

# VLAA RACE WALKING



WALK JUDGING & COACHING

## Handbook



FAMILY FUN AND FITNESS



VICTORIAN LITTLE ATHLETICS

“Front Cover photos supplied by Kids Klix”.

“Diagrams and photos used throughout the booklet have been gratefully supplied by Mark Donahoo, ATFCA Level 5 Coach & Race Walking Australia Liaison Officer”.

“Prepared by the VLAA Race Walking Committee“.

**A TRAINING GUIDE FOR WALK JUDGES**

Official Walking Definition	3
Contact	4
Knees	4
Rules for Judging and Disqualification	5
Cautions	7
Infringing Competitors	8
The Art of Judging	9
Loss of Contact – Faults and Indicators	9
Judging Hints	12
Procedure for Judging	13
Duties of the Chief Walk Judge	14
Judge Grading Levels	15
Do's and Don'ts of Judging	15
Code of Ethics for Graded Walk Judges	17

**FUNDAMENTALS OF RACE WALK COACHING**

Race Walking Rules	19
The Ideal Walker	19
Coaching	23
Training	23
Warming Up and Stretching	24
Teaching Techniques and Drills	24
The Start and Finish of the Race	29
Walking Mobility Exercises	30
Conclusion	33
Notes	34

# VLAA RACE WALKING

02

## **A TRAINING GUIDE FOR WALK JUDGES**

Walk Judging is essential to Race Walking. That is why we constantly need people to train, so that Walks can continue to be conducted efficiently at our venues in Victoria.

The VLAA Competition Rules must be adhered to for all Championships, including Region Heats. There may be procedures in place at venues governing the conduct of Race Walking events, but the principal definition describing the method of walking always applies.

VLAA Graded Judges have to attend lectures, pass exams, and prove their practical ability on a regular basis to retain their names on the VLAA Walk Judge Register.

Most importantly, Walk Judges must develop the ability to decide whether an athlete is walking correctly.

The International Amateur Athletic Federation has given us an Official Definition of Walking. This Definition seeks to make Race Walking and Judging uniform throughout the World. It is the same Definition everywhere – at all levels up to and including World Championships.

It is essential that a Judge knows and understands the definition of Walking, as it is the only basis for decisions when judging. Please read this Guide carefully, and learn and understand the definition.

## 1 OFFICIAL WALKING DEFINITION

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 must be straightened ( NOT BENT AT THE KNEE) from the moment of first contact with the ground until in the vertical upright position.

The I.A.A.F. Rule draws attention to the two vital phases in every Walking stride we term simply as 'Contact' and 'Knees'



**Figure 1:**  
Double Support – both  
feet on ground

**Figure 2:**  
Knee is straight until  
leg is upright

## VLAA RACE WALKING

04

### 2 CONTACT

The first stride is when the Competitor is transferring the body weight from one foot to the other. If the back foot is lifted before the front foot reaches the ground, this means that unbroken contact with the ground has not been maintained. So the rule has been broken. Therefore it is essential that the advancing foot be down on the ground before the rear foot is allowed to lift from the ground.

When both feet are on the ground at the same time, it is referred to as DOUBLE SUPPORT (Fig 1). The judge must see that this situation occurs at every stride – if only for a fraction of a second.

### 3 KNEES

In the fully forward position, the ADVANCING leg becomes the SUPPORTING leg. The rule requires that the leg be kept straight from the point of first contact with the ground until in the vertical upright position. (Fig 2) i.e. at 90 degrees to the ground.

What does “straight” mean?

The definition says “NOT BENT AT THE KNEES”

The supporting leg is the leg that must support the body as the trailing leg leaves the ground. It must be straight from its point of first contact with the ground until it is vertical under the body.

Note that having “Bent Knees” accounts for the largest number of disqualifications in Little Athletics walk events.

When must the leg be straight? From the point of first contact with the ground, until in the vertically upright position, i.e. at 90 degrees to the ground.

What does “straight” mean?

The definition says “NOT BENT AT THE KNEES”

What is the difference between the advancing leg and the supporting leg?

