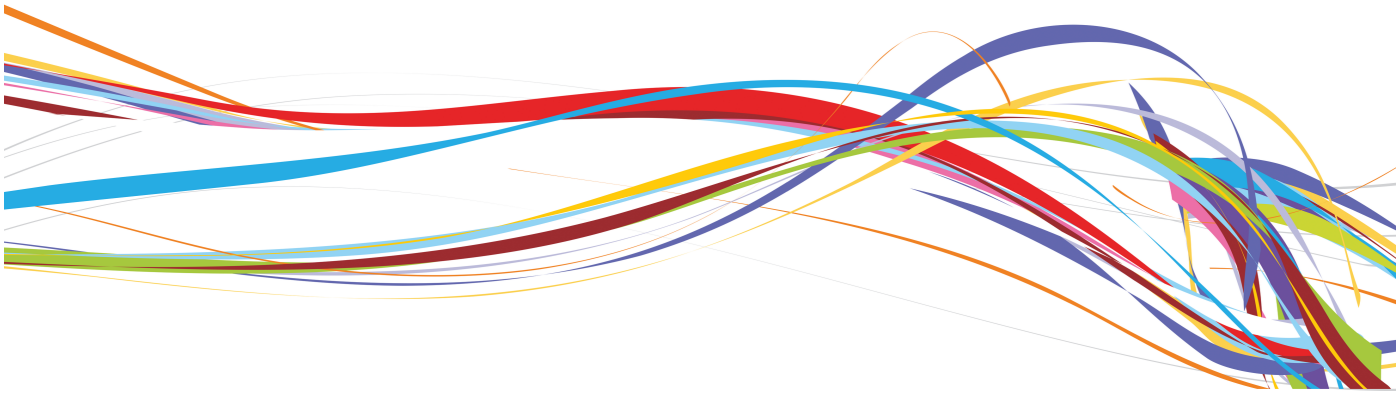


WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The World Championships in Athletics are organized by World Athletics, formerly known as the IAAF.
After the Olympic Games, the World Championships represent the highest level of international athletics competition.
In 1976, after the elimination of the men's 50 km walk from the Olympic program of the Montreal Olympics, the IAAF chose to organize its own World Championships, a month and a half after the Olympics. It was the first World Championships that the IAAF organized separately from the Olympic Games.
The official edition of the World Championships took place in Helsinki in 1983. Race walking has always been present, with the men's 20 km and 50 km races. Starting from the 2022 World Championships in Eugene, the 35 km was introduced in place of the 50 km.
The first three editions were held every four years (1983, 1987, and 1991), and from 1993 onwards, the cycle changed to a biennial cycle.
In 1987, the women's 10 km race walk was added to the official program in Rome. This distance was maintained until the World Championships in Athens, where the race was held on the track with heats and a final. From 1999, in Seville, the distance was increased to 20 km, a distance that remains in effect today. The 50 km race made its debut at the 2017 World Championships, with only seven athletes competing. The 2019 edition in Doha was held in difficult weather conditions and with a nighttime start. From 2022, the race was shortened to 35 km.

The men with the most medals, with four podium, are: Ecuadorian Jefferson Pérez in the 20 km (3 consecutive gold medals in the 2003, 2005, and 1 silver in 1999); Poland's Robert Korzeniowski in the 50 km (3 gold medals in 1997, 2001, and 2003, and 1 bronze in 1995); and Spain's Jesús Ángel García, also in the 50 km, winner of 1 gold (1993) and 3 silver medals (1997, 2001, and 2009). Three other athletes have won three medals, but all without a victory. These three walkers are: Spain's Francisco Fernández with three silver medals in 2003, 2005, and 2007 in the 20 km; Australian Jared Tallent, three silver medals in 2011, 2013, and 2015, and Sweden's Perseus Karlström, two bronze medals in 2019 and 2022 in the 20 km, and one bronze medal in 2022 in the 35 km. In addition to Peréz's three consecutive gold medals, two other athletes, both in the 20 km, have won consecutive gold medals. These are Maurizio Damilano, winner in Rome in 1987 and Tokyo in 1991, and Japan's Toshikazu Yamanishi, first in Doha 2019 and Eugene 2022. Spain's Alvaro Martín won both the 20 km and 35 km in Budapest 2023.

