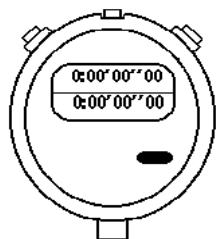


INTRODUCTION TO TIMEKEEPING: Part I:

The South of England Athletics Officials Association



Timekeeper's Starter Pack



The achievement of a track athlete can realistically only be measured by the time it takes to travel a measured distance.

Track athletes spend many hours of effort and training in all sorts of conditions in order to improve personal performance; therefore it should be the duty of those who record their times to be as accurate as possible. Those who become involved with athletics, other than by competing, are usually coaches or parents whose children have joined a local club. Invariably parents get asked to help out at club home meetings by officiating on the track or in the field. Most will opt to hold a tape or mark a throw in preference to timekeeping, which is considered to be too technical.

Like most duties, timekeeping is not difficult once the basics are understood and accuracy will improve with experience. Newcomers wishing to try their hand at timekeeping for the first time at a meeting will be welcomed, and in general will work with more experienced colleagues who are able to assist and advise.

Every year the track and field season gets more and more crowded with meetings at all levels and the demand for officials becomes greater and greater, so your assistance as an official is badly needed if meetings are to be adequately covered.

To this end, the following pages attempt to answer some of the most common questions asked by those interested in timekeeping, and just starting out.

References throughout this text are made to the UK: Athletics publication Rules for Competition.

Q. I am interested in timekeeping. Who should I contact to obtain more information?

- A. Most clubs have an Officials Secretary who will arrange for you to contact the club's most experienced timekeeper. He/she will be more than happy to show you what to do and arrange for you to gain experience working in a timekeeping team.

Q. What do I need?

A.1) Obviously the first thing you should have is a digital timer. Whilst many quartz wrist watches have a stopwatch function, often with two or more memory functions and recall, the button operation is often very imprecise, and therefore not recommended. The ideal timer will have the capacity to take an store 100 times. Such timers can be obtained through the following websites:

www.neuff.co.uk

www.hssports.co.uk

www.habdirect.co.uk

- 2) A good wet suit (top with hood and trousers). There is nothing worse than working all afternoon in the rain, getting wetter and wetter: and one's proficiency drops the colder and wetter one gets.
- 3) An A4 or A5 clipboard (with transparent plastic bag, large enough to contain the clipboard and allow you to write in case it rains), and a soft lead pencil or two. A smarter alternative to a plastic bag is a weather writer obtainable from the first of the three websites listed above.
- 4) The UKA Rules for Competition is an important acquisition, as it contains all the rules pertaining to track events, and timekeeping in particular but at this stage it is not essential.

Q. Right, I now have a digital timer (stopwatch). How do I operate it?

Multi-memory timers are available in a variety of combinations, and are priced accordingly. Two or three rows of display to give split, lap times and running watch time, with 8, 10, 12, 30, 100 or even 300 memory capacity. Some recall times only when the timer is stopped, others have the facility to recall recorded times whilst the timer is still running. All have their particular uses and the Seiko 100 Lap/Split Memory timers are very popular with top graded timekeepers. The basic operations are the same. Press the start button to start the timer, press the lap/split button to record the required number of times (a counter display shows how many times you have taken). Press the stop button for the last time and stop. A separate button is pressed to recall the times in sequence. When all the times are noted, press the lap/split button to clear.

With some timers the recorded times are retained in the memory and can be recalled as often as required until such time as the timer is started again.

It is important that you get to know all the operations of your timer and their sequences, so that you can work it instinctively.