The supporting leg is the leg that is supporting the body. As it passes through the vertical it must be straight.

The advancing leg moves forward as it leaves the ground, until it again makes contact.

Rules relating to CONTACT & KNEES apply throughout the world to provide uniformity.

THESE ARE THE CRITICAL STAGES AND THE MOMENTS OF TRUTH FOR THE WALKER AND THE WALK JUDGE.

#### **4 RULES FOR JUDGING AND DISQUALIFICATION**

At Championships, the panel for each event will be set up by the Race Walking Committee representative. No more than two judges from one Centre will officiate in the same event. Centres and special event days will have their own rules applying to the appointment of judging panels.

If the organising body has not appointed a Chief Judge, the judges present shall elect one from among their number – who is usually the highest graded judge present.

All judges shall act in an individual capacity and must not discuss the legality of walkers while judging a race.

## VLAA RACE WALKING

06

The number of reports needed for disqualification depends on the number of judges available. When in the opinion of the required number of judges a competitor fails to comply with the Walking Definition during any part of the race, the competitor shall be disqualified by the Chief Judge after the race.

- 3 judges on the panel – 2 Reports;
- 4, 5, 6, or 7 judges – 3 Reports

When a judge forms the opinion that a competitor has failed to comply with the Rules, the judge must take the following action:

Make a REPORT. Provide the name of event, judge name, and competitor number and infringement type on the VLAA Report Form.

Inform the competitor in this manner – “No. 10, Report – Contact”, or “No. 20, Report - Knees”.

The call should be made as soon as the offence has been detected.

U11 – U15 age groups receive Non-Verbal Reports.

Note also that once a judge has reported a competitor for either (but not both infringements) he or she must not report that competitor again in that race.

Each judge must hand the completed Report Sheet to the Chief Judge or Assistant as soon as possible after the race has finished.

The Chief Judge shall then inform the competitor and the race recorders of the decision. Note that the Chief Judge is the only person that should inform a competitor of a disqualification, and the reason for it.

## 5 CAUTIONS

If a judge believes that a competitor is in danger of losing contact with the ground, or straightening of the legs is doubtful, the judge can give a CAUTION. The following must be noted.

A Judge may CAUTION a Competitor in an event for each offence. i.e. once for danger of losing contact, and once for doubtful leg straightening.

No Cautions are permitted in the last lap.

Cautions have no bearing on disqualification, however they should be recorded for the Judges own information. When informing a Competitor of a caution, the term CAUTION is to be used.

Inform the competitor in this manner – “No. 10, Caution – Contact”, or “No. 20, Caution – Knees”

If being used, paddles shall be raised to inform the walker, U13 – U15 only.

### **ALL age groups receive VERBAL Cautions.**

A Judge must not Caution an athlete who he/she has already Reported.

You do not have to Caution before you report.

You do not have to Report after a Caution unless you confirm the offence.

### 6 INFRINGING COMPETITORS

By an infringing competitor we mean one who is failing to comply with the Definition of Walking i.e. not maintaining contact with the ground or not complying with the leg-straightening requirements which we have discussed.

It is important to use the term REPORT when reporting a Competitor so that he/she knows. A REPORT means you will report the Competitor for disqualification. If you don't make your call clear, the Competitor may continue believing he/she is all right and is walking correctly.

If you speak out clearly using the word REPORT, the competitor will have time to correct himself/herself before reaching the next judge.

At times, it may be difficult or impractical to inform the Competitor at the point of the infringement. There may be noise (Public Address etc.) or the competitor may be too far from you and moving further away at every stride. In such cases inform the competitor at the next sighting – usually next lap.

#### **U11 – U15 age groups in VLAA Competition receive Non-Verbal Reports.**

Once a judge has reported a competitor, that judge must not speak to that Competitor again in that race.

When reporting (or cautioning) call the competitor's number first to attract his/her attention, then speak loudly so you can be heard.

