

Survey of Starting Commands in Canoe Sprint

ICF decided to have a new starting command "Ready-Set-Go" from the beginning of 2011. The feedback was collected by manual based forms in ICF World Cup and European championships in 2011 and by web survey during May 2011 – October 2012.

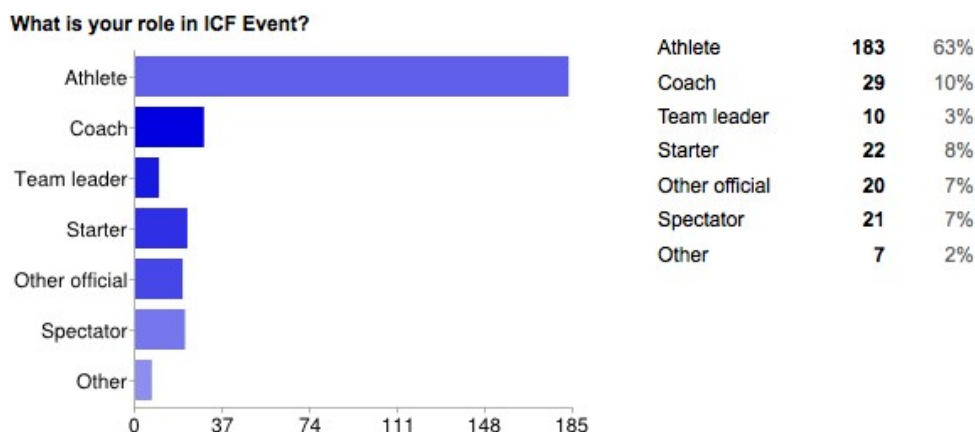
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1. Feedback results

The feedback was analyzed by pivot tables. We got 150 feedbacks in 2011 and 142 in 2012. The feedback contained a lot of unstructured comments and tips for the future. A few respondents came back later with second opinions. No feedback was filtered out of this survey.

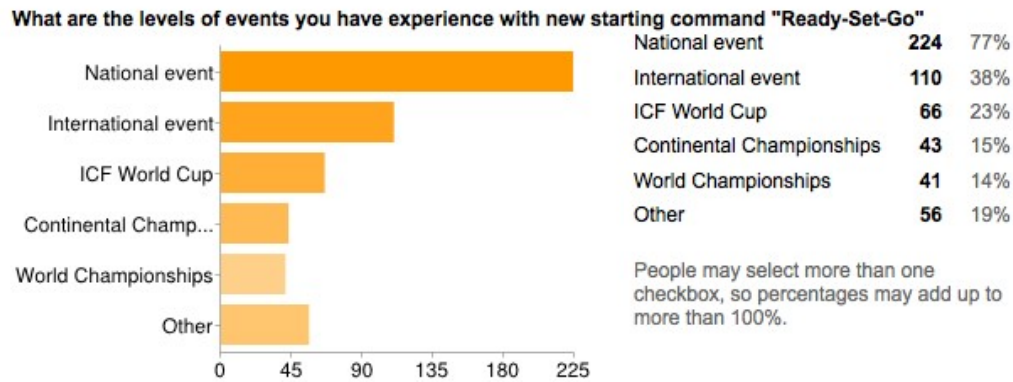
1.1 Source of feedback – the roles



Picture 1. Who gave feedback – the roles.

Every role has a different view to starts. The opinion of athletes is the most relevant but there are many other important stakeholders in the competition event who will take care of the consequences of possible false starts. We asked and got feedback enough to make this analysis.

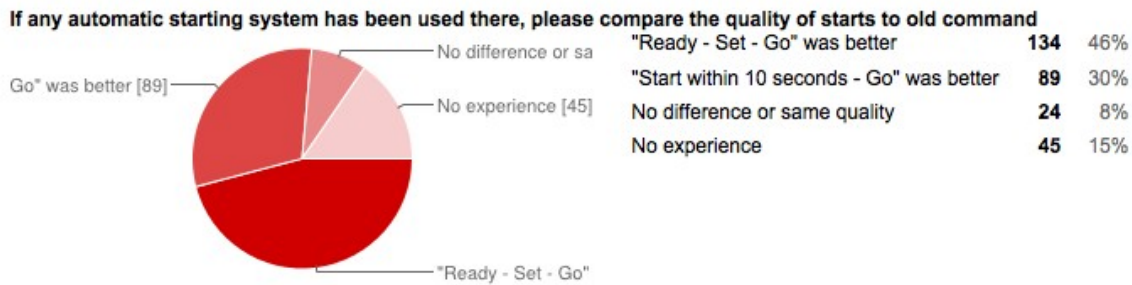
1.2 Level of experience



Picture 2. What level of experience the person had.