In the women's field, the undisputed dominator is China's Liu Hong, with five medals won, although some of those were due to the disqualifications of Russian athletes. Liu was second in Berlin 2009, then achieved three consecutive victories in Daegu 2011, Moscow 2013, and Beijing 2015. After a period of inactivity due to maternity, she again won gold at the 2019 World Championships in Doha and finished fifth in Eugene 2022. Another Chinese athlete with four medals is Qieyang Sheijie, who, however, has never won a gold medal. Second in Doha 2019, she won three bronze medals: in Daegu 2011 and Eugene 2022 in the 20 km and 35 km.
Two walkers have won gold in the same edition in the 20 km and 35 km: Peruvian Kimberly García-León in Eugene 2022 (Kimberly also won silver in the 35 km in Budapest) and Spain's Maria Peréz in Budapest 2023. Russian Olimpiada Ivanova also won two gold medals in 2001 and 2005.

The race walkers with the most appearances are: Jesús Ángel García, 13 appearances from 1993 to 2019, missing only the 2017 World Championships; Portugal's João Vieira, also with 13 appearances, continuously from 1999 to 2022. Behind them are Tunisian Hathem Ghoula and Canadian Tim Berret with 9 appearances.
In the women's field, the longest serving are two Portuguese with 11 appearances: Ines Henriques (from 2001 to 2023, missing only the 2003 edition) and Susana Feitor with 11 consecutive appearances from 1999 to 2011. Henriques's best result was the 50 km gold medal at London 2017; Feitor's best result was third place at the 2005 World Championships in Helsinki. After the Portuguese athletes, Russia's Yelena Nikolayeva is next with eight appearances. After competing in the first edition in 1987, she missed Tokyo in 1991. She then competed continuously from 1993 to 2005, winning a gold medal in Paris 2003 and a bronze in Gothenburg 1995. Spain's Maria Vasco also competed eight times, winning a bronze in the 2005 edition.

The best men's World Championships performances were recorded by Jefferson Pérez in the 20 km, who finished in 1:17:21 in Paris in 2003, and by Yohan Dinis in the 50 km, who stopped the clock at 3:33:12 in London. In the two editions of the 35 km, the best time was 2:23:14, set by Massimo Stano in Eugene 2022.
In the women's events, the best 10 km performance were achieved by Irina Stankina (42:13) in Gothenburg 1995. In the 20 km, the best performance was achieved by Russia's Olimpiada Ivanova, who stopped the clock at 1:25:41 in Helsinki 2005. In the 50 km, Portugal's Henriques won in 4:05:56, while in the 35 km, the best time was recorded by Spain's Perèz in Budapest with 2:38:40.

In the men's race, the most medaled nation is Spain with 17 medals (5 gold, 9 silver, and 3 bronze), followed by Italy with 10 medals (5 gold, 2 silver, and 3 bronze). Russia took third place with 12 medals (4 gold, 5 silver, and 3 bronze).
In the women's category, China took first place, with 7 gold, 7 silver, and 6 bronze. Russia finished second with 6, 1, and 2.

At several World Championships, there has been no shortage of controversy over disqualifications handed down by officials. Among others, I would like to mention those that occurred in the final stages of the 20 km at the 1993 World Championships in Stuttgart.

Mikhail Schennikov (Rus), who was in third place, was stopped at the entrance to the stadium; Daniel García (Mex), who was in second place, was disqualified 200 meters from the finish line; Bernardo Segura (Mexico), who was in fourth place, was stopped 50 meters from the finish line, while Walter Arena, who was in tenth place, was shown the red flag on the finish line. Further controversy arose at the 2007 Osaka Championships, where Francisco Fernández was reinstated after being disqualified in the final 100 meters of the race while sprinting past Hatem Ghoula. At the 2013 World Championships in Moscow, China's Wang Zhen and Guatemala's Erik Barrondo (Gua) were unexpectedly disqualified at the 14th and 18th kilometer points, while leading the race. The race was won by Russia's Alexander Ivanov, who was later disqualified for doping.
There was less controversy in the women's races. Only two events deserve mention. The disqualification of Sweden's Monica Svensson in the final lap at the 1993 World Championships in Stuttgart and that of Russia's Natalya Fedoskina in the final sprint with Italy's Elisabetta Perrone at Edmonton 2001 for the 3rd place.