At a VLAA State Final or Regional, there are normally seven (7) judges used, including the Chief Judge, but at Centre level there is often difficulty in getting judges. Three (3) judges should be considered as a minimum for satisfactory judging. Where possible a Judge's Recorder should be nominated to collect reports for the Chief Judge, even if they are blank. This helps speed up a busy program.

## 7 THE ART OF JUDGING

It is essential for a judge to be able to detect illegal competitors. i.e. those who do not comply with the definition of walking. This we will call “The Art of Judging” – an art that can require quite a lot of practice to achieve!

Although all walk judges are bound by the same set of rules, techniques will vary from one judge to another. Each judge tends to develop his/her own way of detecting the infringer.

## 8 CONTACT

First we are going to look at LOSS OF CONTACT: (Fig 3)

As mentioned earlier, the moment when the competitor may lose contact with the ground i.e. failure to have the leading foot reach the ground before the rear foot leaves the ground – is when the leading foot is about to finish its forward swing and contacts the ground.



**Figure 3:**

Loss of Contact – both feet off the ground at the same time. The rear leg has left the ground, before the advancing leg has made contact with the ground.

## INDICATORS OF LOSS OF CONTACT

### 10

These are not official terms, and are not found in the Rules. They describe the two basic faults that can cause loss of contact, and are an indication only of possible loss of contact.

**The Flat Footed Style** is caused by removing the rear leg too early in the stride. As soon as this occurs the body is not supported, so the leading foot must fall and drop short in front of the walker, or drop under the body in order to hold it up. This fault is observed by watching the leading foot, and when contact is lost the fall under or just in front of the body is observed.

Usually the foot lands flat. This occurs when a walker is attempting speed which he/she cannot control. In other words, the walker is exceeding his/her safe walking speed.

In some cases this infringement may be very clear, but it may occur for a few strides only, perhaps intermittently during the race, or only at the start or in a hard finish.

Do not be misled by a naturally short striding walker. It is what the leading foot is seen to do that is the indication, but the judgment is for the judge to make.

**The Overstriding Style** is indicated by an excessively long stride. The front leg is swung high and long and is still travelling forward clear of the ground when the rear foot leaves the ground. It is likely to occur when an athlete tries to increase speed, often at the start or in a desperate finish.

Do not be misled by a naturally long striding walker. There are several characteristic pointers, indicators or signs in a competitor's mode of progression. These indicators will serve to arouse your suspicion as a competitor approaches your judging position, and you will concentrate especially on that Competitor as he/she passes and make a decision one way or another.

**Head and shoulder bobbing**

The Judge suspects that the Competitor is dropping on to the leading foot because the back foot is being lifted while the leading foot is still in the air. As the body drops on to the leading foot and rises for the next stride, the body is seen to bob at each stride.

**The leading foot dropping short instead of landing out in front.**

The judge suspects that the back foot has been lifted when the front foot is off the ground and still travelling forward.

**Landing flat footed**

It is difficult to walk fast with flat footed landing without getting into the Flat Footed style. The Flat Footed style landing often makes a plopping sound.

**Leaning Back or Forward**

Leaning forward reduces stride length due to the pelvis being thrust behind the walker. The competitor's leading foot sometimes drops short and flat at speed and a flat footed run may result. Leaning back too far makes it difficult to get adequate stride length, and leads to the leading foot finishing its stride in the air and dropping back sharply even though often still landing on the heel.

**High Shoulders**

High shoulders usually lift the carriage of the body, which could cause the stride to finish in the air. As the stride has been completed, the back foot begins to leave the ground and the leading foot begins to drop often landing flat at excessive speed. It will be up to the judge to decide whether the back foot has been held down long enough.

### 9 JUDGING HINTS

At a distant view, watch for suspect modes of progression, but do not make a final decision until a close view of the competitor's feet is obtained. You wouldn't make a decision from the front straight of a competitor in the back straight, nor would you jump to a hasty conclusion of an approaching competitor on suspect alone. You would have to wait until the progression of the athlete can be observed clearly.

As the walker moves closer to you concentrate on one leg, following the movement of this leg stride by stride, concentrating mainly on watching the foot at the end of the forward swing. From the point of contact with the ground, the advancing leg shall be seen to remain straight until it is in the vertical position.

