



HEEL AND TOE ONLINE

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WALKING FIGHTS FOR ITS SURVIVAL AGAIN



The above logo was created by Stefano La Sorda of the Italian racewalking blog website <https://www.facebook.com/LaMarciaCom>. On Tuesday he became aware of the current existential threat we are facing and immediately created the logo and posted his own review. I am also using his logo as it encapsulates what is at stake here.

His post on Tuesday did raise a question – given that we knew about this a week ago here is Australia, how come such an influential Italian racewalking spokesman was not in the loop? Then I realised that I had not seen any related posts on either <http://omarchador.blogspot.com/> or <http://www.marciadalmondo.com/eng/index.aspx>. What was going on there?

Let's backtrack a bit and review the process.

On Friday 11th January, Luis Saladie, on behalf of the IAAF RW Committee, emailed out their latest proposal to all IAAF Member Federations. The email included the following text:

"I kindly ask you to forward this draft proposals to the Race Walking community in your Federation in order that they can submit their thoughts to the IAAF" (luis.saladie@iaaf.org) by latest 29th January."

As that was sent on a Friday, realistically, no action was going to be taken by the respective Federations until at least Monday 14th January, allowing a mere 2 weeks for dissemination of information, discussion and comments to Luis. Clearly inadequate but at least better than the last two attempts by the RW Committee to radically change racewalking, which were done in complete secrecy.

Here in Australia, we received our email from Athletics Australia on Tuesday 15th January. Pretty good really! We are lucky to have such a proactive governing body. To be fair, we had even more forewarning here in Australia as, to her credit, IAAF RW Committee member Jane Saville emailed us on Friday 11th with the document.

For my own part, I alerted readers to this latest threat in my weekly walking newsletter on Tuesday 15th January. If you missed it, have a read at <http://www.vrwc.org.au/newsletters/heelandtoe-2019-num16.pdf> and read my subsequent editorial discussions in <http://www.vrwc.org.au/newsletters/heelandtoe-2019-num16A.pdf> and <http://www.vrwc.org.au/newsletters/heelandtoe-2019-num17.pdf>.

Now back to the above question. Why has there been so little chatter on social media about such an important change? It was as if no one outside Australia, New Zealand and the UK knew. I decided to do some investigation and I chose 4 Federations for review.

- **Fiji – Fail**

Fiji has one walker of note, namely Pramesh Prasad, who has broken all their National racewalking records, up to and including 50km, in the last 12 months or so. Surely he knew about it. I emailed Pramesh. Here is his response as of yesterday (Wednesday 23rd January).

Hi Tim, I didn't get any emails or been contacted by Athletics Fiji for the 20/50km walk about IAAF RW community changes, I will call them tomorrow and ask them if they got any emails from IAAF.

So the Fijian Athletics Federation has one walker of significance and they didn't even get around to asking him for his opinion.

- **Italy – Fail**

I became aware of the lack of communication in Italy when I saw this post on Tuesday from Stefano La Sorda

*Hallo rw friends
the news of this letter from IAAF arrived in Italy only on January 21. I asked my friends athletes and coaches and nobody knew anything about it, nobody in Italy has received the letter (and fortunately that Damilano is Italian ...). I'm very angry but I like David's letter; I'll write a similar one but I'll be a little harder.*

Well, if no one knew about it in Italy, what was going on? I then emailed Nicola Maggio, editor of the wonderful marciadalmondo racewalking website. This website is very much the voice of European racewalking, capturing all major results from around the world and gathering statistics and publishing articles of interest and importance to us on a regular basis. Why had we not heard anything on marciadalmondo. Nicola's reply explained

*Hi Tim
I believe that the Italian Federation has received the letter that has been published.
On the other hand I am sure that I will not be involved, as a former international judge.*

So the question is – if neither Stefano nor Nicola have been asked and if the general racewalking population is also unaware, just what is going on there and who is being talked to, if anyone (apart from perhaps RW Committee chairman Mauricio Damilano)?

- **USA – Fail**

The Yahoo based Racewalking discussion group is huge, with over 1000 members. Most are USA based but some, like me, are foreign lurkers. This incredibly active group posts all USA race results, posts details of all upcoming races and hosts vigorous discussions on all things USA-walking related. Yet not a peep from the group? I posted a general informational item yesterday on this issue and was surprised that the first response was from Dave McCovern, the person who is perhaps 'Mr Racewalking' in America.

*Tim,
The USATF Race Walk Executive Committee met about it tonight. I asked last week to get the word out but was told that the documents should not be disseminated. But if you're going to post the info., by all means I'll comment!*

What!!! That's even worse. Rather than just not disseminate the information, here we have a specific embargo on dissemination. Dave is not allowed to post but, if I can, he can then comment. What an indictment of the process in America!

- **Portugal - Fail**

Along with marciadalmondo, omarchador vies for the position as the top website for all things racewalking. Its daily press releases cover race results from around the world, as well as all things racewalking. And yet, nothing on this issue. So I also emailed the Blog team yesterday. Here is their reply

*Hi Tim,
Thanks for your message.
As far as we know, the Portuguese Athletic Federation sent the IAAF proposals to the international rw judges. We know the subject from some of them, few days ago.
Few people know about this in Portugal. So far, there is no discussion or mailout (no big surprise!) of these proposals between athletes, coaches or other persons.*

*As you may know, the Portuguese Athletics Federation eliminated the 50 km championships in 2016 (Olympic year) having the support of the National Race Walking Coach! We have strongly contested. One year later the 50 km were reintroduced due to the women race/world record!
We are planning an article for tomorrow (Thursday).
Best regards,
The blog team*

I could have chosen more countries and found more of the same, but this is perhaps enough to get my point across.

