

March 2012

A VERY PEDESTRIAN SUBJECT – RACE WALK NOTES - George White

TRAINING

Like runners, all race walkers face a confusing task when trying to work out a training strategy. There are hundreds or thousands of different training routines. Your first task is to determine what you want to do. You may want to peak for an important race, you may just want to perform at your best during our weekly races or you may just want to keep fit. Other than for the last option, before you undertake a training program, be sure you have mastered basic race walking techniques. Too much racing before you achieve a solid technical foundation may lead to inefficient technique that will slow you down and/or get you disqualified.

Go Out and Walk

The most universally accepted training philosophy, if you want to be a successful race walker, is - you need to go out and race walk. Getting up every morning and crunching one hundred sit-ups or pumping out fifty push-ups will not improve your walking time as much as walking itself will. Specificity of exercise is the key to improvement. While other exercises help your race walking, nothing helps as much as race walking itself. Think of adding additional exercises as a catalyst for improving an existing race walking program, not as a program in itself.

Training is necessary for technique, endurance, speed, flexibility and strength. Over coming newsletters I will cover these topics and you can also refer to Peter Sandery's articles as many of the concepts apply equally well to running and race walking.

Whatever sort of training you do you must allow significant time for rest and recovery. This can be total rest, easy training or easy cross training. Remember however, if you race-walk a very easy day - your technique may suffer - so either just do a brisk street walk or cross train.

How you put together your training program depends on your goals but a mix of long, tempo, speed and recovery walks makes sense. To fit in enough recovery days it may be best to create a program over a 2 week period rather than one. If you are really serious about training for a specific goal, then it may pay to discuss a program with a coach.

Basic rules of serious training:

1. "Don't do what you are good at". This is too easy and will not lead to improvement. You need to do various types of training and stress the body.
2. No matter what sort of training is being considered - build up slowly. A 10% increase in any one aspect of training should be a weekly maximum.
3. Do not be a slave to your training program or weekly distance target. If you really don't feel like it, do something different or have a day off.

Technique

As mentioned above, you will not be a good race walker unless you conquer technique first. Inefficient technique costs energy – far more so than in running. The

smoother your style, the faster, more efficient and less injury prone you are likely to be. You are also more likely to be legal, and rightly or wrongly it will look more legal. If technique is right then you can use all your energy in going fast. If at the end of a race you say you could have gone faster but were concerned about the judging then your technique is not all it should be.

Body posture as covered in previous newsletter articles is the start in getting technique right. From there, good technique will be enhanced with the following.

Don't overstride! The further forward the foot plant, the more force required to lift the body up and over the front leg. Top race walkers today hit the ground no more than 30 – 40 centimetres in front of their centre of gravity.

Forward motion comes from pushing off with the rear foot. Keeping this foot on the ground as long as possible by rolling up onto the toe for push-off, maximises the leverage to propel you forward. Once the rear leg leaves the ground it is important that it is not passive i.e. you should not let the leg "swing" through but the knee should drive through aggressively at a bent angle of up to 90 degrees much like that of a runner. Towards the end of this movement you use your glutes and hamstrings to pull the leg back to plant the heel on the ground. This change in direction from the upper leg should automatically straighten the leg by virtue of the momentum in the lower leg.

Next time I will deal with the problems many walkers have with achieving best technique!