You may observe evidence of contact with the ground being lost by noticing the suspect signs from distance, but the final determination will be made by watching the FEET. So remember, that in the final determination, with all things considered contact or loss of it, can only be determined at foot level when the walker is near you.

There is no mention in the rules of having to lock the knee. Some athletes because of their build may do so, but all athletes must ensure that the advancing leg is straight from the first point of contact with the ground until vertical. ( Fig 4 )

How straight does the leg have to be? A good indication is the tightness of the skin at the rear of the knee. Each walker must be assessed for his /her ability to have a really straight leg – it's the firmness that counts.

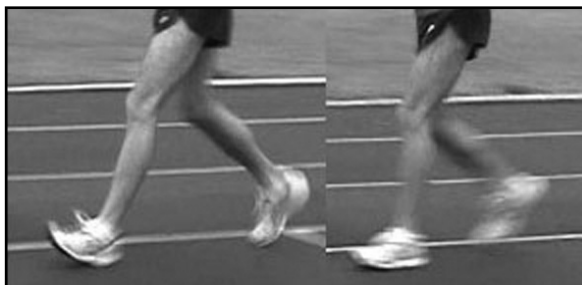


Figure 4: First picture shows a walker landing with a bent knee. The second picture shows a walker with a bent knee after landing but before the leg is in the upright position.

## 10 PROCEDURE OF JUDGING

Stand a reasonable distance from the walkers as they pass, preferably at the outside of the track. The best judging angle is from a point 45 degrees as the walkers approach you, to 45 degrees as they move away. Outside this zone you may form an incorrect opinion of the walker's style, and whether an infringement is occurring. In particular, you should avoid extreme rear judging or trying to judge from across the arena.

You should ensure that your view is not impeded by the raised edge of the track.

Don't encroach on the next judge's area

Don't walk more than a few paces either way and don't follow walkers or run alongside them.

## VLAA RACE WALKING

14

Keep your distance from a competitor unless you intend to issue a Caution or a Report.

The Official Rules do not allow a judge to report any other infringement.

Track Umpires and Referees shall perform the same functions as they do for other events, but must not adjudicate on walking rules.

### **11** DUTIES OF THE CHIEF WALK JUDGE

The Chief Judge should be present at least 30 minutes prior to starting time of the event. The Chief Judge should check that the track is correctly set up, and other officials are briefed on the conduct of the event.

Allocate each member of the judging panel a position on the track ensuring that the entire track is fully covered. At State Finals a minimum of two judges will be required at the start and finish of the event.

Prior to the event, the Chief Judge must identify himself/herself to the competitors and acquaint them with the judging procedure for the event. The Chief Judge PRE RACE TALK must be given. This should include reporting and cautioning procedures, race length, number of judges, and Rules of Walking.

Record Reports by judges on the Chief Judge Master Sheet, and determine the number of Reports, and the walkers to be disqualified.

Notify competitors and recording officials of any disqualifications. Be tolerant with the walkers and give reasons for disqualification.

## 12 JUDGE GRADING LEVELS

### **'A' Grade Judges**

Qualified to judge and act as Chief Judge at any level of competition.

### **'B' Grade Judges**

Qualified to judge at any level, and to act as Chief Judge at Region Heats and at Centres.

### **'C' Grade Judges**

Qualified to judge at Centre level and at Region Heats.

### **'D' Grade Judges**

Qualified to judge at Centre level.

All graded judges and Centre officials should endeavour to introduce new walk judges into their Centres. Often events cannot be conducted because of the lack of judges. It is important that graded judges assist newcomers to complete the 'D' Grade test. Lower level judges should seek a higher grading. This can be arranged through the Region Walks Co Ordinator.

## 13 DO'S AND DON'TS OF JUDGING

Don't believe that the proof of a good judge is in how many competitors he/she reports. If in doubt, give the benefit to the competitor. If you can't form an opinion, don't penalise the walker. Often the lower grade inexperienced judges are the harshest on a competitor. After an event, see how your reports line up with the other judges. At State level, it is not unusual for some judges to give no reports at all in a race.

