



Racewalking advice Bulletin board

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I have received a caution or a red card from
the judge, why?

Often you hear a walker say: *“I received a caution (or red card) but I don’t know why? Everyone else says my style is good.”* Or they say, *“The judges don’t like me, I always get a card but the photographs show that I am legal.”*

So the question is who is right, the walker or the judge?

The answer is both are right. The judge may have seen something that makes them think there could be a problem, while the pictures of the walker may show that they are legal for both knees and contact.

The following article is about what the judge may see to make them think there could be a problem that deserves a caution or red card.

The Rule

Let’s look at the rule relating to racewalking, rule 230 from the IAAF (International Amateur Athletics Federation) states:

Race Walking is a progression of steps so taken that the walker makes contact with the ground, so that no visible (to the human eye) loss of contact occurs. The advancing leg shall be straightened (i.e. not bent at the knee) from the moment of first contact with the ground until the vertical upright position.

Contact & Knee rulings

The rule can be broken into two parts:

Contact- this is where the walker must at some stage in the stride have both feet on the ground (known as the double support phase). It does not state that the walker must land on the heel or leave from the toe, but this is what is recommended.

Knee- this means the knee should be straight (not locked) from when the foot touches the ground until the leg is directly under the body. The following photos show correct knee and contact.



Figure 1: The first picture shows contact by both feet, the second shows a straight knee under the body.

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The contact problems

Below are some pictures that show athletes with a style problem that could lead to a caution or red card, however, the walker is probably legal.



Figure 2: Front foot too high

When the front foot is high, it is harder to get the foot down to the ground before the back foot leaves the ground. The problem here can also lead to a bent knee, as discussed in figure 11. The solution is to keep the foot low, to do this scrap the ball of the foot on the ground as the foot moves forwards.

Figure 3: Back foot too high

If the back foot comes off the ground too high, then the same problem will occur as discussed in figure 2. The leg should only rise to about 70°. The solution is to push off the toe as the foot leaves the ground, but the push should be forward using the ankle and toes, rather than just lifting the foot off the ground.



Figure 4: Arms are too high

If the arms are too high, the centre of gravity rises. This makes it more difficult to keep contact with the ground. Judges watching this may be unsure if the walker has a double support phase or loses contact. Solution to this is to drop the arms and have the hands at hip height, thus lowering the centre of gravity.



Figure 5: Upper body tense and shoulders too high

When the upper body is tense or the walker pushes the arms too hard, the shoulders tend to rise. This will lead to the centre of gravity rising, making it harder to lower the front foot before the back foot leaves the ground, similar to figure 4. Relax the upper body.



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Figure 6: Landing too far in front of the body.

If you try to push the front foot too far in front of the body, it will float above the ground as shown in the picture. As the back foot is almost ready to push off the ground, the walker may lose the double support unless the front foot lands in time. Judges watching may be unsure if the front foot lands before the back foot comes off, so they may give the walker a caution. The walker in the picture would have a double support phase but it would be short.



Figure 7: Good style, both feet on the ground.

To keep good contact and have a double support phase, land on the heel with the toe raised and come off the back toe. As the foot moves forwards, keep the sole almost parallel to the ground and close to it, have a slight forward lean, let the front foot land where it falls and keep the shoulder down and relaxed.

The knee problems

Below are some pictures that show athletes with a style problem that could lead to a caution or red card, however, the walker is probably legal.



Figure 8: A straight knee

What the judges look at is that the line going from the upper leg (quad) to the lower leg (shin) is straight as shown in the diagram.

The longer it is in the stride before the upper leg and the lower leg are in line, the more doubt the judges may have that you will not straighten the knee before landing.

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Below are some pictures that show athletes with a style problem that could lead to a caution or red card, however, the walker is probably legal.



Figure 9: Same person, first lands with a straight knee but it is not straight when under the body.

Pulling the toe up helps to keep the knee straight, but it is necessary to keep the toes up as the body moves forward over the foot, or the knee can bend as shown in the photograph.

Figure 10: Landing on a flat foot

If you land flat foot, the knee can bend as shown above. So even though the knee looks straight there may be some slight movement of the knee over the next ½ second. Holding the toe up works the thigh (quad) which straightens the knee



Figure 11: Front foot too high off the ground.

In figure 8, the line shows how a straight knee is determined; this picture does not have the upper and lower legs in line yet. The knee will probably be straight on landing but when looking at the knee from this point onwards, cautions may be given as the judge may be unsure if the knee straightened in time. Solution, scarp the ball of the foot as the leg moves through.



Figure 12: Knee too high.

Similar to above, a high knee lift leads to the front foot being held high as it moves forward. The lower leg also has to move forwards a long way and the upper leg has to move back to give a straight line between these two sections of the leg as shown in figure 8. Judges may/ may not see the knee bent as the foot lands and may be unsure if the knee straighten in time. Solution for this is the same as for figure 11. Try to walk with the hips not the knee.



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Figure 13: Leaning back

A walker should walk with a slight lean forward. By leaning backwards the foot will often be high as the leg moves forward. To get the foot to the ground, the walker must either drop the hip to drop the foot which is recommended, or they would slightly bend the knee so the lower leg can drop to the ground. If the second method is used, the judge may be unsure if the knee is straight on landing. Solution to this is to strengthen the core stabilizing muscles so there is a slight lean forward.

Figure 14: The trunk is not held upright.

When the trunk is not held upright, that is, the upper body has a forward lean more than 5%; then the pelvis may also have a slight forward bend. This causes a loss of core stability which may create the appearance that the knee is not straightened; the line is not straight from the upper and lower legs, as shown in the figure. The solution is to work on core stabilizing strength and overall posture.

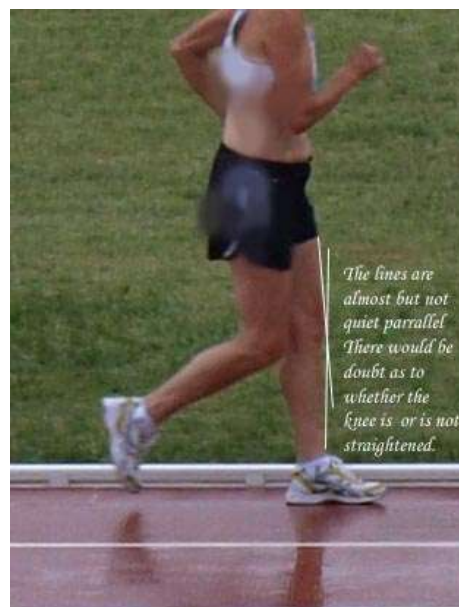


Figure 15: Walking too relaxed



When walking too relaxed, the walker may have arms that are straighter than the usually 90°, the core stabilizers are not working fully and the foot lands flat instead of with the toe raised. When these symptoms are all put together, the knee may not be straight as the leg moves under the body, as demonstrated in figure 9. The walker may not look like they are walking well and those watching maybe unsure if the style is legal or illegal. The solution is to work on posture, core stabilizing strength and to land on the heel with the toe raised and keep it raised.

The conclusion of what to do!

If you as a walker receives cautions or red cards then consider that there may be a problem with your style. If so, do something about it, it may not lead to disqualification but it could lead to one of the many overuse injuries walkers may suffer from. As to what should be done, reread the article as there are hints at each photo on what you could do to fix the problem or refer to my web site: www.racewalkingwithmark.com and look at the other articles for exercises and drills.

Good luck with the walking, however, whether you are just starting or have been walking for 30 years, check your style for problems.