There were also heated discussions over the decision to introduce the 35km instead of the 50km.
The 35km has proven, in these two editions, to be a race more in favour to 20km walkers than to 50km specialists. After all, any athlete who has competed in a 50km race knows the saying perfectly well: "The 50km starts after 35km, the real suffering begins after 40km".

Even at the World Championships, several rankings have been rewritten following doping disqualifications. The first posthumous doping ban occurred at the 1995 World Championships in Gothenburg, where China's Gu Yan, who finished eleventh, was removed from the rankings several years later for violating anti-doping rules. The same fate and the same procedure occurred at the 1997 World Championships in Athens, where China's Gu Yan was once again eliminated from the final rankings along with Olimpiada Ivanova, second in the 10,000 metres, and Spain's Daniel Plaza, tenth in the 20 km.
Since the 2009 World Championships, the list has grown considerably. In Berlin, Borchin (Rus), who finished first, was disqualified; Trofimov (Rus) and Dmytrenko (Ukr) in the 20km. In the 50km, winner Kyrdiapkin (Rus) was posthumously disqualified in the men's race. In the women's race, victory was stripped from Kaniskina (Rus).

Two other editions were decimated by doping bans. In Daegu in 2011, there was a veritable slaughter of eliminations.
In the men's 20km, the following were excluded from the finish line: Borchin (Rus) first; Kanaykin (Rus) second; Yemelyanov (Rus) fifth; Dmytrenko (Ukr) seventh; Morozov (Rus) twelfth; and Çelik (Turk) twenty-third.
In the 50km: Bakulin (Rus) first; Kirdyapkin (Rus) who did not finish the race; and Yerohkin, who had already been disqualified in the race.
In the women's race, disqualifications included Kaniskina (Rus) first; Kirdyapkina (Rus) third; Shumkina (Ukr) twelfth; and Mineyeva (Rus) seventeenth.

Another difficult moment for the event occurred in Moscow 2013, when Russian Ivanov, winner of the 20 km race, and Iranian Ebrahim Rahimia were disqualified in the men's race, while the other winner was Russian Ryzhov in the 50 km race.
The women's finish line was also affected by disqualifications. Russians Lashmanova and Kirdyapkina, first and second, were removed from the rankings; Ukrainian Shumkina came in nineteenth; and Kazakh Ayman Kozhakhmetova, twenty-seventh. The most recent suspensions for doping in world competitions were the Ukrainian Shumkina, who finished forty-second in Beijing 2015; and Ukrainian Igor Hlavan, who finished fourth in the 50 km race in London 2017 and again in London, Greece's Zapounídou, who had not finished her 20km race.

The edition with the highest number of participants was Moscow 2013, where 60 athletes competed in the 20km men's race; 60 in the 50km; and 62 women in the 20km. Moscow also held the record for the highest number of nations present, with 34 countries in both the 20km and 50km races, and 30 countries in the women's race.
The highest number of disqualifications imposed by judges for illegal walking were in the 20km races, Edmonton and Paris, with 9 disqualified. In percentage terms, Edmonton holds the record, with 9 out of 37 competitors disqualified, or 24%. In the 50km race, the dubious record belongs to the Paris race, where 15 out of 39 athletes were disqualified, or 39%. In the 20km race, 15 athletes were disqualified, or 39%. The most affected women's race was the Edmonton race, where 15 of the 42 athletes were stopped by the judges, 36%.
The races with the most retirements were the 20 km men's and 20 km women's races: the 1999 Seville race, with 7 retirements in both events; and the 50 km races, the 2019 Doha race (14 retirements) and the 1991 Tokyo race (12 retirements), both 50 km races held in extremely difficult weather conditions.

