

IAAF Race Walking Committee Report

The IAAF Race Walking Committee met on February 14th 2009 in Monaco. The main agenda items discussed were:

- New time limits for the World Race Walking Cup;
- IAAF Competition Rule Change Proposals;
- Use of names on front bibs instead of numbers;
- IRWJ Education and Certification System;
- Level III Judges mid-term seminar; and
- IAAF Race Walking Challenge.

World Race Walking Cup

As a follow up to its discussion in 2008, the Committee examined a proposal to solve the problem of athletes, clearly below the world level, finishing well after most others, and in some cases causing logistical issues and/or delays to the start of the following event. After discarding the option of re-introducing entry standards, given the need to allow the participation of at least one athlete from every federation despite his/her level, the Committee agreed to propose the introduction of time limits. Athletes unable to start the last lap within a certain time (from the start of the race) would be declared as DNF and would be forced to leave the course. This would only apply to the Senior Races.

The logistics (how and where to eventually stop the athletes) remain to be finalized, but this would be addressed if the proposal is accepted.

Analyzing the results from Cheboksary, and considering the expected time for the last lap, the proposed time limits with one lap to go on a 2-km loop course would be as follows:

Race	time limit at finish -2 km	Projected Finish Time	Number of athletes theoretically affected in Cheboksary (DNF)	
Men's 20	1:35:00	1:45:00	2	AUT, USA
Men's 50	4:40:00	4:51:00	1	IND
Women 20	1:40:00	1:51:00	4	EGY, FA, KAZ, PUR

Recommendation:

The Committee recommends introducing these new regulations and indicated limits, only in the senior races, for the first time in Chihuahua 2010 with a view to eventually reconsider the limits on the basis of the Chihuahua experience.

The Council supported this recommendation on a trial basis for Chihuahua 2010.

IAAF Competition Rule Change Proposals

The Committee examined four Race Walking related rule proposals for amendments to the current IAAF Competition Rules. All four proposals aimed at clarifying existing text and/or making it consistent with other Rules. All were supported, though the text was slightly revised.

A fifth proposal was made as a result of a Committee recommendation from 2008 and concerned a much needed clarification on the notification of those disqualifications made directly by the Chief Judge in the last part of the race. The Committee clarified, that in order to ensure a swift notification, this should be given by an Assistant to the Chief Judge and not necessarily by the Chief Judge himself (who is still judging), even if this may require the appointment of another Assistant.

Recommendation:

The Committee recommended the approval of all five proposals, as revised and reworded by the Committee, and as submitted in detail by the Technical Committee in their report.

The Council supported the five Rule Change proposals as did the IAAF Congress.

The Committee also discussed about whether to remove the concept of the caution from the Rules on the grounds that it is not used in a consistent manner by all International Race Walking Judges. The Committee will not propose this change at this time but will address it during the IRWJ (Level III) Seminar in Metz in May and has also asked the members to seek some feedback by opening the discussion within the athletes and coaches community.

The Committee also received another proposal from Pierce O'Callaghan, a Level III judge, to consider revising the official distances for race walking events, and more specifically, to replace the 20km with the Half Marathon and the 50km with the Marathon. The rationale would be to make the distances more understandable to the general public, and eventually, offer the possibility of staging mass race walking events alongside already existing mass marathon/half marathon races in an effort to increase promotion and visibility of the sport.

The Committee however felt that at the current stage, there would be more disadvantages (overcome tradition, lengthening the lower distance, difficulty of judging, race management with different start and finish lines, confusion between running and walking, etc.) than advantages (greater opportunity for promotion through possible mass races) and did not unanimously support the proposal. The Committee did however appreciate the

initiative and took the opportunity to invite its members to reflect on new and innovative ways of improving race walking.

Names on Bibs

Beginning with the World Indoor Championships in Valencia (March 2008), the IAAF started printing the athletes' names on the front bibs instead of the number (which remains on the back bib). This had not yet been implemented for race walking events, fearing that it would be too difficult for the judges to take note of the athletes' name rather than the number when recording a red card, not to mention the fact that the current electronic communication systems are based on numbers and not names.

