

The history of Olympic walking is fascinating and has undergone several evolutions, both in terms of technique and distance. The early editions were characterized by a certain lack of clear rules, which led to numerous irregularities and discussions about the correctness of the walking style.
In 1906, the first Olympic walking events were held in Athens under the aegis of the Olympic Committee, but they were subsequently no longer considered an official Olympic event.
Technical problems immediately arose there. These same difficulties still exist today, 100 years later. According to Olympic officials, poor technique and judgement significantly affected the 1,500-meter race, to the point that a rematch at 3,000 meters was added at short notice, judged by Constantine I of Greece.
The first official men's races were held at the 1908 London Olympics, with distances of 3,500 meters. and 10 miles. The 10,000-meter track race was introduced at the 1912 Olympics and continued until 1952.

At the 1928 Amsterdam Games, race walking was excluded from the Olympic program. Fortunately, the discipline returned at the 1932 Los Angeles Games with the introduction of the 50 km. This distance marked a milestone for race walking. The 50 km race took place at every Olympics through 2020, except for 1976, when it was briefly dropped and a World Championships was held in Malmö instead. The 50 km race was also the longest track and field event and one of the most grueling and challenging disciplines in the Olympic calendar. This ultra-long-distance race evaluates athletes' efficiency, endurance, and mental resilience, assessing their overall physical and psychological capabilities. I find it incomprehensible why it was excluded from the Olympic program with the introduction of an insignificant mixed relay event at the Paris 2024 Games. Given its limited success, it will not be repeated at the Los Angeles 2028 Games. Personally, I have always maintained that "walking begins where running ends", that is, after the marathon. Instead, the very distance that best represents our discipline has been removed from the Olympic and world stage.
The current men's Olympic records belong to China's Chen Ding, who won the 20 km at the London Olympics with a time of 1:18:46, and to Jared Tallent, who ran the 50 km at the London Games in 3:36:53.

Men's race walking at the Olympics has been rich with legendary figures: among them, Robert Korzeniowski is the most successful Olympic walker, having won the 50 km three times and the 20 km once.
Three other athletes have won four Olympic medals: Ugo Frigerio, three golds and a bronze in his first competitions; Volodymyr Golubnychiy, two titles in the 20 km, as well as a silver and a bronze; Jared Tallent, one gold in the 50 km, as well as two silvers and a bronze.
Four athletes have reached the podium three times: England's Webb, three second-place finishes in his first Olympic races; Germany's Weigel, twice second in both the 20 km and 50 km, and once third in the 50 km. Sweden's Ljunggren John, with one gold, one silver, and one bronze in the 50 km. and Italian Maurizio Damilano, first in Moscow and third in the two subsequent Olympics in the 20 km.
The small number of athletes who have medaled in at least three of the 49 Olympic events held over more than 100 years demonstrates the difficulty of excelling and standing out at the Olympic Games.

With eight Olympic appearances, Spain's García Jesús Ángel is the race walker with the most appearances. He made his debut in Barcelona 1992 and then competed continuously until Tokyo 2020.
Unfortunately, he never managed to reach an Olympic podium. His best result came in Beijing 2008 with a fourth place, after finishing fifth in the previous edition in Athens 2004.

Women's race walking made its debut at the Barcelona Olympics with the 10 km race. Subsequently, starting with the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the distance was increased to 20 km. As previously mentioned, as a further step toward gender equality in the Olympic program, the mixed team relay was introduced in Paris, without much success.

The official Olympic record for women in the 20 km belongs to Qieyang Shejie, who finished in London in 1:25:16. The Chinese athlete finished third there, but in January 2015, Kaniskina (second with a mark of 1:25:09) was disqualified and her Olympic silver medal was stripped. In 2022, the same fate befell Lashmanova (first in 1:25:02), who had her gold medal revoked 10 years after winning London. The two athletes were disqualified due to abnormalities in their blood or steroid profiles. Biological passport sanctions can be imposed even many years after the results achieved.
Due to the relatively short history of women's walking in the Olympic program (introduced only in 1992), there are no athletes with the high number of medals seen in other, longer-standing disciplines.

The most decorated athlete is China's Liu Hong, with three medals in five appearances. Liu has won one gold (Rio 2016), one silver (London 2012), and one bronze (Tokyo 2020). In the two 10 km races (1992-1996), Russia's Yelena Nikolayeva stands out, with one gold in Atlanta and one silver in Barcelona. Only one other athlete, Norway's Kjersti Plätzer, has won two silver medals (Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008).

Portugal's Ana Cabecinha holds the record for the most Olympic appearances. She participated in six consecutive Olympic Games, from Athens 2004 to Paris 2024, achieving a best result of sixth place in Rio 2016.
Representatives from all over the hemisphere have competed in Olympic events. The 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics held the record for the largest number of participants and nations. A total of 228 athletes representing 40 nations competed at that event (74 athletes in both the men's and women's 20 km events and 80 in the 50 km event).
The country with the most medals is Italy, with 10 golds, 1 silver, and 8 bronzes, followed by China with 7 golds, 3 silvers, and 6 bronzes. In third place is Great Britain, with 6 golds, 5 silvers, and 4 bronzes, all won between 1908 and 1964.

Twenty-nine nations have won at least one medal.
Walking events, being judged subjectively, have always sparked controversy and disagreements. Among others, I would just like to mention two editions that damaged the event and left a trail of discussion and anger.
In Sydney 2000, in the men's 20km race, Bernardo Segura was disqualified 10 minutes after finishing, after winning the final sprint against Poland's Korzeniowski.
In the women's 20km race, there were a considerable number of disqualifications for athletes who were leading the race at the time. The first to suffer the judges' decision was China's Liu Hongyu around the 14km mark; then it was Italy's Elisabetta Perrone, who was shown the red flag at the 17km mark. Finally, just before entering the stadium, the same fate befell host Jane Saville.

In Paris 2024, in the insignificant new mixed relay race, the final standings were heavily influenced by technical judgement. A simple examination of the finishing order shows that the top-ranked relay teams were those who had no issues with the judges. According to most experts, not all of them were certainly those with the cleanest pace to avoid being stopped.

The highest number of disqualifications for incorrect walking occurred in Rio 2016, where 24 competitors (6 in the two 20km events and 12 in the 50km event) were suspended. The highest number of disqualifications in a 20km race for violations of IAAF (now World Athletics) rule 230 occurred in Rome 1960, where 7 out of 18 athletes were suspended, 39% of the competitors.

A huge problem for the discipline has been the complication of posthumous disqualifications for illicit drug use, which have rewritten the rankings of some Olympic races.
The first posthumous disqualification occurred at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, where Spaniard Daniel Plaza finished 11th. then came Greece's Tsoumeléka, at Beijing 2008, who finished ninth, but the edition most affected by doping disqualifications was the London Olympics, where 12 athletes were suspended following positive doping tests.

In the men's 20km race, the following were suspended: Russians Andrey Krivov, who finished 37th; Valery Borchin and Vladimir Kanaykin, who did not finish the race, and Ukrainian Nazar Kovalenko, who finished in 27th place.
In the 50 km, disqualifications affected winner Sergey Kyrdyapkin; fourth-place finisher Igor Yerokhin; and fifth-place finisher Sergey Bakulin.
In the women's 20 km, the top two finishers Elena Lashmanova and Olga Kaniskina were excluded from the finish line. In the women's 20 km, the top two finishers, Elena Lashmanova and Olga Kaniskina, were excluded from the finish line. Fifth-place finisher Anisya Kirdyapkina, Turkey's Semiha Mutlu, and Ukraine's Olena Shumkina were also suspended.



