

Introduction to Race Walking

The Greatest Boomer Sport There Is

1) Medical Concerns

A new exercise program should be entered with caution and with consultation with your health care professional. Be aware that proper race walking uses lots of energy, lots of muscles and works the heart and cardiovascular system. It is recommended that you begin slow and work into the sport over time.

2) Definition of Race Walking

There are two USATF rules which define competitive race walking:

- A) "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"
- B) "The advancing leg must be straightened (i.e., not bent at the knee) from the moment of first contact with the ground until the vertical upright position"

3) The Gait

Competitive race walking = running with rules. The rules slow us down and make us work harder but the graceful result is less punishment with fewer injuries and is better for you over the same distance. An Olympic race walker's refined technique is the height of efficiency, focusing all energy on comfortable forward progress.

The gait is a coordinated "dance" of synchronized, repeated movements and we will study individual pieces of that "dance" in order to learn it.

John Wayne could have been a good race walker. He walked with purpose, shifting his weight from side to side and pushing off with his foot, while using his arms and upper body to counter-facilitate.

4) The Posture

Remain relaxed and upright at all times; no forward or backward lean and no rocking from side to side.

5) Step One: The Hip-Lead

Feet land heel-first on a straight line, one after the other. The natural imbalance this action creates is properly countered by employing the arms and upper body. Our society considers the image of this gait as feminine. This is the major reason for the race walk's bad rap among men.

6) Step Two: The Arm Swing

Arms remain at a 90 degree angle at the elbow throughout, swinging slightly crossways, back to front to counter-balance.

7) Step Three: The Push-Off

Locomotion comes exclusively from the trailing foot pushing forward, NOT from the advancing leg pulling! The advancing heel should hit the ground just in front of your bellybutton in a rapid cadence. Speed comes more from quick cadence than step length.

Ideally, the muscle action of pushing off is the only significant effort expended. All the rest follows naturally from that. While the rear leg extends to push off, the other leg is involuntarily snapped back around to the front for its straight-line heel placement, and the knee is straightened. Without being aware of it, we've swiveled and twisted and completed a race walking cycle.