A good judge can assist competitors who may be having some difficulty, by the sensible use of a Caution before an infringement actually occurs.

## VLAA RACE WALKING

16

Do not believe that most of the competitors are breaking the rules. Generally only a small percentage in each race will warrant a Report.

If you form an opinion either to Report or Caution, act at once. Don't hesitate or you may lose your confidence which may affect your later decisions.

Speak loudly so the competitor will hear you, but don't shout which may upset the walker or tell other nearby judges what you are doing. If the walker does not hear your call he/ she may continue on thinking all is well.

Do not prejudge. What a competitor may do in a race one day, he/ she may not do in the next.

Do not be influenced by outside opinion. Make up your own mind about each competitor. Don't be biased.

Judging is strictly individual. It is your opinion only as to whether the walker is breaking the rules.

Do not let your judging border on intimidation by running close behind a competitor. Move alongside for a few strides if you wish, but keep your distance unless you want to address the competitor.

## 14 CODE OF ETHICS FOR GRADED WALK JUDGES

This Code seeks to provide a basis upon which all Walk Judges under the jurisdiction of the Victorian Little Athletics Association can carry out their tasks effectively, efficiently and with dignity.

### **The CODE OF ETHICS requires the Walk Judge to perform the following:**

- Promote walking throughout the Victorian Little Athletics movement.
- Conduct himself/herself in a manner suitable to and in accordance with his or her position.
- Conduct lectures for the education and grading of judges. (Done by B Grade and above)
- Judge in any VLAA competition as allowed by grading.
- Officiate as a Chief Judge at State Championships. (A Grade Judges only)
- Participate in coaching clinics. (B Grade and above)
- Carry out the task of judging with fairness and integrity.
- Respect the decision of fellow judges.
- Aspire to be upgraded to a higher level.

### FUNDAMENTALS OF COACHING

This training guide has been prepared primarily to assist new walk judges gain a better understanding of walking techniques in Little Athletics. It is understandable that some coaches will use these notes as a basis for their coaching at Centre level.

Race Walking is a unique event, and those involved with it must be aware of what can cause an athlete to infringe the rules. They must then be able to assist the walker to rectify the faults. This is most important in Little Athletic ranks because during Saturday morning competition a good Centre will encourage its walk judges to combine coaching and judging especially in the first half of the season, gradually putting more emphasis on judging as the year progresses. Quite often Centres do not have a walk coach, therefore competitors and their parents will turn to the walk judge for guidance.

Knowledge of styles of walking is also very helpful when judging at serious events such as Open Days and during the heats and finals of the State Championships.

A good, properly trained walk judge should be able to offer some advice to the infringing walkers after the race. This may include some technique training or exercises to overcome the problem which caused the walker to lose contact or not abide by the straightening of the knee rule. In many cases this advice is sought by the parents or the children themselves.

The guide does not attempt to make coaches or walk judges overnight. It takes time studying, perseverance and a lot of patience, but we will endeavour to explain the fundamentals upon which a coach or judge can build on in the years ahead.

## 15 RACE WALKING RULES

There are only two rules of walking to be satisfied. These relate to maintaining foot contact, straightening of the advancing leg and an unbent knee. A walker cannot be reported for bad posture, not holding his/her arms correctly, or bouncing.

It is important, however, to be aware of the various errors in techniques, because experience shows that certain bad habits are apt to cause the walker to lose contact or to not be able to straighten the leg.

That is where some knowledge in coaching will keep the judge in good stead by being able to suggest some exercises or training techniques which will help to rectify the problem.

There are varied opinions describing the main difference between WALKING and RUNNING.

A walker is required to maintain continuous contact with the ground, whereas in running, both feet are off the ground at the same time.