Q. OK. I have a timer and recommended equipment, so what happens next?

A. You should arrive at a meeting at least half an hour before the first track event starts and report to the meeting secretary or representative from the promoting club. You will then be advised as to who is the Chief Timekeeper and you should report to him/her. You will be welcomed and most probably asked what grade or experience you have. Don't let this worry you, as the Chief Timekeeper must know this in order to organise the team effectively. If you are inexperienced, you should tell him/her, and you will most probably be paired with a more experienced colleague, who will be only too happy to help and advise during the meeting. You will also be asked if you are confident in taking two times. If not, do not be afraid to say so, we all had to go through the same situation when we first started. The Chief Timekeeper will then ask you to time one or two finish placings, as the case may be. You do not time a particular athlete or lane. You may, for example, be asked to time fourth place in races up to and including 400m (sprints) and 4 & 10 in races over 400m. This means that you are required to time the competitor who crosses the line in 4th place (in sprints) and those in 4th and 10th in the longer races. UKA recommend that individual timekeepers should not be required to take more than one time in sprint races. Having stopped your timer at the appropriate moment, you then wait until your colleague (if you are working with one) or the Chief Timekeeper asks you for the time recorded on your timer.

All hand held times (as opposed to photo-finish) are returned in 1/10th sec. Your timer will show 1/100ths sec, so the time has to be adjusted in accordance with UKA Rule 119 (7) which states: *-Timings in 1/100th sec not ending in zero shall be rounded up to the next longer 1/10th sec.* e.g. 13.20 shall be returned as 13.2, but 13.21 shall be returned as 13.3.

You should not, in the early stages, be asked to do additional duties such as calling lap times, taking lap splits etc. but it is in your own interest in learning the duties of a timekeeper, to watch closely what your colleagues are doing besides just taking times.

Q. So I have reported in, been allocated my duties and know how to return my times; when do I go to work?

A. The competitors having been lined up at the start of a race, the control of the start is then passed to the Starter. He is the official usually wearing a red top and cap. When he is satisfied that all is ready for a race to start he will blow a whistle to check that the officials in charge of the finish are ready. The Chief Timekeeper will warn the Timekeepers that the race is about to start; check with the Track Referee that he is ready, and signal the Starter (usually by holding up their clipboard) once he/she is satisfied that the team are settled.

For sprint races (up to and including 400m) the Starter will call the competitors forward to the start line by the command "**On your marks**". When all the competitors are still he will say "**Set**", raise his gun and when all the competitors are motionless, fire. For races in excess of 400m, athletes adopt a "standing start". He will say: "**On your marks**" and when all competitors are steady on the line he will raise his gun and fire. Unless a loudspeaker system is being used by the starter, commands given at distant start positions, for example for 100m, 200m and 1500m races, may not be audible from the timekeeping stand, so it is vital always to watch what the starter is doing.

You start your watch as soon as you see the "flash", or "smoke" from the gun, **NOT ON THE SOUND !** Look at your timer to check that it has started.

Watch the athletes closely as they approach the finish line in order to ascertain the location of the finisher you are timing. When the athletes are approximately 6-10m away from the finish line switch your eyes to look across the finish line and stop your timer at the moment you see any part of the torso of the athlete you are timing reach the finish line. The torso is that part of the body which is not the head, neck, arms, legs, hands or feet.

If for any reason your timer has not started, you must let the Chief Timekeeper know immediately, in order that he can arrange for another timekeeper to cover that placing. Sing out nice and loud "Not running on". It has happened to all of us at one time or another, so don't be afraid to call out. There is nothing worse for a Chief Timekeeper to find that he is missing a time, especially if he could have covered the position had he been notified in time.

- 1 *UKA Rule 119 (2) The time of an athlete shall be taken from the flash from the starters pistol or other device to the moment when the body of that competitor (i.e. the torso, as distinguished from the head, neck, hands, arms, feet or legs) reaches the vertical plane of the edge of the finish line nearer to the start. (Rule 113)*

Q. I have officiated at a couple of meetings now, but my times are usually 1/10-2/10th sec quicker than those returned by my colleague, timing the same place. What am I doing wrong? All I hear is comments about "reaction time". What is "reaction time"?

- A. Ah! now you have come to the very essence of accurate timekeeping. Nothing to do with nuclear fusion, rather to do with mental co-ordination.

