

FAQ RESPONSE To The IAAF Race Walking Committee

Since the IAAF RWC has chosen to put out a FAQ to explain their latest proposals, I feel it necessary to review the main points therein and test their validity. In my opinion, the document is deeply flawed and adds little to the discussion.

Let me address via my own FAQs.

What is the impetus behind the need to change the international distances from 20km/50km?

Supposedly it is the IOC but we are yet to see anything to indicate that this is in fact the case. You can say anything you like here. It can't be tested as there is no visibility.

My understanding is that the main IOC issue was one of gender equality. They were against the 50km as it included only men. That issue has now been addressed (alas, no thanks to the IAAF RWC).

So what other issues are there? No evidence has even been put forward.

Did the IAAF RWC propose the elimination of the 50km and 20km and replacement with a ½ marathon and relay two years ago?

The RW Committee deny this but the facts say otherwise. Here is the direct cut and paste from the minutes of their February 2017 meeting, forwarded to the IAAF Council as a firm recommendation.

*IAAF RACE WALKING COMMITTEE
REPORT TO THE IAAF COUNCIL
12/13 April 2017 – London (GBR)*

10. RACE WALK COMPETITION PROGRAMME IN MAJOR COMPETITIONS

Following lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed the following:

.....

4. Change international distance for race walking for 2019 and 2020 to the Half Marathon for both men and women. Maintain 10,000m race walk as distance for U-20 men and women at least until 2020 IAAF World U-20 Championships.

When that failed to gain traction with the IAAF Council in their April 2017 meeting, the RWC continued on as if nothing had happened. It seems they won't take no for an answer in any circumstances.

Sadly, they won't even acknowledge the truth about what happened in 2017.

What did the 2018 RWC Survey Show?

The results have never been published. All I have is a note in the minutes of the May 2018 IAAF RWC Meeting which is as follows

3. The Committee conducted a survey of stakeholders during February and March 2018. A total of 1690 responses were received from all IAAF Areas and 100 countries. An analysis of the responses provided by 371 current athletes and coaches revealed that if only one individual race walking event for each gender were to be conducted in the future, the preferred distance would be 20km for both men and

women. However, the majority of current athletes noted that they would prefer to maintain two individual distances.

This is hardly a definitive result on which to propose further change.

As with any survey, it all depends on what questions are asked. If you have a question that says, “*If you can only have one international distance, what would it be?*”, then you will obviously get the answer “20km”.

Has there been any consultation with the race walking fraternity?

Apart from the survey mentioned above, the answer is clearly no. I have yet to meet anyone who can lay claim to have been asked by anyone on the IAAF RWC as part of any formal process.

What are the issues with the 50km?

I'm sorry but I don't accept their bullet points at all. Let's take them one at a time

- shorter to offer more options for live coverage

The live coverage on the 50km is currently superb. Just fire up youtube and check out the 2016 Olympic 50km in Rio. What an exciting event, what excellent coverage and what great camera work. What is the issue here?

- easier (and more logical) transition from U20 (& younger) ... less attrition

That can be fixed with a proper transition through U23. Why not have an international U23 30km championship as a stepping stone to the 50km. Let's think outside the box here.

- possibility of in-stadium (larger crowds and exposure?)

This is just plain wrong. The roadwalks attract huge crowds and it's all free. Put it on the track and you have to have a ticket. The concept in London 2017 to have a day of racewalks at the Mall was wonderful and shows us the future. That was probably our best ever racewalk day and now you want to do away with it?

- enables RW to offer shorter events for U20 & younger (again, less attrition & more athletes attracted to try RW)

Completely irrelevant. The distances on offer in U20 have no bearing on this 20km/50km debate.

How does 10km/30km compare with 20km/50km?

Obviously no effort has been made to review this from a scientific standpoint. The best 20km walkers are going to be the ones who excel at both 10km and 30km. It is only if you have 2 vastly differing distances (20/50) that you offer the speedsters and the endurance walkers their own events. Changing to 10/30 will actually reduce opportunity for walkers.

I'd like to see a proper physiological analysis of this before voting on such a change. It would seem to be the starting point in any discussion.

How do we make racewalking more relevant?

Hey, I can think of many ways to grow our footprint with the current 20/50 scenario. Here are a few ideas just off the top of my head.

- Ensure the walks are held in truly iconic settings: eg Copacabana in Rio (which was the initial choice), Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, The Mall in London.
- Keep it to a single day and make it a community day.
- Put on a mass participation walk between the 50 and 20km walks, over a short distance.
- Have the very best commentators (how often do we see commentators who start calling yellow cards reports!)
- Make use of large screens to follow the action. The best ever example of this that I have seen was in the 2014 IAAF World Race Walking Championship in Russia. What a wonderful example of how to do it properly!
- Put the proper crowd friendly facilities in place (Rio in 2016 and London in 2017 had NO toilets at all at the walks courses, nor any bottled water for sale, much less a program, for heavens sake).
- I want to be able to stand trackside with my ipad and check the race out and see the report board, the race leader board and be able to zoom in on particular walkers and see their laps. It's all there, it just isn't used!
- Other codes get their athletes to wear heart monitors, etc, to add to the drama. Etc. We are a long way from ever being able to say 'World's Best Practice'.

These are the sorts of things the RWC should be promoting. Just changing distances is not going to do anything, unless all the rest is addressed. And if all the rest is addressed properly, you won't need to change distances.

How far away are we from a workable RWECS system?

Now don't get me wrong. I am not against the RWECS. First a bit of history

A position paper was prepared in 2013 by Italian Antonio Amigo and was then widely circulated for review and comment. An amount of money was made available by the IAAF to mount a pilot study for what was termed The Electronic Detection System Project to create a definitive judging system for race walking events. As of December 2016, this pilot had moved to the design stage, with contracts signed to construct two preindustrial demonstration prototypes to detect loss of contact by race walkers. One will be used in training and another for competition. The timeline for completion of the project was 18 months. The results of this project would then be considered by the IAAF Race Walking Committee in order to draw up a rule change proposal which would then need to be considered by the Technical Committee and approved by Council. The goal was to be able to trial a system in competitions ahead of the 2019 IAAF World Championships.

So if the RWC had kept to their timetable, it would now be a completed project and it would be ready for use in Doha. They are probably 2 years behind on their timetable, with little to show.

How far are we from a workable system – my best guess is 4 years.

- Consider that with the pit lane, it was used for 3 years in junior events before it was used in a senior championship, and it was a much simpler concept.
- Realistically how can it be made accessible to everyone? My understanding is that it relies on a series of bluetooth receivers placed strategically around the circuit and feeding into a central database. So you need shoes, bluetooth receivers, a central server with bluetooth capability, and finally the software program. Tell me how that's all going to be available for the aspiring walker.
- We have yet to know if there is to be a float period or no float. If a float, what are the threshold settings?
- Where are the draft amended rules?
- What races are going to be targeted for a proper review?

- How can you say that you want this all in place by 2020?

Dr Brian Hanley from Leeds University, a leading expert in the field of race walking biomechanics, was asked his opinion in 2018 on how the proposed electronic shoe will effect times achieved by walkers. His full report, *Measurement of Flight Time in Race Walking*, was published in my newsletter of <http://www.vrwc.org.au/newsletters/heelandtoe-2018-num09.pdf>. It makes for interesting reading and does raise the question – how much analysis has the IAAF done on this topic and what sort of flight phase are they going to allow? The devil's in the detail and at the moment we know NO details.

Is this the time to be changing to a 10km distance, a distance that relies on this device working as designed?

Tim Erickson
Melbourne, Australia
17 January 2019