

Remit for the 2025 Annual General meeting of the New Zealand Masters Athletics Association.

Reference: NZMA annual General Meeting December 2022.
Unfinished business.

At the above AGM Egmont Athletics forwarded a proposal "That a B Grade category of walks be established" This was agreed to by the meeting and to be further looked into.

Quote from Minutes

"The meeting agreed in principle with the introduction of a B grade walk category for athletes 65 years and older and to look at it in more detail. K Gillum-Green / D Shaw carried "

Currently this has not proceeded. At the 2025 NZMA Tk and Fd Championships there was no B category listed amongst the entries.

Proposal. To add consistency as far as judging is concerned, NZMA adopt the OMA policy 6.3. for championships conducted by NZMA

Remit: Judging of Race Walks

1. NZMA encourages athletes of all ages and abilities to participate in the sport of race walking conducted under its auspices whilst seeking to maintain the technical challenge of the sport.
2. Walk judges should use their discretion in applying a "no Advantage" consideration when judging masters walkers particularly in the older age categories where it is clear that the athlete cannot lock their knees.
3. Competition conducted outside of NZMA events remain under WA and WMA rules.

Stewart Foster
Life member
OMA Council member(Treasurer)

PTO for supporting evidence

PROPOSAL TO CREATE A MODIFICATION TO WORLD ATHLETICS RACE WALK RULES

Background

Physiology changes with age! There is a decline in muscle mass and flexibility, and arthritis is likely to develop to at least some degree. Masters Athletics was established to enable athletes to continue competitively in their chosen sport. It supports changes to rules and implement specifications to encourage continued participation. To quote the AMA website – “The specifications for some events and various implements change with the age of the competitor. This allows for the changes in ability as we progress through the age groups.” The changes to weights, hurdle heights and spacing etc. reflect the physiological changes associated with ageing. This occurs in all technical athletic disciplines **except race walking**. (Running 800m and up and the horizontal jumps do not have specific changes to cater for aging athletes, but it is hard to imagine what could be done, or need to be done, for these disciplines.) Over the history of Masters Athletics there has been continuous modification to these changes to keep or increase athletes taking part in the events.

Race-walking does not have adjustments to the rules for athletes as they age, yet it is arguably one of the most technical events. Despite there being no specific rule changes for walking, for decades WMA, AMA and the States/territories have variously applied leniency amongst older walkers. This was done in lieu of a specific rule adaptation to keep older walkers in the sport. Some judges and jurisdictions would argue that they do not apply leniency, but race results indicate that it is widely applied consciously or sub-consciously to allow many older walkers to compete. Many older walkers have arthritic knees that prevent a straight leg on contact; others do not have a great problem with the initial straight leg but then suffer a small collapse. The inability to absolutely straighten the leg on contact or stop a small collapse before the upright position is a physiological characteristic of ageing and should be recognised in the same way that other physiological changes are reflected in rule changes for the other athletic disciplines. These physiological changes in no way confer an advantage on the walker.

It is time to put something in the rules to give aging race-walkers similar benefits to those enjoyed in other disciplines and provide more certainty for them entering races. There are only two significant rules in race-walking and only one which aging walkers have trouble with – that is the requirement to straighten the leg on contact and to maintain that straight leg through to the upright position. This element of the rules has only existed since 1996 and it is only since then that there has been an issue for older walkers. Many older walkers struggle with this and currently Oceania Masters Athletics is the only major jurisdiction where a Policy exists to encourage the application of the concept of “No Advantage” as a means of maintaining participation and avoiding significant numbers of walkers being disqualified.

Looking at the basics, the rules exist to distinguish the sport from running and to prevent an unfair advantage by effectively running. The “Heel and Toe” concept defined walking for over a century and seemed to adequately separate running from walking. The best distinction between running and walking – is contact with the ground. A flight phase (loss of contact) coincides with increased stride length and usually with a significant gain in speed – hence an advantage. Soft knees on the other

hand, invariably result in poor thrust, a more flat footed landing and shortened stride and hence a net loss of speed – not an advantage, but they are easy targets to judge.

Proposal

AMA to formally adopt leniency into the rules of race-walking for older athletes to enshrine what has been an informal practice for decades at State, National and World level. This would provide more consistency and certainly for athletes. If agreed, this would need to be taken further as a remit to WMA. How this should be done is for AMA to decide, but one way could be to adopt the No Advantage concept. (Objections to the No Advantage concept cite that it is too subjective, but to a large degree, race-walk judging is intrinsically subjective – hence the need to have many judges to even out that subjectivity.)

Discussion

A definition of the No Advantage concept would need to be agreed upon and the following is provided to begin the discussion.

“Where the angle of a slight bend in the leg at the knee remains basically the same for a complete stride then that walker is to be deemed as gaining No Advantage. “

The No Advantage concept would apply from a certain age group perhaps 60 or 65.

Masters race-walkers should not expect the “No Advantage” concept to allow carte blanche against the basic rules. It would be there to allow for slight bending of the knee particularly in older walkers where physiological changes prevent a perfectly straight leg from being achieved but these walkers are seriously trying to Race-walk correctly. The No Advantage concept would not be there to condone a flat footed, distinct bent leg creep. **Older race walkers should still look like race-walkers with a largely straight leg and high toe on contact.**

Considerations the judges could make:

- Where the angle of the bend in the leg at the knee changes during walking i.e. the drive leg straightens after the mid-point of the stride, that walker shall be deemed to have gained an advantage.
- If the quads are not activated, a soft knee will gain no 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. 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.