You will have noted that in my previous answer, I stated "You start your watch as soon as you see the "flash" or "smoke" from the gun" and "stop at the moment you see the athlete's torso reach the finish line".

The time it takes for your eye to register the instant appearance of the "flash" or "smoke" and send a signal your brain to instruct your finger to press the start button in order to make contact with the switch to start your timer, is known as the "reaction time". (This time varies from person to person but is typically 2/10th to 3/10th of a second).

At the start, it is impossible to prejudge EXACTLY when the gun will fire, and for most timekeepers, their reaction time to the Starter's signal is relatively consistent.

However, at the finish, the timekeeper is presented with a different scenario. Not only do they have to stop the timer at the point the torso crosses the line, but attempt to achieve this whilst identifying a particular athlete's torso. In many (mainly sprint) races, athletes cross the line within one or two tenths of a second of each other, adding to the challenge.

The timekeeper can see the athlete approaching the finish line, and the temptation is to anticipate the athlete's arrival and stop the watch precisely as the athlete reaches the line. This will give the athlete a time which is short by the time it took for the timekeeper to react to the gun at the start. It is vital not to react and stop the watch until the athlete has been seen to reach the finish line. A perfect time is one in which the reaction time to the gun is the same as the reaction time to seeing the athlete reach the finish line.

If, in a one athlete race you were able to view the finish through a narrow slot in a large piece of cardboard held in front of your face, and you "started to stop" your timer the instant that the athlete passed across your narrow field of vision, then your reaction time would be very close to that at the start. The instant of seeing the "flash" or smoke at the start is similar to the instant the athlete's torso crossed the finish line and the reaction time between the instants and the starting/stopping of the timer should be the same.

Of course, in practice this is not possible. So one spends years in perfecting the technique of blotting out all other competitors apart from your own, resisting the temptation to "start to stop" your timer until the instant your competitor crosses the finish line. As with most things practice makes perfect or at least to within a few 1/100ths of a second.

In some instances it is helpful to know what your reaction time is, and a way to do this is to mask off the last three zeros of your timer with tape so that only the ten second digit is visible. Start the timer and run it for a few seconds and stop it. This avoids any anticipation. Start the timer and stop it the instant that the zero changes to one. Remove the tape and the display should be 10.?? The ?? is your reaction time in 1/100ths of a second. Surprise! Surprise!! Of course it doesn't matter whether your reaction times are fast or slow, so long as they are the same at both start and finish. Once again, it is CONSISTENCY of the reaction which is important.

There are of course several other things that can affect your accuracy, poor starting signals, sudden distractions at either the start, finish or both, loss of concentration during a long meeting, being too hot, too cold or even having to run back from calling lap times to athletes during, say a 1500m race. So don't give up, you will find that your times will improve with practice. Relaxed concentration is the key.

SECONDARY DUTIES:

The primary duty of a timekeeper is to record the time it takes for an athlete to complete a race. However, as you will quickly discover, the Chief Timekeeper will allocate other (secondary) duties to timekeepers. You will certainly not be expected to learn all of these additional duties within the first year or so of timekeeping, but the following may help you understand the five main duties carried out at most club or league meetings.

Despite the advances made in recent years regarding photofinish systems, they are not infallible, and can fail. As you will soon discover on reading the rules, hand timing is a perfectly acceptable technique for registering a record FOR RACES EXCEEDING 400 METRES. Secondary duties form part of the data supporting a claim for a National or indeed World record. Treat them with respect.

CALLING INTERMEDIATE TIMES:

This will probably be the first secondary duty you will be asked to do. As with all duties, expect a more senior timekeeper to explain what is required, and work with you during the meeting. Remember the golden rule: IF IN DOUBT ASK.

Calling involves literally telling the competitors in a race the actual time the race has been running for. In an 800m race for example, this is carried out at the finish line as competitors complete one lap (400 metres). For a 1500m race, a timekeeper usually calls the time at the start line for 2 laps.

