



Race Walking

By Susan Heiser, USATF Race Walk Officials Chair

Judging Race Walks - Applying Technique Rules

“The Judge’s primary role is to act as an impartial and independent adjudicator, performing their duties with accuracy, consistency, objectivity and the highest sense of integrity.” (World Athletics Race Walk Judge Training)

Race Walk Judges are the final arbiters on the legality of the athletes’ race walk form and are specifically trained to observe each athlete and decide if they comply with the rules of race walking (USATF Rule 232.2).



They must also understand the flow of the race walk paperwork, their role as part of a team of judges, and how to communicate their independent decisions to individual athletes. This article addresses race walk mechanics and the practical application of Race Walking technique rules.

Race Walk Technique

Race Walking requires different mechanics than “walking” and “running.” Race walkers with good technique land with the foot just in front or under the body, keeping the knee

straightened and then bending the knee to push off the toe after the leg passes behind the hips. The bending of the knee loads the hamstrings and glutes. Propulsion is achieved by pushing off the toe and driving the swing leg forward. The legs alternate support and swing phases in a cyclical movement repeated three or more times every second.

Race Walk Rules

Race Walk Judges watch for two issues - Loss of Contact and Bent Knees.

“Race Walking is a progression of steps so taken that the walker makes contact with the ground so that no visible (to the human eye) loss of contact occurs. The advancing leg must be straightened (i.e., not bent at the knee) from the moment of first contact with the ground until the leg is in the vertical upright position.” (USATF Rule 232.2)

Judging Positions

Race Walk Judges are assigned judging zones along the course to watch for rule violations. Judges should move within their zone and do not judge athletes in other zones. Judges must position themselves with a clear view of the athlete's legs and only judge from the side. Judging from the front or the back is not accurate. For track events, judging is typically from the outside



Illustration 4. The Race Walking Judge's Viewing Area (G. Westerfeld)

lanes but Judges should move to the inside of the track to confirm that a violation exists before making a final decision.

Violations must be seen in "a progression of steps" and not just a single instance. This is typically two or more cycles with one or both feet.

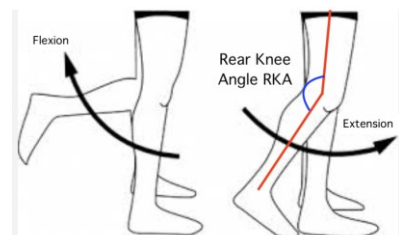
Judging Contact

Loss of Contact (LOC) occurs when both feet are off the ground at the same time as seen by the unaided human eye. Trained judges generally see LOC at 45 or more milliseconds. Double contact is not required to be seen and it is accepted that there will be a minimal invisible flight phase that may be captured in

still pictures.

The rules are violated only if LOC is *visible to the human eye*. This requires that the Judge observe that both feet are simultaneously off the ground. This may appear as a float phase or a forward drift of both feet that occurs if neither foot has ground contact.

Note: Judging with cameras or video is not allowed.



Judging Knees

A Bent Knee (BK) occurs when the lead leg is not fully extended at the moment of heel/foot strike through to its upright vertical position under the body. Legs are made up of muscular hinged parts and can never be linearly straight. Knobby knees, muscular quads, hyperextended or bowed legs are not a BK offense.

The Judge must watch the leading leg from the side and observe the angle of the knee when the athlete's front foot is visibly on the ground. This is generally indicated by a weight shift from the rear supporting leg to the front leg. A legal leg will be straightened (not bent at the knee)

Note: The knee can be bent anytime after it has reached the upright position and the knee is passing behind the hip.





A BK will be observed when the rear knee angle between the leg bones is decreased. A BK will generally include loading or tensing of the quadriceps. This flexed position allows the athlete to gain an advantage by engaging their quads to extend the knee joint at push off - as a runner does.

Buckling—that is bending of the knee after landing with a straightened knee—is another BK violation and can result from a forceful heel strike.

Spot the difference – Runner or Race Walker?