On Tuesday I emailed Luis Saladie to query the lack of timely information on the Italian front. Rather than even investigate, he answered (almost immediately) as follows

I don't think so that the process is inadequate but of course you're free to express your opinion.

Well, I am expressing my opinion, Luis, and it is that the whole process is a bag of excrement! It is so flawed that it is no longer possible for the RW Committee to consider these recommendations at their February meeting. This process is fatally broken.

I got so fed up yesterday that I actually posted to my private facebook account, something I normally reserve for my political or personal comments! I am facebook friends with lots of the racewalking community around the world and I was surprised to see the number who reposted the post – it was obviously news to them as well and they felt the need to try to spread the word. Alas, time is running out. Tuesday 29th January looms only 5 days in the future.

Some Federations apart from Australia and New Zealand have been proactive and are working constructively with their racewalking communities. I would like to share the response from UK Athletics to Luis Saladie. Author Peter Marlow has given me permission to share.

Dear Luis

Thank you for your email. I have considered the proposals and have also been in discussions with UK athletics on the matter and I have been asked by them to respond on their behalf as well as my own.

I am aware of many responses around the world to the proposals and I have tried not to repeat these even though I agree with them and instead share the outcome of my discussions with UKA.

We discussed the contents of your letter and were able to take on board numerous other comments after many discussions, email exchanges and of course by reading social media.

Firstly the IAAF Race Walking Committee (RWC) should be congratulated for reaching out to the Race Walking Community (RWCom) and other interested parties for their views on the future of race walking. This of course is in stark contrast to the actions taken under a veil of secrecy back in 2017.

The proposal suggests maintaining four individual events, whilst in contrast to the earlier suggestion of only two events, I believe is one that the RWCom fully support. However where does the idea of 10km and 30km come from. What is wrong with the current programme of 20km and 50km? It cannot be because it is too long, there are many sporting events that last longer but with the right coverage and camera work, they prove to be exciting and we offer the Rio Olympic 50km as an example of how it can work for race walking. Also the London 2017 Festival of Race Walking was a massive success as was Berlin 2018.

In the last two years the IAAF have introduced a women's 50km event yet the RWC are suggesting that the good work done by the IAAF should be cast aside in favour of short distance events. From seven athletes at London 2017 to thirty two in Taicang and followed by twenty in Berlin shows that there is a definite growing interest in the event. We suggest that the RWC should focus on making the current programme of events more relevant and exciting in order to promote the event rather than just changing the distances.

As for development of younger athletes and the reduction of attrition, no one has ever said that race walking is easy but by introducing step up distances, say 30km or 35km for under 23 age groups as they do in some European countries we could encourage, develop and prepare athletes for 50km should they be so inclined.

In respect of the electronic shoe (RWECS). I was able to share with them all of the correspondence on the matter and from most recently the excellent email from Maryanne Daniel. UKA raised many interesting and valid points that I present to you below.

When is the insole being tested in real terms given that the RWC state that it will be ready for use in 2021?
What is the cost of the insole for participating athletes and race organisers?

We suggest that it is most likely that the majority of race walking events will not be able to afford the technology so how will this affect qualifying races and performances for major championships?

The introduction of such technology will as you suggest lead to a change in the rules of race walking but given that most races will not be using the technology does this mean that we will have two definitions for the one event?

Our bottom line is that there are so many unanswered questions around the RWECS that we feel that to rush it through would most likely lead to the introduction of something that we are not ready for. Maryanne Daniel raised numerous points that no one has yet thought of and who knows what the wider race walking community will think of.

Finally UKA express deep concern in the short timescale allowed by the RWC in seeking a response to their proposal and we worry that you are merely carrying out a tick box exercise and are already planning on submitting your proposals, signed sealed and delivered, regardless of any responses you may receive that may or may not support them. UKA truly hope that this is not the case and await your responses on the matters raised.

A superb letter, one of many that have been sent back to Luis Saladie.

My recommendation is unchanged.

- **Every single racewalking supporter (walker, parent, coach, judge, official, friend, follower) needs to email Luis Saladie at luis.saladie@iaaf.org. He needs to get thousands of emails, so many that he can't handle the response. Have you emailed yet? Have you spread the word to others? Are your family also emailing him? Are your friends also emailing him?**

Time for a Moratorium

In finishing, I reiterate the point I made last week.

The IAAF RWC meeting, held on Saturday 25th February 2017, voted YES to recommendations which were to be forwarded to the IAAF Council, effectively killing off the 50km in early 2018. The recommendations, developed in secret by the IAAF Race Walking Committee, were that

- The 50km event was to be deleted from all future World Cup/World Championship and Olympics
- The 20km event was to be discontinued, to be replaced by half marathon distances in all the above competitions

Luckily, these recommendations were defeated.

Sadly, the IAAF RWC continues to propose these or similar changes on an ongoing basis, choosing time and time again to ignore the wishes of the racewalking community.

It is now time for the IAAF Council to step in and give us some certainty and stability. We need a freeze on such propositions. Our walkers need to have some certainty regarding the 20km and 50km walk distances.

I propose a moratorium up to and including the 2024 Olympics, during which the 20km and 50km will remain our prime international events.

The outcome of this latest push is in your hands. Every person who reads this is urged to get involved, even if only at an individual level. This will only be stopped if we all work together in a common cause.

Yours in racewalking

Tim Erickson
Melbourne, Australia
terick@melbpc.org.au
Mob: +61 412 257 496