

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **What Is Race Walking?**

*You're a what?* That's the typical response I get when I tell people I am a race walker.

If they have heard of my beloved sport, they don't know much about it. While race walking has been in the Olympic Games since 1904, the first evidence of a walking competition can be traced back to an Egyptian hieroglyphic record from 2,500 B.C. But the public image of race walking faces many challenges; chief among them are its lack of good PR and its unorthodox gait. Although many walkers believe their sport is on the rise, in the U.S. it seems to have a relatively small loyal following that maintains its base without much growth.

The small friendly community of race walking suits me just fine. As an injured runner in high school, I looked for an outlet for my competitive energies. The race walking community welcomed me with open arms. My first race walking experiences were all competitively minded. After a successful competitive race walking career in college, I joined the real world and focused on my non-athletic career. However, race walking remained a major part of my life. The many health benefits of race walking keep me walking, and in shape, to these many years.

Whether you're competitive-minded or interested in improving your health, race walking offers abundant opportunities for fun, fitness, and personal challenges.

### **Benefits for the Competitor**

For those who are competitive-minded, race walking provides opportunities at all ability levels. For the novice, many running races offer walking divisions, or you can try race walking against some of the slower runners in a local 5K or 10K race. More advanced race walkers typically gravitate to the many regional championships, national championships, and age group competitions organized by USATF (United States Track and Field). At the top of the competitive pyramid, elite race walkers strive to compete in international competitions such as the Olympics, World Cup, Pan Am Games, and the World Championships.

The elite of our sport race walk at incredible speeds. The world record for the mile is well under 6 minutes, while the longest Olympic distance of 50K (31 miles) is covered in less than 3 hours and 40 minutes. If you want to walk this fast then read on.

### **Benefits for the Health Conscious**

Race walking offers greater health benefits than most people realize. Forget fad diets; race walking helps you lose weight and keep it off. Race walking burns more calories per hour than pedestrian walking and more calories per mile than running at the same pace. It improves cardiovascular conditioning and muscle tone while increasing range of motion. All that, without the excessive jarring and stress caused by running.

Race walking involves major body movements, working your arms, legs, buttocks, and hips. More dynamic than pedestrian walking or running, which use roughly 70% of the body's muscles, race walking uses a whopping 95% of your muscles. Talk a little while you walk and you might get those last few muscles working too.

### **About the Book**

*Race Walk Like a Champion* is the culmination of 20 years of race walking, as well as the combined experience bestowed on me by my coaches and mentors. It picks up where *Walk Like an Athlete*, co-authored in 1996, leaves off. *Walk Like an Athlete* was aimed at the recreational race walker. *Race Walk Like a Champion* is focused on instructing the competitive race walker. However, whether you are a novice race walker or an elite competitor, *Race Walk Like a Champion* will provide all the information you need.

While race walking has not changed much since my first race walking book, the technology utilized to explain race walking has changed dramatically. Eight years ago, black and white computer graphics provided effective illustrations for *Walk Like an Athlete*. Today, however, the advent of digital photography—rivaling film-quality photos—and improved color-printing production facilities make possible professional, full-color photographic explanations of race walking technique and training. In addition, my own knowledge of expository writing has grown considerably. Since the publication of *Walk Like an Athlete*, I have written three computer science textbooks, while continuing my teaching career at Drexel University. Thus I have learned much about the art of precisely explaining seemingly complex concepts.

*Race Walk Like a Champion* is more than just a book. It's a complete package when you add the two accompanying DVDs. The DVDs take the printed pages of this text, expands them with over 100 training schedules, from 5K to 50K, and brings them to life in a complete audio/video presentation.

**Pedagogy**  
**Photographs**

The single most important element of this text is the use of full-color, high-resolution photographs and illustrations to demonstrate proper race walking technique. *Race Walk Like a Champion* contains nearly 400 photographs and illustrations to detail every aspect of proper technique as well as demonstrate common mistakes. The following is just a sample of the images used to clarify the meaning of the definition of race walking:



*Is this visible to the human eye?*



*Zoomed in view*

**Tips**

Throughout the chapter, coaching tips highlight key issues:



**COACH'S TIP**

While racing, opening energy bar or gel shot wrappings is difficult. Make sure you pre-open your carbohydrate source to save time and frustration.

**Warnings**

Common mistakes are highlighted in a warning box:



**COACH'S WARNING**

Never try something for the first time right before or during a race. Experiment with nutritional supplements, different foods, or electrolyte drinks during your training. What works for another athlete may not work for you.

**The Red X**

To insure you do not accidentally mimic the technique demonstrated in an image showing incorrect form, all incorrect figures will have a small red x in the upper corner.

**Spotlights**

Throughout the text, key contributors, publications and resources are highlighted via my spotlight breakout boxes:



**SPOTLIGHT ON**

**Team in Training (TNT)** is the world's largest endurance-sports training program in the world. I have had the pleasure of coaching and helping the program since 1994. Words can not express the sense of joy and accomplishment TNT brings to its participants.

TNT trains novices as well as seasoned athletes to participate in ...

