

LONG WHISTLE WARNINGS

There are two long whistles for backstroke starts: one to enter the water and the second to bring the swimmers to the wall.

“TAKE YOUR MARKS”

Both hands should firmly grip the available handles in the swimmer's preferred position. The feet should be placed under, at, or above the water surface, either level with each other - mandatory when using a foot ledge - , or 'split' one higher than the other. The feet and toes should be placed firmly on the ledge. In pools where there is no foot ledge, the feet and toes should 'grip' the wall or touchpad.

The body should be pulled up and in towards the block with the hips nearly out of the water.



“GO!”

- The 'drive' from the wall should be initiated from the hips by the swimmer feeling they are pushing the wall away.
- As the hands release their grip, the head and shoulders should move forwards as soon as possible ('forwards' as in the intended direction of swimming – i.e. towards the other end of the pool)
- The head, shoulders, body and hips should move diagonally **upwards** and **forwards**. The neck and chest should be extended.
- The duration of the push should be as short as possible (indicates greater force).
- The arms should be swung forwards and extended past the head.
- The order of 'drive' is hips, head, hands.
- At the end of the leg drive the body angle should be diagonal and straight.



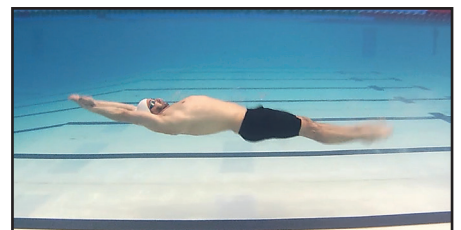
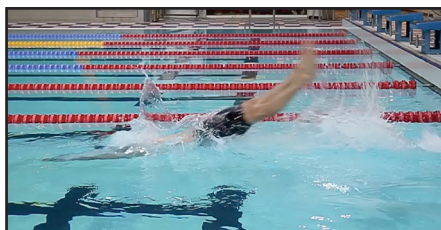
FLIGHT

- The flight over the water should take the swimmer as far as possible.
- The hips should be raised as high as possible, then, just before the hands and arms enter the water the feet should be raised completely out of the water. This will produce an arched body shape over the water.
- The arms should squeeze the head before the entry.



ENTRY

- The hands, arms, head, shoulders, torso, hips, knees and feet should enter through the same 'hole'.
- A small dolphin kick should be made **during** the entry of the legs (Hips, head, hands, **feet**).
- A tight, 'squeeze' streamlining should be held to ensure no loss of speed after the entry.



PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Arm and shoulder strength.
- Explosive leg strength.
- Flexion of the spine.
- Shoulder flexibility.

TESTING & MONITORING

- **‘Sergeant’ (vertical) jump.** Stand with one arm extended upwards and mark the height of the fingertips on the wall. Jump and touch the wall as high as possible above the mark. Measure the difference.
- **Two-footed long jump.** Lie the swimmer down on the floor and make one mark at the feet and one at the top of the head. Then ask the swimmer to extend both arms above the head and mark to where the finger tips reach. The swimmer then stands with both feet together behind the first mark and jumps as far forward as possible, landing with both feet. The minimum target distance should be the second mark (equal to the swimmer’s height), while a good standard is beyond the third mark (height plus arms).

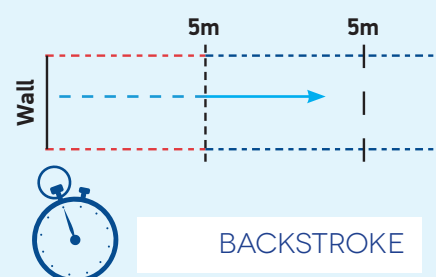
THE RULES

- **SW 4.2** The start in Backstroke and Medley Relay races shall be from the water. At the referee’s first long whistle (SW 2.1.5), the swimmers shall immediately enter the water. At the Referee’s second long whistle the swimmers shall return without undue delay to the starting position (SW 6.1). When all swimmers have assumed their starting positions, the starter shall give the command “take your marks”. When all swimmers are stationary, the starter shall give the starting signal.
- **SW 4.4** Any swimmer starting before the starting signal has been given, shall be disqualified. If the starting signal sounds before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue and the swimmer or swimmers shall be disqualified upon completion of the race. If the disqualification is declared before the starting signal, the signal shall not be given, but the remaining swimmers shall be called back and start again. The Referee repeats the starting procedure beginning with the long whistle (the second one for backstroke) as per SW 2.1.5.
- **SW 6.1** Prior to the starting signal, the swimmers shall line up in the water facing the starting end, with both hands holding the starting grips. Standing in or on the gutter or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter is prohibited. When using a backstroke ledge at the start, the toes of both feet must be in contact with the end wall or face of the touchpad. Bending the toes over the top of the touchpad is prohibited.
- **SW 6.2** When a backstroke ledge is being used, each inspector at the starting end shall install and remove the ledge after the start.
- **SW 6.3** At the signal for starting and after turning the swimmer shall push off and swim upon his back throughout the race except when executing a turn as set forth in SW 6.5. The normal position on the back can include a roll movement of the body up to, but not including 90 degrees from horizontal. The position of the head is not relevant.

