

## Racewalking - Overview

**Racewalking** ideally is an important segment of athletics based on the foot race where athletes need to walk through the tracks with constantly maintaining the foot to ground contact. The sport was first originated in England. Dating back to 18<sup>th</sup> century the long distance power walking races were known as **pedestrianism** usually slightly lower paced than running and higher paced than walking.



Racewalking is very competitive and challenging sport. It is a race between two or more people in a championship and a battle against the time taken to finish the race compared to the other athletes. This sport gained good popularity and players from all over the world were keen on participating in the race and eventually in 19<sup>th</sup> century Racewalking was introduced to Olympics in men's category.

### Racewalking Distances

The races are organized as road events or on running tracks and contested in distances ranging from 1000 meters to 50000 meters. According to International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF), a standard distance of 20 km racewalk was set both for men and women category and a stand-alone distance of 50 km racewalk for men's category. A 10 km racewalk is held for junior athletes in both men and women categories.



In this document you can learn about the rules of Racewalking, different championships & tournaments held in the world, and the significant players successful in this sport.

Racewalking is very similar to other athletic sports like running or jogging and does not need any expensive equipment. As this sport requires lot of foot work which elevates the heartbeat of the athlete. To prevent the walkers from any pain and discomfort in their muscles and joints, the basic Racewalking gear is essential.

## Shoes

Racewalking is completely based on heel-to-toe motion with the walking technique of never losing foot contact with the ground which makes the Racewalking challenge more difficult for the athlete. The proper walking footwear with low heel enables easy rocking motion and eases the athlete to make their heel contact with the ground faster.

## Clothes

Both men and women need to put on comfortable clothing with sweat wicking ability. Men are on their colored jerseys and women in colored tank tops and shorts resembling their nation in the championship. Apart from body clothing the walkers should have sweat wicking socks unlike cotton socks which absorb sweat that causes discomfort to the athlete's feet.

## Racewalking - Participating Countries

Racewalking sport event is usually held on the open-air roads and on running tracks. These walking races have been one of the favorite sports of Britain and America for betting on the athletes. Nearly 70 countries worldwide are participating in the Racewalking championships. There are many countries throughout the world that have given out successful athletes and are member of IAAF, the international regulating body of Athletics. IAAF helps in organizing Racewalking tournaments throughout the world. Some of the countries that produced Racewalking athletes are listed here.

Racewalking is very popular in Soviet Union but many Asian countries also participate in various international Racewalking championships. The best Asian players come from China, Japan, Korea, Kazakhstan, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand and India.



The non-Asian countries that participate in racewalking are – Australia, Russia, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Germany, United Kingdom, United States of America, Sweden, Latvia, Switzerland, Hungary, Spain, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Norway, Greece, Canada, France, Portugal, Finland, Romania, Columbia, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Guatemala, Bolivia, New Zealand, Panama, Costa Rica, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritius, Ethiopia, Egypt, South Africa, and Ireland.

## Racewalking - Playing Environment

## Road Courses

Walking races are usually held on road courses where the race begins from a stadium and finishes at the stadium. Racewalking races are conducted ideally in summer as a road event and typically outdoors. Usually happens in multiple laps of 2 to 2.5km road circuits. Depending upon the path and distance of the road course up to nine walk judges are spaced to check the walking technique of the athletes. As per the rule, the athletes have to maintain a foot contact with the ground and always remain straight. Each walk judge checks the samples of competitors every lap or circuit.



## Running Tracks

Racewalking is also been conducted on running tracks although walkers cannot essentially race in lanes. Yet the competitions at times are held on the tracks because of its consistent surface. The tracks are rubber coated to make the surface uniform and unbroken which is ideal for a championship. Each lane on the track is around 122cm wide and the length of the track ranges from 200m to 400m long. Based on the length of the track up to six walk judges are spaced around the track.

## Racewalking - Common Terms

Here is a list of some of the common terms frequently used in Racewalking –

**On your Marks** – It is a phrase used to start the race and a warning sign for the athletes to be prepared for the race.

**Step** – is a motion of the feet moving from front to back to make a foot contact with the ground followed by the other foot.

**Stride** – A consequent event of taking steps and progressing forward during the race by the walker.

**Stride Rate** – The number of strides taken per minute.

**Stride Length** – The distance between the one of the foot having contact with the ground to other foot retreating behind during progression of the walker's steps.

**Gait** – is referred to as the style or technique of walking during the competition.

**Gait Cycle** – is stated as the time taken to the heel strike of one leg until the heel strike of the same leg making a cyclical movement.

**Stance Phase** – The phase during which the athlete takes his whole body weight on one leg and specifically on to the heel till the moment of lifting the foot once the toe is off.

