

## Walk Notes June 2012-05-09

### **DOES RACE WALKING GIVE YOU THE CREEPS? – DO YOU HAVE “ANIMAL” OR OTHER BAD HABITS?**

"Lifting" and "creeping" are the common terms used to reflect violations of the two rules of race walking: loss of contact (i.e. you are more or less running) and bent knee. Any or all of the following problems could cause an infringement of these rules.

#### **Duck feet**

Do your feet slap the ground like a duck? If they do you are probably in danger of bent knees. Weak shins or overstriding may cause this but wearing shoes with too much support may also factor. If you wear a shoe with a very thick heel the foot tends to flatten quickly, slapping the ground with every step and can also cause pain in the shins. Wearing a thinner shoe will reduce these forces and help with knee straightening – low heels or racing flats are a better option. Short bursts of heel walking will help the shins and so will heel raises standing with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of your foot off of a step.

#### **Overstriding**

Overstriding will lead to slower speed and possibly bent knees. As discussed previously the only element of a long stride that is good is that part of it behind the body. When the lead leg is thrown too far forward, the knee will often "break" to make heel contact with the ground sooner. Shortening the stride in front of the body will not only help eliminate straightening problems, it will also increase efficiency. Keeping the rear foot on the ground longer will make up for lost stride length in front of the body - and increase power. Do lots of quick step training and concentrate on the rear part of the stride to overcome it.

#### **Robot Legs**

Straight leg walking to ensure a straight knee on contact is not the right way to go. The leg coming through may be bent at up to 90 degrees. If you tend towards straight legs, try thinking about punching with your knee as you bring it forward.

#### **Bent knees in general**

The bane of masters walking! The cause may be deep rooted as we all lose flexibility with age, yet we try to maintain stride length and speed. Shortening your stride will help as well as quick step drills. Try bending your rear leg more as it comes through, and drive it harder to help straighten it. Stronger and more flexible hamstrings, quads, calves and lower back will all help.

The following may be useful in helping to insure a straightened knee.

1. The easiest way to help assure a straight knee on contact is to take a short stride i.e. plant the heel just in front of the torso. The farther in

front of the body the heel lands, the harder it is to insure a straight knee.

2. Regularly stretch the hamstrings (the large muscles on the back of the thighs) after the muscles are warm.
3. The knee should be straightened more through the normal swinging action of the leg rather than through the use of the quadriceps. Normally the upper leg will swing forward farther than required, and then begin swinging backward to meet the lower leg (with the knee then straight) just as the heel makes contact with the ground.

### **Don't wear your shoulders as ear-muffs**

Rigid shoulders carried high, limit arm motion and also impact the hips. Race or any other form of tension will lead to the shoulders rising. Try to relax and use the thought of your elbows being very heavy.

### **The "lean"**

A lean of more than 5% will cause all sorts of other problems. Especially, there should be no lean from the waist. This causes the centre of gravity to shift forward over the lead leg and when speed is increased, momentum collapses the knee causing the "creeps". The more you lean the more you will land flat footed and the more the rear foot will leave the ground without maximum push-off. Walk tall, don't look down and strengthen the back.

### **Swayback**

An inward curve of the back – generally caused by a tight lower back and weak abdominals – causes all sorts of follow-on problems in technique. Stretching and mobility exercises for the lower back, and abdominal strengthening are vital in overcoming this problem.

### **Horses Knees**

Prancing like a horse with high knee lifts can cause lifting even at a fairly slow pace. Concentrate on driving the knee and keeping the foot coming through, close to the ground.

### **Chicken Wings**

Excessive crossing of the arms may not lead to cautions or red cards but you might injure fellow competitors and it doesn't help your speed. Remember that the legs basically try to mirror what your arms are doing. Powerful, low and controlled, basically forward-backward moving arms that don't cross the centre line of your chest or go higher than your nipples, will help produce an optimum stride.