Starting

I mention each and every year that the Starter has an awesome responsibility as a part of the track and field meet. His/her responsibility during the administration of running events makes for a smoothly run meet. The starter has jurisdiction over the competitors at the starting line except for those duties assigned to the clerk of the course, and shall decide without appeal whether a start is fair and legal, or which competitors shall be charged with a false start. I always try to talk with the clerk and the head finish judge when I report to the venue. I want to get our signals and instructions for the runners straight. A duplication of instructions is redundant and the runners usually do not listen to me as closely when there has been information given them about the start by the clerk. A conversation with the public address announcer is needed, also. I want him/her to know what I will be doing before each race so there will be no delay in starting the races. I am always very concerned about starting the races on time when there is a time schedule.

As a former track coach and a starter for over forty years, there are many things happening in today’s track & field that have evolved over the last forty + years.

I definitely was not a super coach as I am not a super starter, but I try and work hard on my mechanics from meet to meet and year to year. I know that there is a particular thing that coaches could help their athletes in improving on – that is the preparation for the race – “the start.” In many of the small meets, especially, but seemingly in all meets & classifications, there is something that could make all the sprints and relays “get off to a better start.” I like for my runners to stand behind their blocks before I give them
the starting commands. Many athletes take their starts/run throughs and then get down in the blocks before I am ready for them to do so. There is a lot of wasted energy taking place that each competitor could be conserving by standing and mentally becoming ready for the race. This bit of information may be handled by the clerk or by the starter in groups/sections/ or heats before the race begins. I would like to be able to do this before each section, but many times we/the starter does not have enough time to do this before the prelims/section/heat is ready to begin.

The runners, when they report to the start, are told to get a couple of starts and then stand behind their blocks. If they are listening, as they should, they will not do what I said earlier as one of my pet peaves- get in their blocks, too early

The sprints, ie 100 meters, 200 meters and 400 meters are all run in lanes for the entirety of the race. 100 meter races are run on straight-aways. The 200 meter sprint is run around a one turn so therefore it is started from a staggered start. The 400 meter is run around two turns and the track may be marked off a little differently from track to track. This is another reason why the starter should be sure to survey the starting points of the races, looking at location and colors of starting points as soon as he/she gets to the venue.

All races which are run up through the four hundred meters, the commands should be like this: I know that these commands are not entirely proper, but I always say, “Ladies/Gentlemen, on your marks.” This personalizes it a little and I heard a starter 30 or so years ago say that you need to be as calm, but yet commanding, as you can be to make the runners feel calm and thus they probably will hold for you and have a fair and legal start. I do not like to have false starts. I do not like to have someone jump on me and me not catch it, either.
The next command is “Set.” This should be done quickly and with no delay. When every runner comes up and is set and motionless, I fire the gun. I try to have the same period of time (usually one to two seconds) between set and firing of the gun for each race. If someone drags on me, that is not a fair start for the other runners and I will call them up. If there is any movement right before or right after set, I call all runners up. That is not a false start. If there is a false start, all the runners have a false start. (The whole field has one, if there is a false start) The next runner/s to false start is disqualified.

Hands should be behind the starting line. If it is a relay race, the starting runner may have the baton across the line and it may be touching the track beyond the line.

As the starter and since there are at least 8 runners when the track is full, I like to crisscross with my assistant starter so they are watching the runners furtherest from me on the 100 meter dash and the 110/100 meter hurdles. The assistant starter should take the runners near me. The assistant or back-up starter has the same responsibility as I do on a false start. If the race gets started and there is a false start, the gun is fired again to bring the runners back. The gun is not fired if there is a break by a runner before the race is fairly/legally started.

As the starter looks at the starting line, he/she needs to decide where to stand and communicate this with his/her recall starter. NEW 2011 – For all races, a starter should be in visual contact with all competitors so the pistol report is heard by all competitors at about the same instant – NOTE – With an assistant/recall starter present, the starter should position him/herself on the inside of the track, between the starting lines for lanes 4 and 5 and far enough back to be able to watch the competitors in lanes 5 through 8. In this position, he/she will be ideally suited to observe a side view of the competitors. With or without a sound device the competitors
should be able to hear the instructions and the sound of the gun when it is fired. The assistant starter should be on the outside of the track able to watch lanes 1 - 4, and in line of sight of the starter. This allows the starter to make eye contact without having to move his/her head.

If there is no assistant starter, there are two positions for the starter, neither of which is ideal. The first is on the infield far enough away from the track so he/she can get a good peripheral view of all competitors. If the track is around a football field, the goal post should be a reference point. Being too close to the track does not give a good side view of all competitors and the report of the gun is not heard at approximately the same time. The disadvantages of this position are that the starter may not see something because it occurs in his/her peripheral vision and the lane 1 athlete may be blocked because of where the finish line officials and equipment are located. The other position is on the outside of the track in front of the last occupied lane. (If there are empty lanes, the starter should have the clerk redraw the lanes so there are teams in consecutive lanes.) While this puts the competitors in a narrower field of vision, it does result in the competitors in the lower-numbered lanes receiving the pistol report a few 1/10ths of a second later than the competitors in the higher-numbered lanes. The starter’s position may vary from the above suggestion if there is a limited range of movement for an automatic timing sensor cable or if field event venues or their landing areas are located at that end of the track.