This gives the athletes a verbal time at the 400 and 800m point in a race. Another timekeeper will then give the time at the "bell" lap (finish line) i.e. with one lap to go. For obvious reasons a clear voice is required, and life can be made difficult when an enthusiastic crowd of spectators tries to drown your voice.

RECORDING LAP SPLITS & LEADER:

Mainly for record purposes, it is important to record the number of the leading athlete in races exceeding 400 metres in length and relevant split / lap times. For example, in an 800m race, the number and time of the leader at 400m (one lap) would be recorded TO 1/10th OF A SECOND. In a 1500m (3 and 3/4 laps of the track) the time and number of the leader would be recorded after 300m (as the leader crosses the finish); 700m; 1100m and the finish. For races of 3000m and above, the individual kilometre split times are also required A sample of a typical lap recording sheet is included with this document.

LAP CHART:

Typically for races such as 3000m; 3000m Steeplechase; 5000m and 10,000m the number of competitors and their "spread" of ability inevitably leads to lapping i.e. where one or a number of runners overtake other competitors and therefore finish more than one lap in front of others. For obvious reasons it is vital to keep track of each athlete to ensure each runner completes the exact distance, and receives the correct finishing time. Lap charts are a permanent record of the "running order" during a race, and are produced independently by track judges and timekeepers.

RELAY "SPLITS":

Using the 4 x 400metres relay as the most common example, relay "splits" are a very rough indication of the time each competitor records in running their particular "leg" of a relay. To maintain consistency, the split time is taken as the RELAY BATON crosses the finish line NOT the point at which the baton is actually handed between team runners. Remember that the **final** time is identical to individual races, i.e. as the TORSO crosses the line.

LAP TIMES TO ANNOUNCER:

Usually adopted at major fixtures, but can equally apply to meetings where track facilities include a good P.A. the duty is fairly self explanatory. However, it should be noted that the Chief Timekeeper is responsible for supplying lap / split times to the Announcer (see Code of Practice). This also applies to lap calling, although in some instances at meeting with a very small team of timekeepers, the Chief may authorise a "non timekeeper" to assist by calling lap times at, say the start of the 1500m. This is perfectly acceptable providing **ALL** competitors in the race receive equal favour.

Q. I've now officiated at quite a few meetings, my timing has improved and I am enjoying timekeeping to the extent that I would like to become graded. How do I achieve this?

UK Athletics has a system for grading officials and there are two possible entry levels - Level 1 Assistant official for those who wish to assist in officiating across the range of officiating activities, and Level 2(Club), which is discipline specific. Level 2(Club) enables beginner officials to enter the system if they are aware of the discipline, eg timekeeping, in which they wish to officiate.

To achieve Level 2(Club), officials must:

1. Attend a generic Introduction to Officiating Workshop delivered by an approved tutor.
2. Attend a discipline specific workshop delivered by an approved tutor.
3. Complete a logbook.
4. Show evidence of officiating at a minimum of 4 meetings.
5. Work with an appropriate mentor.
6. Submit the logbook for assessment by an approved assessor and meet the assessment criteria.

Please note that it is not necessary to be a member of a club to become an official.

Higher levels of officiating for timekeepers are:

Level 2(County)

Level 2(Regional)

Level 3, which is the level that must be achieved from those who wish to officiate at national meetings.

Q. As a graded official am I expected to attend every meeting I am invited to ?
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A. No, of course not. As a volunteer you give of your free time as you can.

If however you decide that you want to progress up through the grades, then upgrading will depend on experience and satisfactory reports. It therefore follows that the more meetings you attend, the more experience you acquire, the better your chances of being considered for upgrading.

The county championships each year are used by the senior officials to assess the progress of junior grade officials and you should make every effort to be available. As well as your technical ability as a timekeeper, attention will also be paid to your attitude as a whole as you are part of a team.

Many meetings these days are dependent on sponsors for financial support and the presence of a smartly turned out team of officials, going about their duties in a quietly efficient manner, can only enhance the presentation of the meeting as a whole, and hopefully attract further financial support.