**Swing Phase** – The phase when the athlete's toe is off the ground and the leg is not taking on any body weight till the athlete makes contact with the ground.

**Flight Phase** – At any instant of time if the athlete's both feet are not in contact with the ground and usually cannot be detected by the human eye and will last up to a millisecond when one foot is advancing and the other one retreating.

**Heel-to-Toe** – is a technique implied by the walkers during Racewalking competitions to always maintain contact with the ground without bending the knee.

**Loss of Contact** – Refers to one of the important rules of Racewalking, the walker's feet should never lose contact with the ground as visible to the human eye. The heel of one foot should definitely touch the ground before the toe of the other foot leaves the ground.

**Bent Knee** – Is the other important rule of Racewalking. While progression of the athlete's steps forward, the advancing leg making contact with the ground should be straightened from the hip to the foot; until the other foot reaches to the vertical upright position the bending of the knee indicates a violation of this rule.

**Yellow Paddle** – Refers to a caution given to athletes if they are very close to violating any rules during the competition.

**Red Card** – Mentioned by the Chief Judge that the walker is disqualified from the race as three different walk judges have issued silently after noticing the violation of the rules.

**Walk Judge** – An experienced person to check the samples of the walkers of every lap to point out the infractions occurred during the race and indicates it to the chief judge.

**Chief Judge** – Out of the appointed judges of the event, one judge is assigned to be the chief judge to take decisions on the disqualifications of the athlete's during the race.

## How To Racewalk?

The Racewalking tournament typically kicks off by a gun fire, with the athletes in their positions just at the start line. The tournaments are held on 10km, 20 km and 50 km distances.

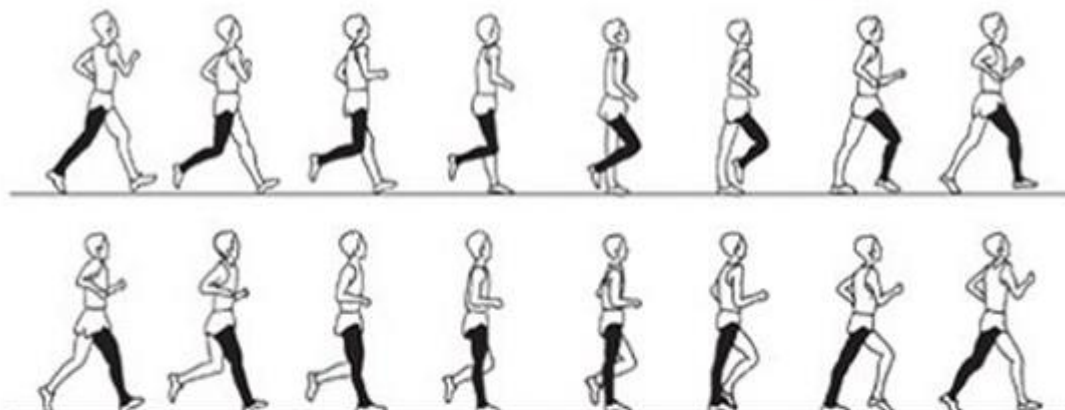
### Getting Ready

The walking races begin when all the players assemble at the start line in a stadium. As the walkers cannot race in lanes so they take standing positions at the start line on the command "On your marks". The starter of the tournament ensures no player to stand on the start line after the command.

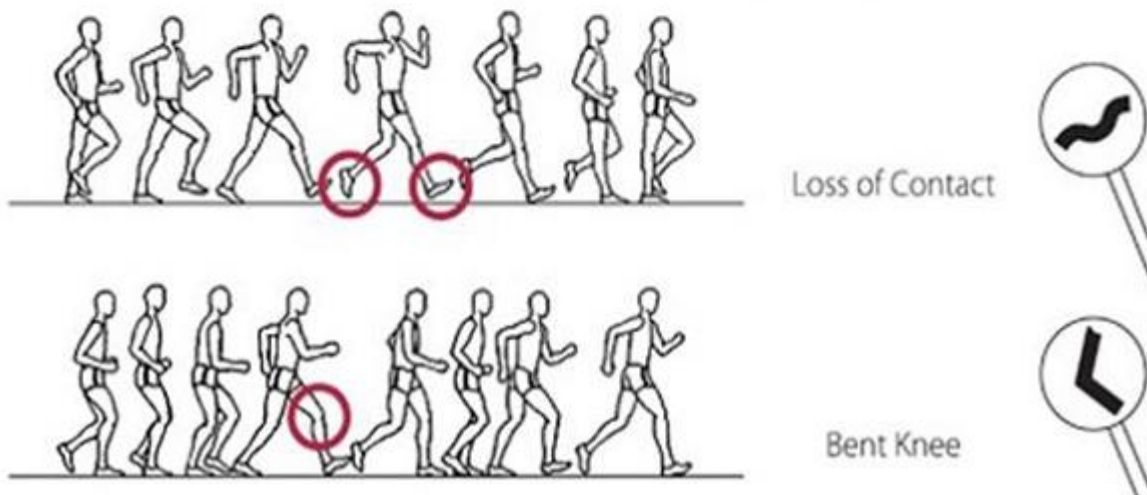
A five minute, three minute and one minute warning signs are given to the athletes before beginning of the race, followed by a gun fire with an indication to all the participants to start the race.