The respondents had many levels of experience from national to international event. There were 224 respondents of 292 who had national level experience. 174 out of 292 crossed their experience in remaining 5 levels. If they crossed checkbox to any of the last 5 levels, the feedback was considered to be international. So it was possible that the same feedback was considered to be national and international feedback.

1.3 Better command with automatic starting system



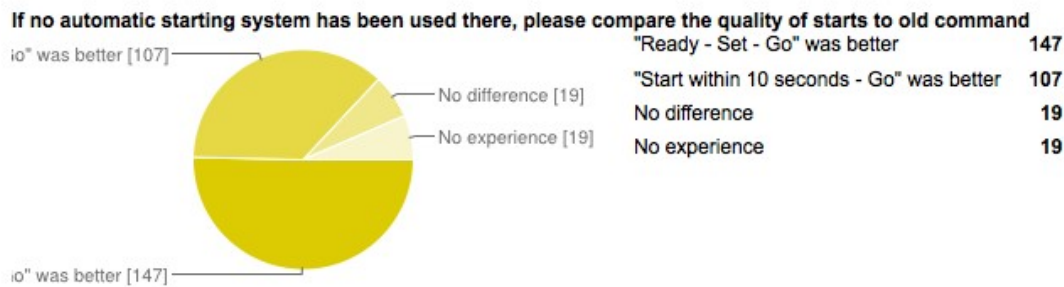
Picture 3. The better starting command when there is an automatic starting command.

This question was the most relevant for ICF Canoe Sprint Committee. The picture 3 shows all the answers but the table 1 is filtered only for international level feedbacks of 2012.

Table 1: International experience of better starting command with system in 2012

Role	No difference	No experience	Ready - Set - Go	Start within 10 sec	Total Result
Athlete	10	9	49	26	94
Coach	1	1	7	5	14
Team leader			2	1	3
Starter		2	3	1	6
Other official			7	2	9
Spectator	1	1	6	6	14
Other		2			2
Total Result	12	15	74	41	142
	8%	11%	52%	29%	100%

1.4 Better command without automatic starting system



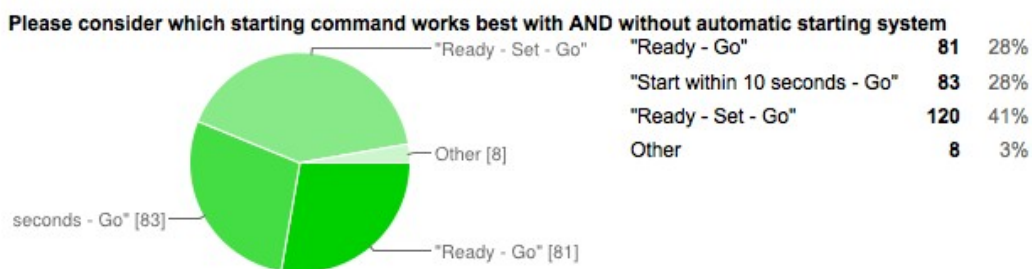
Picture 4. The better starting command when there is an automatic starting command.

ICF events have always automatic starting system involved in, but most of other events don't. The picture 4 contains all the answers, but table 2 is filtered to just those feedbacks where level "National" was marked.

Table 2: National experience of better starting command without automatic starting system

Year	No difference	No experience	Ready - Set - Go	Start within 10 sec	Total Result
2011	7	7	61	37	112
2012	9	5	61	37	112
Total	16	12	122	74	224
	7%	5%	54%	33%	100%

1.5 The best starting command in general



Picture 5. The best starting command in general (for canoe sprint).

Competitors are having starts with automatic starting system and without. Many competitors do both canoe sprint and marathon competitions. Some national federations are still using "Ready - Go", which is also the valid command in canoe marathon. Canoe sprint discipline gave up "Ready - Go" long time ago because of serious problems - followed by command "Attention please - Go" which also failed in ICF events.

Table 3: The best starting command in general with AND without automatic starting system.

Year	Other	Ready - Go	Ready - Set - Go	Start within 10 sec	Total Result
2011	7	43	57	43	150
2012	1	38	63	40	142
Total	8	81	120	83	292
	3%	28%	41%	28%	100%

2. Discussion

The importance of proper starting command is more important now that 200m races belongs to the Olympic program. The starts with automatic starting systems are relevant for ICF events. If you look at the data of picture 3 and table 1, the message is quite clear. If we would filter the answers "No experience" out, the very clear majority consider that the command "Ready – Set – Go" is better command.

The interesting point is that 8% of feedbacks say that there is no difference between old and new command. If you compare figures of the picture 3 from years 2011-2012 to opinions of table 1 from 2012 only, you may see how the effect of "change resistance" is reducing in natural way too.