Finally, a word of warning . Do not attempt to take more times than you are asked to. Whilst it may be possible to take several times when runners are well spaced apart, close finishes will mean that times are "snatched" and therefore unreliable.

TIMEKEEPERS' CODE OF PRACTICE

- F1.** Timekeepers should report to the Meeting Secretary and the Chief Timekeeper at least 30 minutes before the first Track event.
Chief Timekeepers should report to the Meeting Manager/Secretary before leaving the Meeting to ensure that all necessary paper work has been completed.
- F2.** Individual Timekeepers should not be required to take more than one time in sprint races. Good practice requires that Timekeepers should not take times other than those requested by the Chief Timekeeper.
- F3.** In distance races on the track with large fields, timers with multiple-memory functions or print-out facilities (but not programmable computers) should be used, where possible, to ensure that all runners are timed to 1/10th sec. Otherwise, or in addition, a Running Watch should be used.
- F4.** For deciding fastest losers, hand times to 1/100th sec. must not be used.
- F5. Calling of intermediate times.** Provided that there are sufficient timekeepers available, intermediate times in races of more than one lap should be called at the Start Line and at the Bell. In the case of the Steeplechase, because of the varying distance of the lap on different tracks, calling should take place at the Finish Line. Variations may be made at the Chief Timekeeper's discretion, but normally calling will not take place at intervals of less than one lap except for the Bell time. In Mile races, intermediate times should be called at the 1/4 miles. On indoor tracks of 200m., times should be called every 400m. plus Bell time, unless otherwise required. (N.B. Lap times should be recorded every 200m. in accordance with UKA Rule 119 (3) and IAAF Rule 160 (14).
Timekeepers going out on duty should be aware of safety and courtesy to athletes, officials and spectators.

- F6.** To enable Timekeepers to comply with UKA Rule 119 (3) and IAAF Rule 160 (14), a clearly visible marker should be placed on or near the inner edge of the track to indicate the distances of 1K and 2K in the 3000m Steeplechase. Similar marks should be placed at any other distance required e.g. 1500m in Mile, 3K in 2 Miles etc.
- F7.** The Chief Timekeeper is responsible for any intermediate times given over the Public Address System. He can provide this service :
- (a) where there is an automatic device with a time display on the track, by appointing the operators of this device to be official timekeepers for giving intermediate times, provided that he is satisfied that such times are sufficiently accurate.
 - (b) by a telephone line or radio link to the Announcer.
 - (c) where the Announcer's box is situated close enough to the Finish Line, by stationing a Timekeeper adjacent to or, with the agreement of the Announcer, in that box. If none of these are possible, then no intermediate times should be announced.
- F8. Relays.** Split times for Relay events should not be taken if the individual legs are less than one complete lap. The split times should be taken as the baton crosses the centre of the take-over box.
In the case of the 4x400m., competitors may be required to run in lanes for three bends; the first take-over is therefore staggered and in each lane the centre of the take-over box should be marked on the track by a white line with a green mark super-imposed; Timekeepers recording times for teams in lanes 2-8 therefore should take up positions on the outside of the track opposite these marks for the first take-over. For lane 1 and all subsequent take-overs, the centre of the take-over box is the Finish Line, and times should be taken from the stand. It is recommended that Timekeepers allocated to each team for split times should revert to their normal finishing position at the finish.

- F9.** Where Photo-Finish is in operation, the Chief Timekeeper should ensure that the hand times are communicated to the Chief of Photo-Finish as soon as possible after the completion of the race.
- F10.** In Cross-country and/or Road races with large numbers of competitors, there may come a time when the competitors are too closely packed for times to be given for every position. When this situation arises, Timekeepers should thereafter identify a runner's number and record this with a time as frequently as possible. In practice this can be done every 5 seconds or less; these times and numbers can then be matched with the Judges' positions and every runner can be accredited with a time within the above limits. Wherever possible, computerised records of results should bear the official hand times.