping due to a condition of the track or a malfunction of the starting block, the starter may authorize an attendant to hold or support the blocks. (*Inform the person supporting the block to sit down behind the block and place one foot against the back of the rail. The other leg should be out of harm's way. When the "SET" command is given, tense your support leg; do not push against the rail. Remain motionless until all runners have left the start line.*)

EQUIPMENT & UNIFORM NEEDED: □ Starter's pistol# (closed barrel, .32, .22, 9mm), □ holster, and □ blank ammo or electronic sound-flash (gun less) system; □ pouch for live and spent shells; □ watch; □ earplugs; □ starter's platform or 2- or 3-step ladder; □ NFHS rule book; □ whistle; □ red, yellow, and green starter/referee cards; □ bell for sounding the last lap; □ voice amplification system (placed so all athletes hear); □ a back-up starting device; □ extra track spikes; □ spike wrench; □ tape (non-residue); □ red or white hat; □ khaki pants or shorts; □ red polo shirt/jacket; □ comfortable shoes; □ sunglasses; □ sunscreen; □ raingear; □ water; □ snacks.

Standard colors for starting lines, break line, relay exchange zones, and finish line (check to see if the venue has posted track markings and what they represent)

STARTING LINES (*Check the lines in Lane 2 to confirm the colors.*)

100 meters, 110-meter-high hurdles (straight line)	WHITE
200 meters, 300 meters, 400 meters (staggered in lanes)	WHITE
800 meters (staggered in lanes or alleys)	GREEN or WHITE with GREEN
1600 meters, 3200 meters (curved line)	WHITE
4 x 100-meter relay (staggered in lanes)	WHITE
4 x 200-meter relay (staggered in lanes)	RED or WHITE with RED
4 x 400-meter relay (staggered in lanes)	BLUE or WHITE with BLUE
4 x 800-meter relay (staggered in lanes)	GREEN or WHITE with GREEN

BREAK LINE (curved)

GREEN

RELAY EXCHANGE ZONES (*Double check these before the first race.*)

4 x 100-meter (400-m) relay	YELLOW TRIANGLES (staggered)
4 x 200-meter (800-m) relay	RED TRIANGLES for 1 st and 2 nd exchanges (staggered) (RED/YELLOW in Lane 1) YELLOW TRIANGLES for 3 rd exchange zone (same as 4 x 100)
4 x 400-meter (1600-m) relay	BLUE TRIANGLES (staggered for 1 st exchange)
4 x 800-meter (3200-m) relay	GREEN or BLUE

FINISH LINE (straight)

WHITE

REMINDER: While using a starter's pistol at any meet, always follow basic gun-safety protocols. Never point the gun at anyone, and always treat the gun as if it were loaded. Get in the habit of reloading your starter's pistol after each race, but not after a recall.

"A competent starter should be relaxed and never try to overwhelm the athletes with his or her presence. A competent starter also practices preventive officiating. If a starter sees a situation developing that could result in a problem, he/she should do something to correct the situation immediately, before it does become a problem." Eric Zemper