

RACE WALKING WITH SAMA

by George White

As an athletic club we must obey the rules as they currently apply. So for Race-walking we must apply both the contact and straightened leg rules.

SAMA introduced Club Walking into its program, to encourage current walkers who struggle with bent knees, previous walkers who no longer compete for fear of disqualification, and others who might like to try walking without the pressure of full Race walking rules.

For Club Walking the only rule is that there would be no running - which for our purposes is defined by the requirement to always have one foot on the ground (bent knees will not be an issue). Other than not being able to set records Club Walking has the same status as Race-walking in our competition.

Race Walking will be conducted under WA rules with the "No advantage" concept applied for older walkers.

Those athletes choosing to compete as a Race Walker should not expect the 'No Advantage' concept to permit carte blanche to disregard the basic rules. It is there to allow for **slight** bending of the knee particularly in older walkers where a perfectly straight leg cannot be achieved, but where these walkers are seriously trying to Race Walk correctly. It is not there to condone a distinct bent leg creep (which invariably occurs when trying to go too fast). While still open to interpretation as for all walk judging, it is expected that judges will show leniency towards older walkers. Older race walkers should still look like race-walkers with a largely straight leg and high toe on contact.

Walkers must make a choice! If they enter the Race walk then they must accept the decisions of the judges. Also in making this choice they can either continue to walk as they have always walked or attempt to get better.

SAMA Judges are obviously volunteers and are trying to help and should not come under frequent criticism. **Their purpose is not to catch those gaining an unfair advantage, but to protect those complying with the rules.** We realise judging is interpretive, as is the no advantage concept, and that is why as far as possible we have multiple judges. While some of our judges do not have long experience at the art, it is unfair to suggest that they do not always know what they are doing.

Considerations the judges may make:

No Advantage

- Where soft knees remain approximately the same for a complete stride then that walker is to be deemed as not gaining an advantage.

For the judges there are physiological changes in the legs that could help in determining advantage. A runner relies on large contractions of the quadriceps and this contraction of the quadriceps at contact is usually quite visible! While a legal race walker relies on the quads to drive the leg forward, there should be no contraction on contact, with straightening accomplished without their use. If contraction of the quads continues this is basically a running action and constitutes creeping. If the quads are not activated, a soft knee will gain no advantage. A true race-walking action is to pull and push the ground back underneath and behind with the hamstring and hip muscles.



In this photo the lead walker has a bent knee and the quads are activated. The following walker has a straight leg and no activity in the quad.

What the individual can do

If a current walker is borderline re the bent leg rule there are 3 options:

1. They can accept that a DQ may happen and please do not admonish the judges.
2. Switch to Club Walking, or
3. Try to do something about it.
 - Firstly it may be necessary to slow down. Anyone with straight legs normally can race-walk if proper technique is used, but to do this you may have to slow down considerably until the body gets used to it.
 - The best assistance comes from stretching on a regular basis – particularly of the muscles at the rear of the leg – the hamstrings and calves, but also the shins.
 - Increase quadriceps strength to drive the swing forward of the lead leg (the quads are not activated after contact however).
 - Increase shin strength to enable a high toe at contact.
 - Without sufficient hip drop, the body compensates for the impact shock of the stride by bending the knee. The muscles used in hip drop can be stretched by standing with one foot on something like a brick and the other stretching to the floor.
 - Shortening the stride in front of the body and concentrating on holding the toes high for first contact will not only help straightening problems it will also increase efficiency. The action of a high toe at contact

exemplifies the concept of race-walking (heel and toe) and demonstrates the athlete is seriously trying to race walk.

- Ensure an upright stance. Leaning forward almost guarantees a bent knee.
- Tight figure of eight walking helps work the hips and emphasises straightening the knee.
- Emphasise a straight leg and strengthen the ankle and shin muscles by heel walking (only possible with very short strides).
- Race-walking up an incline will force a short stride and straight leg in front of the body and a strong drive from the rear leg.

With older walkers it will take time to make changes but it is possible if many of the above are done on a regular basis.