

Princeton Athletic Club 2013 – Distance running events – Course, Marshals, Umpires, and Starter

Although Princeton A. C. events have not been sanctioned by USATF, the rule book provides good guidelines for the responsibilities relative to managing the course and starting a distance running event.

As a practical matter, the roles of **umpire** (rule 127) and **marshal** (rule 133) are often combined and called marshals. Courses for recreational level distance running events are seldom under exclusive control of event officials. The roles of **starter** (rule 129), **referee** (rule 125), and **chief finish judge** (rule 126) are often combined.

Umpires (rule 127) observe the conduct of athletes on the course, may be stationed on the course to direct competitors where necessary (rule 251.6) and may report to the referee about competitors who divert from the marked course (rule 251.7).

Marshals (rule 133) are concerned with restraining everyone not involved with the competition from interfering with the course.

The course must be clearly marked (rule 251.2), the course must be described in the event invitation (rule 251.5). This responsibility lies with the organizer (rule 251.6). See also rule 243 for road events.

The first responsibility to know the course lies with the organizer. Having provided a published and well marked course, it is the athlete's responsibility to follow it. Umpires (marshals) may be used to direct athletes where necessary. It is desirable to mark the course sufficiently such that, **as much as possible, the responsibility to follow the course lies with the athlete.**

For road events, monitors are to be placed at all turns and major intersections (rule 243.2). Each turn or intersection shall be clearly marked (rule 243.1.a). The rule does not explicitly charge monitors to direct the athletes, and does demand course marking so there will be “no doubt” as to the direction. Having provided a well marked course, again, as much as possible, the responsibility to follow the course lies with the athlete.

The responsibility of the athlete to follow the course is implied by USATF rules 251.7 (cross-country) and 243.4 (road): referee to disqualify athletes who cut the course. USA Triathlon Rules of Competition Article III, paragraph 3.4.a states explicitly, “It is the participant’s responsibility to know the course.”

MARSHALS should receive a course map and a definite location to be stationed. They should have written instructions for contacting emergency services. This will often be a cell phone call to 911, and written location information to aid dispatcher, including town, county, and state. For less urgent situations, marshals should be able to contact the event director. Marshals should also have instructions for leaving their posts – what time, and any on-the-spot course break-down.

Determine before event day whether there is cell phone coverage and what alternative will be used if this is not available.

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The starter (rule 129) is responsible for explaining the commands used to start and starting the event (rule 162.3-4). The starter must command athletes attention, put them at ease, and communicate clearly and definitely. There are two commands: “on your marks” and then the start signal (pistol, horn, whistle). After the command “on your marks,” the starter should pause briefly to wait for stillness and then give the start signal.

Do not use a count-down.

The start signal should be given confidently. If a whistle or horn, a full, clear, loud blast. The air horn is loud, and a start pistol is louder. Hearing protection is available and recommended.

An example script used by a starter might be: “I have three things to tell you. First, please quiet down so you can hear the other two. Second, there are two commands: on your marks and then the whistle. Third, ... have fun. Timers ready? ... On your marks ... [tweet].”

The starter's attention should be focused on the athletes about to start the event, not on other matters. It is highly preferable that the **starter not be the race director**.

THE START. At the start, a common procedure is to say a couple of thank yous, briefly explain the course, including special cautions, mention the organization (Princeton A. C.), possibly including the next club event, and then do the actual start. The thank yous, course explanation, and PAC acknowledgment might be given by the race director or someone else designated, and then the starter introduced.

Specific thank-yous by name are appropriate, if it will not cause offense by leaving someone out.

The announcements at the start should be reasonably brief. The exact content and delivery is not set in stone. For example, the starter may give the course description. Because of the starter's focused role, it is better for someone else to give the thank-yous and acknowledgments.

[For track events, it is usual for the starter to describe the course, i.e. the number of laps to be run, and the finish procedure. The start for individual running events over 400 meters is the same two command start. Sprint starts are different. See rule 162.]

It is OK for the race director, announcer, and starter to use notes when giving the start announcements.