Along with the athletes the judges play a very crucial role in Racewalking competitions. Six to nine judges are assigned for each tournament; along with a chief judge to constantly monitor the athlete's walking technique throughout the tournament all along the road course until the player ends his race at the finish line. At any instance if an athlete gets 3 red cards from 3 different judges, the chief judge disqualifies the athlete from the race.

## Correct Race Walking Technique



## Incorrect Race Walking Posture



## Quick Glimpse of the Game

Racewalking refers to a movement of feet of the walker when the walker progresses forward making constant contact with the ground, and no visible **loss of contact** occurs at any point of time for the judges. Ideally this walking technique is popularly known as “**heel-to-toe**” motion keeping the arm to shoulder motion low to ground.

The next important technique of Racewalking is the advancing of the leg without bending at the knee being visible to the human eye known as the “**lifting or bent knee**” rule. From the instant of losing one foot contact from the ground the other foot shall be straightened until the first foot is back on the ground with vertical upright position.

Throughout the Racewalking challenge, the two rules if violated by the athletes for three times and three different judges notice the violation of techniques, the walker is given red card and is disqualified from the competition.

The athlete who finishes the Racewalking competition without violation of the rules, walks through the specified distance. Unlike other athletic sport events, in Racewalking the walker's needs to touch the finish line before the other competitors as to declare the winner of the tournament.

## Rules of Racewalking

Racewalking is a very tough disciplinary sport being physically monitored by multiple judges, yet the walkers are increasingly participating in the walking road events and competitions. The rules are clearly defined by the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federation) for the participants of this sport as listed below

- **Loss of Contact Rule** – During speed walking the walker's feet should never lose contact with the ground as visible to the human eye. The heel of one foot should definitely touch the ground before the toe of the other foot leaves the ground. There will be a millisecond per stride where both the foot of the athlete lose contact with the ground, but are not in the range of visibility to the human eye and are undetectable.
- **The Bent Knee Rule** – In the course of progressing the athlete's steps forward, the advancing leg making contact with the ground should be straightened from the hip to the foot. Until the other foot reaches to the vertical upright position, the bending of the knee indicates a violation of this rule. At any point of time the knees should be visible to the judges.
- **Yellow Paddle** – The judges can issue a yellow paddle to the walker as a caution when the walker is very close to breaking the above two rules. A walk judge can issue a yellow paddle for the same athlete only twice, once for loss of contact and once for bent knee.
- **Red Card** – Out of the appointed judges of the event, if any one judge has an opinion that the athlete has violated any of the above two rules, at that instant the judge issues a silent red card for that particular walker and will send it to the chief judge. The athlete is unaware of the red card being issued to him. Every single judge can issue a red card to all the walkers but only once in the whole competition.
- **Disqualification of an Athlete** – An athlete can only be disqualified from the walking competition by the chief judge. If the chief judge gets three such individual red cards from three different judges, he calls for that particular athlete's disqualification from the competition. The yellow paddles issued to the walkers are not considered as criteria for



disqualification. If the athlete still continues the race even after disqualification being called out and finishes first, he does not win the race.

## Racewalking - Tournaments

Racewalking tournaments have gained good popularity and has got place in Olympics in 1904. Due to the strict rules and disappointments of disqualifications faced by athletes has demotivated many sports enthusiasts.

The foot race was being conducted all over the world in several championships as listed below –

- IAAF World Racewalking Team Championships
- IAAF Racewalking Challenge
- Commonwealth Games
- Pan-American Games
- Europe Athletic Championships
- Asian Racewalking Championships
- Olympics 20km Men & Women's category
- Olympics 50km Men's category
- Olympics 10km Junior's category

## Racewalking - Champions

There are many hall of fame athletes who have been successful in Racewalking since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the top 10 Racewalking champions based upon the categories are tabled below –

### Men's Category

we have the following champions –

20 km			50 km		
Athlete	Nationality	Year	Athlete	Nationality	Year
Sergey Morozov	Russia	2008	Yohann Diniz	France	2014
Vladimir Kanaykin	Russia	2007	Denis Nizhegrodov	Russia	2008

