INTERVIEWS WITH SOME ATHLETES

By Maurizio Damilano



MAURIZIO DAMILANO			
1	Olympic Games	1980	Moscow
1	World Championships	1987	Roma
1	World Championships	1991	Tokyo
3	Olympic Games	1984	Los Angeles
3	Olympic Games	1988	Seoul

Race walking has undergone a series of changes in recent years that have sparked a debate among athletes, coaches, judges, and enthusiasts.

Since this work by Sandro Damilano is dedicated to statistics, but also certainly steeped in the history of the discipline, I asked some recent champions of world race walking to share their thoughts on some of the key points that shape this debate.

The questions I asked them touched on current issues, the technical and organizational evolution of the discipline, and their personal feelings and memories.

Of course, these are the opinions of a few significant figures in the global race walking movement, but they can certainly help keep both the debate alive and the profound feelings of those who have practiced the discipline at the highest levels.

I think it's very interesting to see how the current vision of the discipline, and what it might look like for the future, varies depending on individual experiences. Ultimately, however, the passion and love everyone has for the discipline and what it has contributed to international athletics shines through. It can still be used as a reference tool for many young people, particularly given its ease of practice as a street discipline, but also its connection to the social fabric through a fun activity aimed at well-being, health, and sustainability.

Race walking has its own distinct identity, which has always characterized it, even through its race distances, marking it as the longest-distance event in the athletics program (the 50 km). It distinguishes itself from the world of running precisely through its use of different courses and distances. While it's true that official distances have changed over time, they have always sought to specifically define race walking within the context of other athletics disciplines.

The technical evolution of the sport has also affected race walking, and it would truly be a step backward in history if we didn't consider that this specialty also requires technological advances to ensure fairness in judging and greater understanding. Introducing technology to judging as much as possible using modern systems doesn't, I believe, reduce the importance of judging and the role of the judge, but rather provide them with a tool capable of reducing the subjectivity of interpretation and improving the credibility and understanding of the judging itself.

I have been fortunate enough to practice for over 20 years in top-level international competitions, and my dearest memories are of this world's ability to maintain unity and friendships that endure over time. Sporting rivalry often translates into sharing and unity in supporting the discipline in the face of often unrealistic and exploitative criticism.

While I recognize the current difficulties that accompany our sport, I am confident that its very popular nature, its close connection to walking—the most popular exercise, also as a tool for well-being and freedom of movement—can support it, helping to understand its truest nature.
I believe it isn't by assimilating it to the typical distances of another athletics discipline that we can help make it more understandable, but rather by ensuring that its values and natural uniqueness are best represented.
Race walking is a heritage that athletics cannot lose in a global sporting landscape that is increasingly focused on its diffusion not only as a competitive sport but primarily as a broader practice, capable of engaging an ever-increasing number of people and impacting the popularity and spread of individual sports.