The Committee discussed the matter and felt that the judges will still be able to judge properly. However, it suggested that some testing should be done at IAAF Race Walking Challenge events before implementation at the World Championships in Berlin. Since the Committee meeting we now have this experience. Gary Westerfield was a judge in Berlin and reports that it was a problem for the panel of judges. They used two lists (names and numbers) for reference. Gary said he had to get quite close to an athlete to check the name against a number while recording the number. He recommends the use of front bibs with both names and numbers.

IRWJ Education and Certification System

The Committee was presented with the conclusions of the working group which was asked to draft the format and contents of the Level III Judges mid-term seminar planned for May 2009 in Metz, France. It was confirmed that the main objective remains the improvement and harmonization of the judging criteria within the Panel and that the Seminar should take place over 2 days plus the day of the European up during which the judges will be asked to shadow judge.

The Committee also started discussions on the format and contents of the Evaluation Seminar for the reconfiguration of the Level III Panel, which will take place in October 2010. Details will be discussed at the next meeting (May 2010). The Committee has already proposed that the Evaluation be conducted in English only and that there be no physical fitness test.

The Committee also reviewed the Level II Education and Certification material and recommended some amendments which were provided to the IAAF Member Services Department.

Level III Judges Mid-Term Seminar

Having sought feedback from many members of the race walking family, including the judges themselves, the coaches, the athletes and even spectators, the Committee decided that the focus of the seminar was going to be the need to ensure **consistency** in the judging. This meant ensuring, to the greatest extent possible, a common understanding of the rules and a standard approach in their application and enforcement.

In practice, this meant addressing the following key topics:

- The definition of Race Walking as in Rule 230 – Is it clear enough to allow a correct interpretation by the judge in order to judge correctly?
- Are cautions appropriately defined and used in an adequate and consistent way?
- Given that there are differences in how judges apply and enforce the rule, what are the ways in which consistency in the judging of Race Walking could be improved?

In addition to the above, the Committee also felt that this was a good opportunity to provide information to the IRWJ on the following topics:

- Special powers and responsibilities of the Chief Judge
- Code of Ethics for Race Walking Judges
- The duties of the Technical Delegate

Four working groups were formed to review various topics and to present their thoughts and views to the rest of the panel.

1. The definition of Race Walking as in Rule 230 – Is it clear enough to allow a correct interpretation by the judge in order to judge correctly?

No group suggested that a major change should be introduced but most did feel that small modifications should be considered in order to solve the following issues:

Straightening of the advancing leg

There was some debate on whether the straightening of the advancing leg was a basic requirement of good walking technique. From a biomechanical point of view the straightening of the leg nevertheless represents the best way to achieve a fast walk, and the groups finally agreed – it represents the key difference between walking and race walking. The group agreed to keep this part of the definition in the rule.

Moment of first contact with ground

It was debated by the groups whether the moment of first contact should occur with the heel, although the rule does not specify it. No modification to the rule was recommended but there was an understanding that landing with the heel is characteristic of proper race walking and something athletes should aim for and judges should be looking at.

Must as opposed to shall

Rather than: "The advancing leg *shall* be straightened", it was suggested that "*must* be straightened" would be clearer, especially for those who do not have English as their mother tongue. In fact some may understand that *shall* is closer to *should* than to *must* and may apply the rule accordingly. Again, this will be discussed by the Race Walking Committee at the next opportunity.

2. Are cautions appropriately defined and used in an adequate and consistent way?

In danger of failing to comply

Perhaps this was the most debated item in relation to this specific clause. All groups seemed to agree that to be in danger of failing to comply cannot be clearly defined. The closest interpretation that was given to this wording was that it identifies the instance in which the athlete, to the eyes of the judge, breaks the rule for the first time, though not in a blatant manner. The following modification to the wording was suggested in order to attempt to better identify the circumstances in which an athlete deserves a caution:

"When a judge is not completely satisfied that the walker is fully complying with the definition, where possible, he should caution the walker by showing him the yellow paddle indicating whatever offense has been infringed."