THE FOOT LEDGE:

- At the start, the toes of both feet must be in contact with the end wall or face of the touchpad. Bending the toes over the top of the touchpad is prohibited.
- The ledge may be adjustable to 4 cm above or 4 cm below the water level.
- The ledge is a minimum of 65 cm in length.
- The ledge must be 8 cm in height, 2 cm at the width with 10 degrees of slope.

BACKSTROKE START



LEVEL	BACKSTROKE	
	MALE	FEMALE
1	5.4	6.2
2	5.8	6.5
3	6.2	6.8
4	6.5	7.1
5	6.9	7.1
6	7.3	7.6
7	7.7	7.9
8	8.1	8.2

START STANDARD TO 15M

COACHING PROCESS & CONTROL

- Swimmers should always ensure the lane is clear before practising backstroke starts. A 'buddy' system is a good solution.
- An effective backstroke start position requires tremendous upper body strength and control. Young swimmers may not be able to pull themselves up into an effective position, or may not be able to maintain a steady position once they are there.
- If young swimmers cannot hold a high body position they may be better served staying lower until they have developed strength.
- Remove all unnecessary movements, especially during the arm swing after the hand release.
- Prepare the swimmer to "be ready" for the start signal.
- **Increase propulsion** (force) during 'drive' from the block. **Decrease resistance** (maintain speed) during entry and initial 'glide' phase.
- Ensure power transfer during the leg drive from the wall is forwards and upwards and is through the hips.
- The best start is the one that maintains the fastest speed *after* the swimmer enters the water. **Remember, it's about how they get off the wall fast; not how fast they get off the wall.**
- Experiment with the foot positions and the footrest position.

LAND EXERCISES

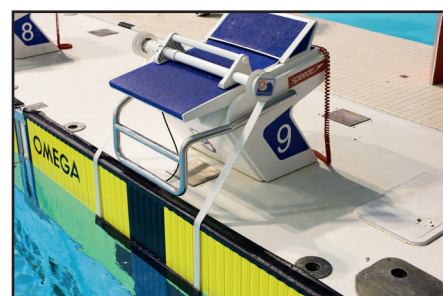
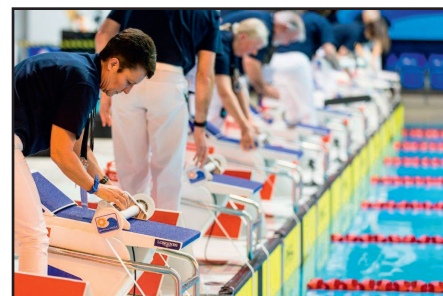
- Basketball.
- 'Reverse' plyometric jumps. (Jump down from an elevated position facing **away** from the direction of jump).
- Bounding. Running backwards.
- 'Streamline' squat jumps (arms held tightly overhead, squeezing the head).
- 'Streamline' squat jumps moving **backwards** with each jump.
- Single leg squats.
- Leg presses.
- Tie a bungy cord around the swimmer's waist and ask them to dive backwards onto a crash mat. Adjust the tension of the cord to increase resistance

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- **Over-riding consideration: it's about how they get off the block fast; not how fast they get off the block.**
- Jump backwards from block into the water for distance and/or height.
- Practice starts with hands at the sides at entry/with one hand extended, other by the side.
- Swimmers stand in the shallow end with their backs against the lane rope. On a command they jump backwards, shoulders first, over the lane rope. A good back arch will help them do a backwards somersault.
- Have the 'buddy' hold a kickboard or noodle on the surface so that the starting swimmer can arch over it. Adjust the distance from the wall to suit the individual swimmer. The goal is that no part of the swimmer touches the board or noodle.
- 'False' starts: Swimmers practice driving with the hips and legs but do not release their hands from the grips. Once they have felt the hip drive they return to a relaxed position ready for the next exercise.

INTERPRETING THE RULES

- The feet do not have to be in the water at the start, they can be above the water (or split, one underwater and the other above the surface). Both feet must be in contact with the wall or touchpad – even when using a foot ledge.
- The foot ledge is adjustable in increments of 2 cm, from 4 cm below the surface to 4 cm above the surface. It is horizontal and cannot be tilted so, when using a ledge, the feet will be level with each other. When there is no ledge the feet can be 'split'.
- The rules are clear that the starter should not give the start signal until all the swimmers are 'stationary'. However, there are numerous examples of swimmers being disqualified because they adjusted their position instead of immediately finding their preferred position. The rule prohibits 'starting' before the signal whereas adjusting is 'merely' movement and obviously not a start. However, to be safe, make sure your swimmers can go straight into their well-practised, preferred position with no fidgeting or fumbling.



COMMON FAULTS & FIXES

- Feet slipping on the wall or touchpad.
- Swimmer too weak to pull the body up out of the water on the 'Take your marks' command – **adjust foot position to gain greater friction and grip.**
- Swimmer pushing straight from the wall rather than diagonally upwards. This pushes the back through the water and creates massive resistance.
- Swimmer pushing diagonally upwards but not lifting the hips and/or feet whilst in mid-air. This results in a flat, 'pancake' entry.

DESCRIPTIVE WORDS & IMAGERY

Go!, power, explode, drive, fly, soar, take-off, Bang!

SEE ALSO

- British Swimming: britishswimming.org
- ASA: swimming.org
- SASA: scottishswimming.com
- WASA: swimwales.org
- BSCA: gbswimcoaches.co.uk