

RACE WALKING
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What is race walking?

Race walking is a USATF long-distance endurance track and field event in which the athletes must walk and not run. Although it may look easy, race walking, an Olympic sport since 1904, is in reality very difficult. Form and technique are utmost in this sport. Olympic distances are 20K (12.5 miles) for women and 20K and 50K (31 miles) for men. Elite walkers can complete a 20K in under 1 hr. 30 mins. and a 50K in 3 hrs. 35 mins.

To acquire fluidity in form and technique, athletes must have good foot roll, strong shin muscles, and flexible hips. Compared to other track events, stride length is reduced significantly. To achieve competitive speeds, race walkers must attain cadence rates of 200-220 steps per minute. As a result, race walking gives an athlete the same cardio benefits as running without the impact. Because the feet are only a couple of inches off the ground, there is no pounding like in running.

Two rules differentiate race walking from running and are enforced by judges during competitions:

1. One foot must appear to be in contact with the ground at all times so that no visible (to the human eye) loss of contact occurs. (Lifting ~)
2. The advancing leg must be straightened from the moment of first heel contact with the ground until the body passes over it. (Bent knee >)

During a competition, at least three judges watch the walkers and judge their form with the naked eye to determine whether they are to be disqualified. When a race walker receives three warning cards from three different judges, that racer is disqualified.

For two videos, click these links:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=U5C-d3qpjoY> Notice at the end of the video, a judge runs out with a yellow paddle to warn a racer.

http://running.competitor.com/2012/01/video/what-is-race-walking_46361 Interviews with John Nunn and Tim Seaman at the 2012 50K Olympic trials.

The best shoes for race walking have a lower heel and a flexible sole that is uniform in thickness from toe to heel, like performance training shoes or racing flats. Running shoes with chunky heels are not good, because it is difficult to toe up and roll the foot to achieve the cadence needed.

Why should an athlete consider race walking?

When compared to other track and field sports with large numbers of participants, a youth athlete has a better chance to excel and gain confidence in races, because there are fewer youth race walkers than sprinters. Due to a shortage of youth race walkers in the US, there are currently more colleges that need race walkers for their track and field teams than there are high school walkers.

According to the USATF site, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) has been conducting the race walk as a scored event at its National Track & Field Championships for over 40 years. Since 1980 nearly 75% of all race walkers on the USA Olympic Team have graduated from NAIA member colleges and universities.

Check these links for more info: <http://www.naia.org/> for colleges and <http://www.hsrw.net/>, a site to recognize high school race walkers.

For other race walking information, also check these sites:

www.usatf.com

www.racewalk.com

www.eracewalk.com