



Unpacking the Rules of Shoe Control

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Technology in athletic footwear now adds performance enhancing elements that require regulations to ensure that no unfair advantage is gained. Shoe Control rules and how they are applied in competition is a complex topic.

These rules allow shoes for traction and protection from injury but limit any mechanical advantage so that human performance remains the primary determinant of race outcomes. When and how these rules are applied is not consistent across performance levels and age groups in competition.

World Athletic (WA) Technical Rule 5.2 [Reference 1 below] is the basis for the regulation of Athletic Shoes. This rule is bigger than it looks, including by reference specific WA documents that codify the Shoe Control process: WA Athletic Shoe Regulations [Ref 2] and WA's Shoe Control Guidelines [Ref 3].

USATF Competition Rule 143.3 adopts the WA Shoe Rules and does not "supersede [WA Shoe Rules] but provides general access to that rule." By reference, the WA standards are passed through to form part of USATF Rule 143.3.

Not all competitions require Shoe Control. WA Rule C2.1A - Athletic Shoe Regulations [Ref 2] provides the key to knowing when Shoe Control is essential. Section 4.1 states: "An unapproved shoe may not be worn by Athletes in World Ranking Competitions." IF a race or meet is on the World Athletics Calendar THEN athletes are contending for World Ranking points and Shoe Control must take place.

Additionally, if the event is a U.S. national team qualifying event and/or the athlete is attempting to set a WA or U.S. Open Record, their competition shoes must be listed as permitted for race walking on the WA Shoe Checker [Ref 4] as of the day of the race. At non-WA calendar events, meet management may elect to adhere to WA Shoe Control standards, but it is not required.

Race Walking is unique in that shoes approved for race walking or running on roads are also approved for use on tracks. Therefore, officials and athletes only need to look at the "Road" column on the WA Shoe Checker to check if a shoe is WA approved for race walking on any surface.

To check if a shoe is permitted by WA for race walking — Open the WA [Shoe Checker](#) [Ref 4]. Type in the model name or number to search. If you are not sure, click "Full List" to show all the shoes. This list is sorted by brands in alphabetical order. Scroll to the brand name then look for the shoe name. This may require clicking on each shoe name to bring up a picture for comparison. Clicking on the picture will enlarge it for easier inspection. Focus on the shape of the sole unit since molded parts have a fixed texture, silhouette, and surface treatments.

Footwear for use by Masters Race Walkers is governed by USATF Rule 143.3 (j) [Ref 5], which relies on and incorporates the shoe standards adopted by World Masters Athletics (WMA). This rule allows shoes without spikes to have a maximum thickness of 40mm. Any shoe permitted on the WA Shoe Checker in the "Road" column will meet this limitation. For Masters, other shoes that are not specifically listed on the WA Shoe Checker may also be permitted if they meet the 40mm restriction, and Shoe Control Officers should be prepared to measure shoes by the method described in the WA Athletic Shoe Regulations [Ref 2].

Whether you are serving as the Shoe Control Officer for Open, U20, or Masters events, you should download the WA reference documents listed below to create your own Shoe Control manual.

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The reference numbers in this article and the rules they reference:

[Ref 1] [WA Book of Rules](#) - Book C - C2.1/Technical Rule #5.2-5.6 - Shoes
TR#5.2 Athletes may compete either barefoot or in Athletic Shoes on one or both feet. Athletes must comply with all regulations relating to the wearing of Athletic Shoes approved by the Council.

For Shoe Control, specific information is provided in the [Shoe Control Guidelines](#) which may be downloaded from the [World Athletics website](#). In particular, no sole thickness measurements are expected to be conducted during shoe control. TR# 5.6 See also the [Athletic Shoe Regulations](#) in the "Book of Rules Book C: Competition", published separately on the website.

[Ref 2] [WA Book of Rules](#) - Book C - C2.1A/Athletic Shoe Regulations, Dec 2, 2025

[Ref 3] [WA Technical Information](#) - Athletic Shoes/Shoe Control Guidelines, Jan 1 2026

[Ref 4] [WA Shoe Checker](#) - List of Approved Athletic Shoes/Shoe Checker.

[Ref 5] USATF Competition Rule 143.3(j) - Shoes/Masters Events. For Masters events, shoes shall comply with WMA rules. As of January 2021, shoes with spikes shall have a maximum sole thickness of 30 mm and shoes without spikes shall have a maximum thickness of 40 mm.