

# Race Walking



## COACHING RACE WALKING



*This is a script summary from the video clip*

### Basic Technique

The first step for a school teacher or coach working with Race walking is to develop a sound understanding of the correct technique and of the rules governing the sport. If an athlete fails to develop the required skills, not only will they perform poorly but they may also be disqualified due to infringement of the laws. Although the rules may seem complicated, they can be summarized quite simply. (See video interview)

### Posture

Posture is of prime importance to race walking. Poor posture leads to loss of technique and possible infringement of the rules. Common postural faults with race walkers can include:

- Slumped, rounded shoulders or upper spine.
- Bending forward from the hips is another common fault with beginner walkers. To help correct these faults get the athlete to place clasped hands behind their back, pushing the back of their hands hard against their hips. The athlete should practice walking in this position to help them feel correct postural alignment. As with all track events, posture is crucial to ongoing development.

### Arm and shoulder action

The Arm and shoulder action needs to be developed correctly as it controls the balance, as well as speed and stride length of race walkers. Compared to distance running, the arm action in Race walking is much more vigorous and can be quite fatiguing, particularly if not performed correctly.

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Also, the angle at the elbow should stay more consistently at around 90 degrees throughout the swing, and should not open up during the backswing as the sprinting arm action tends to do.

Often a race walker will hold their arms too high. This can be corrected by having the athlete drape a long sleeved jumper over their shoulders. The athlete holds onto the sleeves with arms held at 90°. The athlete then swings their arms through the range without letting go or reducing the tension on the sleeves. This drill may need to be practiced until the athlete is comfortable. This can also be used if the athlete has their arms in the 90° angle and drops them to 120° in the backward swing, and if the athlete chops their forearms downwards.

The athlete needs to have relaxed shoulders with no tension around the neck and shoulder area. As the athlete fatigues their shoulders may become too rigid. Asking them to circle their shoulders a few times may help. This exercise can be incorporated into a training program as a relaxation aid. Good posture also includes a reduction of forward shoulder swing. A good coaching cue is to ask the athlete to keep the shoulders "low and relaxed", with a strong but fluid movement.

## Leg Action

A race walker needs a smooth, rhythmic stride pattern with continuous contact with the ground. A straight leg when it is in the upright position and a strong rear-leg drive action. The total action of the legs can be divided into three phases: the double support phase when both feet are momentarily on the ground; the single support phase when only one foot has contact with the ground; and the recovery phase.

### Double support phase:

The double support phase occurs for only a split second when the heel of the lead foot makes contact with the ground while the toe of the rear foot is still on the ground.

### Single support phase:

The single support phase starts when the toe of the rear leg leaves the ground. The forward support occurs from heel contact until the leg passes under the centre of gravity. The backward support starts as the leg passes under the centre of gravity and lasts until the toe leaves the ground.

### Recovery phase:

The recovery phase occurs simultaneously with the single support phase. The knee of the rear leg is bent to 90° to allow for a rapid recovery, the hip of that leg drops and reaches it's lowest point as it passes the supporting leg.

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## Foot action

The action of the feet during the leg phases must be correct for the leg action to be successful. During the recovery phase of the leg, the foot remains relaxed with toes angled towards the ground. The toes come up when the preparation is made for heel contact. Both feet must travel in a straight line with full extension and flexion of the ankle joint. Any deviation from this foot action will result in a reduction of stride length.

## Trunk and hips

With beginners who often lack abdominal and lower back strength it is better for the athlete to use an upright posture for the trunk. As strength is gained the athlete should be steered towards a more effective racing posture which is a 3–5° forward lean. It is important to note however, that this lean should be from the ankles and involving a whole body forward inclination. Often athletes will create a forward lean by bending at the waist, and this is counter-productive to good performance.

This slight lean forward assists the body in reaching higher levels of speed. It is imperative that the hips do not swing from side to side as this will reduce speed, shorten stride length, affect balance and arm action, and possibly inflame the hip socket. This aspect is often misunderstood, with many people falsely believing that side to side motion of the hips is desirable.

It is the backward and forward motion that determines stride length. Once the rear foot leaves the ground and starts its forward swing, the hip of the swinging through foot is lowered and moved forward. The hip of the leg, which is in contact with the ground, must remain firm and not push out to the side. This will require good levels of hips strength, which can be developed using some of the drills outlined in this section.

It is often falsely believed that race walkers needs to have unusually flexible or hyper-mobile hips but this is not necessarily the case.

## Summary

The refinement in technique can take place over time, and it is important to keep initial instructions simple and consistent, allowing young walkers to enjoy their training. Training volumes should be progressed gradually, and the focus should be on quality, rather than accumulating excessive mileage.