

June 11, 2007

**Q: Why is it that sometimes a referee blows his whistle once at the start of a backstroke race and other times a referee will blow it twice?**

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Rule:

SW 2.1.5 - At the commencement of each event, the Referee shall signal to the swimmers by a series of short whistles inviting them to remove all clothing except for swim-wear, followed by a long whistle indicating that they should take their positions on the starting platform (or for backstroke swimming and medley relays to immediately enter the water). A second long whistle shall bring the backstroke and medley relay swimmer immediately to the starting position. When the swimmers and officials are prepared for the start, the referee shall gesture to the starter with a stretched out arm, indicating that the swimmers are under the starter's control. The stretched out arm shall stay in that position until the start is given.

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**A: This is not a new rule. It has been in existence for some time. But its application has been inconsistent among various jurisdictions and different levels of competition. For example, most club swimmers in both Swim Alberta and Alberta Summer Swim Association meets will not encounter referees that start with the series of short whistles. Our swimmers come to the blocks ready to swim so the short series of whistles is redundant. Even Nationally ranked meets may not follow this process during preliminary heats. It will slow down the pace of the meet as swimmers will not prepare for their race until they hear the short whistles; still in their warm up suits, swim cap not on yet, goggles not on, etc. To run through the heats faster, the swimmers are quickly called to the blocks (or into the water for backstroke) with one long whistle. It is fairly consistent that the second whistle is blown for backstroke swimmers after all swimmers have entered the water. This is to notify the swimmers to immediately come to the blocks and secure their starting grip. All swimmers seem to enter the water a little differently on the start of the backstroke. Some jump in, others may hold the handles and slide in without even getting their upper body wet.**

**The most obvious benefit for the swimmer in using a second short whistle is that they don't have to hang on the grips ready to start while someone in a another lane floats or drifts slowly back to the blocks.**

**When the second whistle is blown everyone knows to come immediately to the blocks and prepare for the start. In the past ASSA referees felt that meets ran smoother and quicker if only one whistle was used. But often a referee that refs both summer and year round club meets will use the two whistles and summer swimmers were confused thinking they had done something wrong, were supposed to get back out of the water, etc.**

**So to be consistent with the start ASSA decided to implement the two whistle process for the start of the backstroke race beginning with the 2006 summer season. Unfortunately this has not been consistently applied throughout all regions and we may still find a referee that only uses one whistle. Suffice it to say, we should all be using two whistles.**