



# Race Walking

By Susan Heiser, USATF Race Walk Officials Chair

## Hosting Non-Championship Race Walks - On the Skinny

Non-championship race walks (RW) should follow the rules for USATF Championships “as far as possible” (USATF Rule 9). However, there are many times when the lack of Certified Race Walk Judges makes this impossible. This is frequently the case for local high school and youth development meets, collegiate invitationals, and master meets. In these cases, modifications to the standards set for National Championships are permitted as long as all of the other USATF Competition Rules relevant to race walking are followed.

This article suggests modifications that can be made when hosting a non-championship race walk with minimal resources and refers to supporting documents posted on the USA Race Walking National Committee [website](#).

### **The Track is the Thing**

Track race walks are easy to conduct as facilities are readily available and a race walk can be added to any track meet. Depending on the age group, a 1500m or mile race walk will typically take 10 to 15 minutes to complete, a 3000m race walk will take 18 to 25 minutes, and a 5000m race walk will typically take 30 to 45 minutes. Some Meet Directors for collegiate or high school events add the race walk into their schedule between sprint events, to give competitors more recovery time. Others add the race walk before the standard start of the meet so that their set schedule is undisturbed. Either way, adding a race walk to an established track meet can benefit all parties - athletes, coaches, and event directors. *Note: Regardless of which competition rules are used in the track meet, race walks will always follow USATF Rules.*

### **Mixing it Up**

Race walks are unique in that both genders are permitted to compete at the same time (USATF Rule 147.2), and multiple distances can be conducted simultaneously (USATF Rule 232.3b). So instead of hosting separate heats for each distance and each gender, all athletes can start at the same time and at different start locations (i.e. 1500m vs 3000m starts). This is advantageous where entries are small or time is limited. In these cases, the lap counter(s) would need to keep separate counts for the different distances and competitors must declare and compete at one distance (Rule 232.3b). *Note: The race results would need to be reported by distance with gender and age group(s) identified.*

## **Judging Minimums**

The standard track championship race walk requires five Certified RW Judges as well as additional supporting officials and volunteers (see *RW Best Practices - How to Host a Race Walk*). For non-championship races, a minimum of three Certified RW Judges is required to conduct a valid event (USATF Rule 232.3c) and fewer support officials and volunteers are needed. While three Judges may be sufficient to cover a small event on an indoor track, four Certified RW Judges is better for larger events or on a 400m outdoor track. *Note: With minimal judges, disqualification would occur when a competitor has received three Red Cards from three different judges (Rule 230.3c).*

When there are four or fewer RW Judges, the Chief Judge should not roam the track but rather judge from Zone 3 and along the final straightaway. *RW Best Practices - RW Basics: Track Assignments Non-Championship* shows suggested judging positions for situations when only three or four Certified RW Judges are available. It also addresses scenarios with minimal support crew, including recorder, posting board assistant, and Red Card collectors. While these support roles would generally be assigned to a Certified Race Walk Judge or race walk official, another certified official or capable volunteer could serve when qualified staff is limited. *(Also see RW Best Practices- RW Basics: Hosting Non-Championship Events.)*

## **Crew Short Cuts**

Cutting the crew thin can be a disservice to both competitors and spectators. Although the rules allow for many championship processes and devices to be eliminated for non-championship events, these devices are there to provide transparency and information to the athletes, their coaches, and spectators. Please keep in mind fairness to the competitors when considering the following cuts:

*No Posting Board:* Posting Board(s) are only “required” for National Championships, International Selection, and WA events (USATF Rule 230.1g). While not providing a Posting Board may reduce the need for Red Card Collectors and Posting Board Assistant, it also removes the only method of communicating to the competitors the number of Red Cards they have received and notifying them if they are in danger of being disqualified. When a posting board is in use, it should be placed on the course and/or near the finish (USATF Rule 230.1g). To benefit athletes starting in their last 100 meters, the posting board is generally located around 90 to 80 meters from the finish, on the inside of the track, where it can be seen by the athletes and spectators.

*Recommendation: Always provide a posting board and a volunteer to assist.*

*No Red Card Collection:* RW rules require that Red Cards be given to the Recorder ASAP (USATF Rule 230.3b). The Red Card collection process goes hand-in-hand with having a Posting Board and is critical for the timely notification and disqualification of competitors who are judged to be failing to comply with the rules of race walking. Not having a method of collecting Red Card information and delivering it to the Recorder

creates problems with transparency and fairness. The rules assume that some method of Red Card collection will occur and specifically allow for this to be done electronically (USATF Rule 230.3h) but are otherwise silent on this process. This opens up a variety of ways for card collection to be achieved including by runners, cyclists, rollerblades, gators, etc. Volunteers assigned to run/walk Red Cards from the Judges to the Recorder is the easiest low tech method. *Recommendation: Always provide a method of Red Card collection (at least three volunteers).*

*No Recorder:* The primary role of the Recorder is to track the Red Cards written for a competitor during the race. The Recorder serves under and in support of the Chief Judge. When no Recorder is assigned, Red Cards are given to the Chief Judge (Rule 230.3b), who is then responsible for tracking RC's and compiling the Judging Summary Sheet. When ten or fewer athletes are competing, the Chief Judge may serve as both the Recorder and Posting Board Operator. In these instances, the Chief Judge should serve along the finish straight in Zone 3 and the Posting Board may be moved to the center of the straight zone. *Recommendation: With three Certified Judges and three Red Card Collectors, the Chief Judge can serve as Recorder and their Red Card Collector can also work the Posting Board.*

*No Penalty Zone:* The Penalty Zone was added in 2016 as a way to give athletes an additional opportunity to correct their technique before being disqualified. When in use, a competitor who receives three Red Cards from three different Judges shall be directed into the Penalty Zone as soon as possible and remain there for the applicable penalty time (USATF Rule 230.3j). Disqualification would occur when the competitor receives four RCs from four different judges. The Penalty Zone is required for World Athletics sanctioned events including National Championships and International Selection events. The use of the Penalty Zone requires at least two additional officials (Chief Judge's Assistant/Penalty Zone Manager and Penalty Zone Timer) and is not recommended to be used with fewer than five RW Judges. *Recommendation: Do not use a Penalty Zone with less than five judges.*

### **To Walk or to Race Walk? - Alternative Formats**

USATF Rule 9 also allows non-championship events to be held in a format other than provided under USATF Competition Rules. This allows flexibility for the Meet Director to host races at distances other than the USATF Championship distances and/or to use different entry and awards criteria. This flexibility also allows non-championship race walks to be conducted as part of, or alongside, running races or power walks as monitored walks. While these alternative formats may be useful to promote walking and healthy living, events that mix race walking with other forms of ambulation would not be record eligible and could not be used as a qualifier for other race walk events (USATF Rule 232.6 and 266). When seeking to host a record eligible Race Walk, it is wise to follow the strict standards for National Championships.