This proposal was strongly supported and will be discussed by the Race Walking Committee at the next opportunity.

Use of cautions

Having established a better definition of the term and having established that an athlete is, de facto, already breaking the rules when he deserves a caution, the groups then discussed whether there should be a caution at all. There were different views on the usefulness of cautions. Certainly many athletes and coaches seem to appreciate them and find them useful to assist them in the management of the race. However, there are other athletes who, admittedly, only consider what is on the red card posting board.

Finally a common agreement was reached and an acknowledgement that cautions must be used as a means of assisting the athlete in the management of his/her race, and that ideally, the caution should always be shown to the athlete before the judge eventually decides to write a red card for that athlete. There may be exceptions so this cannot be established as a rule but this should be the general principle. Exceptions could be:

- An athlete blatantly (or obviously) breaks the rule thus clearly gaining an unfair advantage compared to his opponents.
- An athlete breaks the rule in the last part of the race where it is too late to caution him/her.
- The circumstances in which the Chief Judge can use his/her special powers.

The IRWJ agreed to adopt this common policy but it shall not be published as a rule.

3. Given that there are currently differences in how judges apply and enforce the rule, what are the ways in which consistency in the judging of Race Walking could be improved?

In this context, being inconsistent essentially means one of two things (or both):

- The judges do not necessarily see the same offense (bent knee or loss of contact).
- Judges are more or less strict when observing the same degree of infraction, and may or may not caution or send a red card.

The consequence of this discrepancy is clear and leads to frustration and misunderstanding within the athletes, coaches, spectators, and media. The Race Walking Committee will look at various options aimed at achieving a better harmonization and consistency in the judging practice.

Evaluation of the work of the IRWJ

A different approach to an improvement of the consistency in the Panel was the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the IRWJ with a view to correct, where possible, the deficiencies, or to remove the judge from the Panel in extreme cases. The need to receive some form of feedback of their performance was a clear message from all the IRWJ. An evaluation by a commission or panel of experts was proposed. The judges would accept the conclusions of the panel of experts which could include recommendations such as:

- Re-assigning judges to the competitions.

- Removing judges from the Panel.

It was clearly understood that an evaluation of the judges' work is a major requirement and the Committee will work towards the implementation of a suitable system.

Education

All the groups seemed to agree, and proposed, that the most efficient way of guaranteeing a consistent and effective judging panel is through a better education as to adequate guidelines on what is expected from a Level III judge. The need for a dedicated education system for the IRWJ focusing on the interpretation of the rules and providing guidance from the experts was clearly acknowledged. The Race Walking Committee will propose to the IAAF that appropriate initiatives be put in place to achieve this objective.

Meeting during competitions

As part of the judges' evaluation and education process, it was suggested that greater opportunity should be taken of the judges' attendance at major competitions. While there are pre and post-competition meetings, these focus more on organizational and procedural aspects rather than on evaluating the performance of the judges after each event and addressing any issues. This should be introduced as a standard procedure with the participation of experts from the Committee on site at competitions. A standard agenda should be developed and an appropriate time for the meeting scheduled. The Committee will address this matter during its next meeting with a goal to develop a standard procedure, agenda, and goals for these meetings.

IAAF Race Walking Challenge

Following recommendations from the Committee in 2008, the format of the 2009 IAAF Race Walking Challenge has been revised hoping that the changes will generate more interest from the top athletes. The Committee is aware that this will be a test year for this circuit of competitions and will monitor the participation very closely. At the same time, the members were invited to gather opinions and exchange ideas within the race walking family with a view to submit possible amendments to the regulations by the end of June 2009. A selected working group will then draft the new Regulations for 2010 and submit them to the IAAF Council for approval. Possible budget cuts within the IAAF could negatively affect the future of the Challenge.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Bowman

Member, IAAF Race Walking Committee