Jefferson Perez	Ecuador	2003	Matej Toth	Slovakia	2015
Paquillo Fernandez	Spain	2002	Nathan Deakes	Australia	2006
Yūsuke Suzuki	Japan	2015	Sergey Kiryapkin	Russia	2012
Vladimir Stankin	Russia	2004	Robert Korzeniowski	Poland	2003
Bernardo Segura	Mexico	1994	Alex Schwazer	Italy	2007
Alex Schwazer	Italy	2012	Yu Chaohong	China	2005
Zhen Wang	China	2012	Mikhail Rhyzov	Russia	2014
Nathan Deakes	Australia	2005	Zhao Chengliang	China	2005

### Yusuke Suzuki



He is an excellent speed walker from Japan participated in the 20 km event twice at the world championships and in Olympics. He has taken 1:16:36 hours for the 20km walking race creating a new world record. He has been a very active walker since his young age and has won several medals in the world junior championships. In 2007 he started competing in the 20km races is world championships.

## Yohann Diniz



Yohann the present-day world record holder with a record of finishing the 50 km walking challenge in 3:32:33 hours. This French race walker is very popular in 50 km Racewalking category and has won several gold and silver medals in the World championships. He has broken his previous world record and set a new one by walking 1 minute 41 seconds faster in the 2014 Europe Athletics Championships. He also participated in 20 km racewalk and set a new world record of 1:17:02 hours in 2015, which was again broken by Yusuke Suzuki.

## Nathan Deakes



Being one of the most successful race walkers from Australia, Nathan was world record holder and a winner of several walking competitions. He has taken the bronze in the 2004 Olympics and four time gold medallist in 20 km and 50 km categories in the commonwealth games. Nathan was the first person to win gold medals for both the categories consecutively. As he brought Australia several accolades he was crowned as Athlete of the year twice.

## Women's Category

In women's category, we have the following champions –

**20 km**

Athlete	Nationality	Year
Olga Kaniskina	Russia	2009
Elena Lashmanova	Russia	2012
Olimpiada Ivanova	Russia	2001
Anisya Kirdyapkina	Russia	2011
Lu Xiuzhi	China	2015
Shenjie Qieyang	China	2012
Elmira Alembekova	Russia	2012
Tatyana Shemyakina	Russia	2008
Hong Liu	China	2012
Tatiana Sibileva	Russia	2010

### Olga Kaniskina



Olga is a Russian Racewalking coach and a very popular race walker winning medals for Russia since 2004. She won gold medal for Racewalking in the 2008 Beijing Olympics being the fastest walker and broke the Olympic record and won silver medal at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

As a three-time World Champion in 20km Racewalking, she also set a new world record of finishing the race in 1:25:42 hours breaking the old record of Olimpiada Ivanova.

### **Olimpiada Ivanova**



One of the finest Racewalkers from Russia, winning many medals in world championships from the year 2000 to 2007. She won against time beating the rest of the world by finishing the 20 km race in 1:27:48 hours and finished second in the Athens Olympics. She won first gold medal in 2001 Edmonton World Championships.

### **Hong Liu**



Liu is well-known Chinese race walker and a current world record holder who finished the 20 km race in 1:24:38 hours against the Olympic world record of Olimpiada Ivanova and Olga Kaniskina. Starting her career with the junior championships, Liu set an event record in her first race. She won quite a few medals at the world championships, Asian games and the summer Olympics.

## **Racewalking Athletes from India**

Racewalkers from India have made their beginning at the Asian Games and set some important world records. The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has made

good efforts to qualify for a place in 2016 Rio Olympics. Some of the popular athletes are listed below –

### **Gurmeet Singh**



The Indian race walker has been competing in the Asian games. Earlier he has participated in the 2012 Summer Olympics in 20 km Racewalking event finishing it in 1:22:30 hours. Gurmeet also participated in International Grand Prix finishing in 1:22:05 hours at the sixth position.

### **Kushbir Kaur**



She is the first Indian racewalker in the women's category to finish the 20 km race next to Lu Xiuzhi in the Asian Games, winning the silver medal for India. Starting her career with the junior world championship she was noticed only after bagging a bronze medal in 2012 Asian Junior Athletics championship.

Kushbir participated in 2013 world championship recording 1:34:28 hours and broke her own record to clock 1:33:37 hours in the Asian walking Championship, being the third to finish the race. She has qualified for the 2016 Rio Olympics recording decent time to finish the walking challenge.

Apart from the above Indian athletes there are few more who have made their presence felt in the world championships in 20 km and 50 km walking races. They are as follows –

- Sandeep Kumar
- Manish Singh Rawat
- Surender Singh

Racewalking is still emerging as a global sport in India. These established race walkers are setting a positive trend to the next generation to showcase their potential in this athletics sport.

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