Table 1 shows how the roles of "Coach" and "Spectator" are the roles which are quite tied to learned traditions. One weakness of this survey was that we had no statistics from the past as to how many false or low-quality starts we had before. The overall feeling is that we have now managed to relax competitors better just before the moment of shot in order to avoid "useless" false starts.

The meaning of the most intensive starts of 200m has raised because of the status of Olympic distance. The good or bad start has huge impact to result of 200m. The number of 200m events will raise also at the lower-level international and national regattas.

The message of picture 4 and table 2 is very interesting. Picture 4 covers all the feedbacks but table 2 just feedback where also experience level "National" was crossed. Majority considers that new command is better without any automatic starting system - but there is not relevant progress of opinions between 2011 and 2012. There are exactly 112 feedbacks from the both years. This result might mean that there is a status quo situation with starting methods at the national level. On the other hand, some of the national federations do not have at all the national canoe sprint racing rules. When ICF will change the rules, the all the national rules have changed immediately.

Picture 5 and table 3 are important because we should use the same commands at the national and international events to educate competitors for fair and equal races. The interesting detail is that when we replaced the old command by "Ready – Set – Go", we opened the box of pandora and received 7 other proposals for the best general starting command - other than "Ready-Go", "Start within 10 seconds-Go" or "Ready-Set-Go". But later in 2012, only one new innovation was sent.

The surprise was how popular the "Ready-Go" still is. One explanation is that marathon events do use this command with success. The difference between a start of canoe sprint and canoe marathon is relevant. The aligning process and importance of better start are different even between 5000m and marathon races. We think that each kind of competition earns own starting command, because the procedure of start is different too. This is how we may maximize the relaxation of competitors, offer more fair starts and avoid most of false starts.

ICF events have many starters who are normally working and commanding in slightly different ways. The competitors who participate more than one boat class, will have the experience offered by two or three different starters. The different pace and voice pressure of start command words might cause additional false starts.

Some respondents gave constructive textual comments and tips. Some of them and especially starters have not understood the word "Ready" should be a soft, preparation command offering athletes mental focus to real action command "Set". Some starters have not followed the rule exactly with "Go" either. If

starter is watching carefully when all the athletes have set paddles to catch position, then the important time variance between "Set" and "Go" will always happen. Delay would never be exactly the same also because of different wind and wave conditions. If command "Go" or shot signal comes too early related to athletes and conditions, athletes will lose confidence in all the starters of that event.

We should still develop the procedure BEFORE starting command to get relaxed and confident competitors to start position. They should be better awareness which race is starting, how much time they still have for warm-up, when they should approach a start line together with other boats. No boat should be late, the timing of previous single boat prize-giving ceremonies should be planned better in the schedule and changing weather conditions should be informed better.

Any difficult weather or technical conditions do not harm a simple start command as much as before. Our racing rules are defining the meaning of command words. Starters should pay more attention to the meaning and use of each word related to existing conditions and skills of athletes.

The anticipation is the existing problem with any command. A sudden shot or signal would not be a proper solution because a "good luck" factor would have too significant a role in Olympic distances. For marathon and long distances a sudden start works because there

- are so many boats for aligners
- are conditions where most of competitors won't ever have a perfect start because of too narrow area and disturbed catch position of first stroke
- is very small portion of failures compared to total number of boats
- is smaller meaning of start stroke for a whole race

The moment of start is a consequence of start procedure. The other key persons are a chief official who plans the schedule and coaches who offer most of starts for their athletes in training sessions. The coaches working at the international events would be the most potential messengers for our starting guidelines to reach national level and next generation of competitors.

3. Conclusion

The simple English command "Ready - Set - Go" has been shown to be more acceptable than earlier commands. The pronunciation is easier for starters from all countries.

The athlete's "anticipation" is the existing problem with any command. Sudden shot or signals are not a good solution because of the "good luck factor" as they relate to Olympic race distances (200, 500 & 1000 meter). While a sudden shot or signal works for Marathon and long distance (5000 meter) races because of the profound differences in these races; based on our experience it does not work in Olympic distances.

An important factor in starting is actually the procedure before the start. Before the actual start or lead up to the actual final "Go" is what is so crucial to a good and fair start. This procedure or script should be created in detail so that all starters can achieve the same success. The aligners and umpires can also be involved in this pre race routine. The chief official should be communicating with coaches at team leaders meetings as well as more definition and detail can be added to the rules.

Could we use warnings for competitors who do not follow a common start

procedure like others? If we can create an efficient and effective starting procedure that will lead up to and include a good and fair start we believe this will help calm athletes before their start and help to eliminate their "anticipation". We could adjust the competition rules in many other ways. We need more co-operation with stakeholders to develop starts canoe sprint.

The Canoe Sprint Committee should continue to work on this evolution of the start procedure.