I would like to speak now to the races from the 600/indoor, 800 outdoors on up. These races may or may not be started with blocks. If they are, the commands are a little different. The last couple of years there have been some changes in the starting spot for distant races. Up until that time, all the races, from 800 on up were started from the one turn stagger and the runners broke at the break line on the opposite side of the track. The Arkansas
Activities Association adopted a few years ago the starting spot on these races in alleys. On an eight lane track, the first alley (lanes 1 – 4) is the same as the old teardrop/waterfall start that was once used on all distant races. The second alley (lanes 5 – 8) is marked in those lanes starting at the one turn stagger for lane five. The entire field is usually divided equally to run in the alleys. Lanes 5 – 8 (alley two) must stay outside the lane line between lane 4 and 5. They may break at the regular break line at the start of the straight away on the opposite side of the curve from where the race begins. The track should have a dotted line one meter back from the starting line. The participants should stand behind that line until the starter gives the command, “On your mark.” When he says that, they shall step up to the starting line and become motionless. The starter will fire the gun, when the field is motionless.

Indoors, the track is smaller and thus the lanes are less, usually six in number. The number of lanes per alley is determined by the number of lanes. As was mentioned in the previous information, the alleys are marked off on the indoor surface. Each alley has the same number of lanes or same amount of surface so the runner/participants will be equally or near equally divided. If there is an uneven number there possibly will be more in alley one than there is alley two. This is determined by the game management. It could be the first half of the field or odds and evens. The length of the alley will be determined by whether the race is run indoors or outdoors. The break line will be designated before the races are started. On many tracks, the alleys are marked by cones from the starting line of alley two to the break line.

Are there any questions?
Pre-meet Duties

(1) Inspect and test the starting apparatus and FAT equipment
(2) Inspect the starting and finishing lines, relay staggers, exchange zones, and cut-in flags/cones
(3) Confer with the announcer to familiarize him/her with the meet time and schedule for preliminary calls
(4) Confer with the head finish judge to ensure agreement and understanding of meet procedures
(5) Confer with the clerk of the course regarding pre-race instructions to the competitors to avoid duplication or information at the starting line.
(6) Meet with the assistant/backup starter and discuss recall procedures

Pre-race Duties

Just prior to the race and before giving remaining instructions, the starter should:
(1) Inspect the starting device (again) to make sure it is ready and direct all attendants and noncompetitors to move away from the starting line.
(2) Restrict & quieten the environment around the starting line so competitors are able to direct their total concentration to the start of the race.
(3) Apply preventive officiating checks for proper uniforms and jewelry. NOTE: The NFHS decided in 2011 that the competitors should be informed that they should be dressed and conform to the rules. This is signed off on by the coaches before the competitors warm up for the events. If an umpire or any other official sees a competitor that is illegally dressed or has jewelry on, he/should be reported to the referee. The referee will warn the coach for a team warning. If it happens the second time, the competitor or relay team will be disqualified.
(4) Give final instructions - Appropriate information might included the following” Runners, do not delay in responding to my commands. At the command “On your marks,” I will give you reasonable time to assume a comfortable position. When the command “Set” is given, I will expect you to promptly come to your final position and remain motionless until the starting device is fired. - Note: this set of instructions applies to the races up to and including the 400 meters.

Your pistol is very important to the races. All starting devices used on high school campuses, especially, are to be legal. This means that the gun you use will be a closed nose gun. This is a gun which fires only blanks.

Other items for discussion/explanation

(1) Indoor – if the competitors use a kneeling start in the sprints, there maybe some decision that will have to be made whether there will be one or two commands indoors. If there is at least one competitor who wants to start with a kneeling start there will be two commands – On your mark, set, and the gun. The rule book does not address this. It only gives the two commands for races less than 600 meters.

(2) A sound system used by the starter/assistant starter is a recommendation. All the competitors can hear if there is a sound system. The expense of purchasing one may be prohibitive for starters to buy if their schedules are not productive enough to purchase one. **Note:** Indoors you may be able to use the sound system that is already installed in the venue.
(3) The use of block holders – This may be done at the discretion of the starter if the surface is wet or the blocks are faulty and both or one of these causes the blocks to slip.

Information for presentation edited on 1/17/09 - for Administrative Track Workshop – AAA Office 2/21/09
In red was cancelled/rescheduled because of inclement weather. The presentation made on 1/22/11 is in accordance with 2011 new rules.