## 16 THE IDEAL WALKER

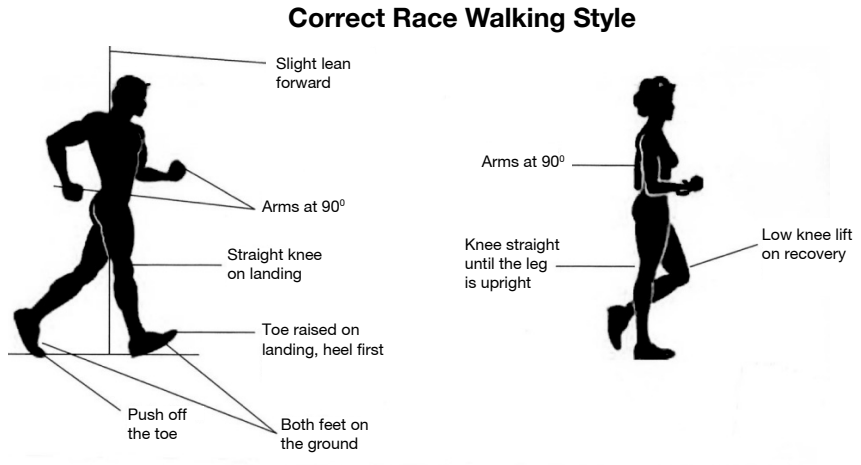
Children are all different with individual physiques and at various stages of development and corresponding level of strength. The task of the Coach is to develop each child's own technique within these assets or limitations as the case maybe.

From past experience and using the increasing knowledge of the anatomy of men and women, we have created a mythical "Ideal Race Walker". With this and the improving training techniques, coaches should strive to emulate this ideal walker in the children under their care.

## VLAA RACE WALKING

20

Ideally, the closer we get our athletes to emulate this “Ideal Race Walker” (Fig 5) the greater are the chances of success. It must be stressed again however, that this is not always the case, and that there are exceptions to the rule.



**Figure 5:** Ideal position of a race walker.

The pictures below demonstrate the Correct Walking Style with a straighten leg on contact and part of the foot in contact with the ground at all times.



**Figure 6:** The walker is demonstrating sound walking technique, the front foot strikes the ground, preferably on the heel, before the back leg leaves the ground. The leg is straightened on contact with the ground until it is in the upright position.

**The ideal walker should have:**

- An upright and relaxed carriage, not stiff, not leaning forward or backward excessively. A breakdown in technique can lead to a rule infringement. There should be no more than a 5 degree lean.
- The head resting squarely on the shoulders, not to one side or flopping around, so that there is no tension on the neck muscles.
- The hands should be slightly closed with the thumb resting on the fore finger; the thumb should be the uppermost digit, again so that there is no tension, this time on the arm muscles.
- The arms bent at approximately 90 degrees and not straightened during the race, and not bent and then straightened during the movement of the arms through the shoulders. Note that the arms play a big part in ensuring correct walking technique. Arms and shoulders are used to absorb trunk rotation caused by a powerful leg and hip action.
- The arm swing should be to the mid line of the body with the hands coming up to chest height. The backward swing of the arms should bring the hands down to the hip region.
- Flexible hips so that a fluent oscillating movement may be achieved to give length to the stride with a forward movement, and be able to drop to assist the leading leg to get to the ground quickly. If the hips sway from side to side the walker will reduce speed, shorten stride length, affect balance and arm action and may inflame the hip socket.
- To lift the knee just high enough for the action of walking to be carried out; too high a lift will only increase the time factor that the foot is off the ground.

### **The ideal walker should have:**

- The heel of the leading foot should make firm contact with the ground. This is important in assisting the leading leg to be straight at first contact with the ground, and be maintained straight until it is in the vertically upright position. This is a requirement of the rules of walking. Note that the advancing leg does not have to be straight as it moves forward.
- Both the leading and trailing leg should be straight at the moment of double support. (The time when both feet are on the ground together). This would achieve ultimate stride and there would be no danger of the trailing leg breaking contact too soon. But remember we are talking about coaching and no rule is infringed if the rear/trailing leg is not straight at the time of double contact.
- Teach your walkers to walk a straight line, thus gaining metres in a race.
- Excessive lifting or dipping of the shoulders will reduce speed and restrict arm action. A slight dip will occur towards the supporting leg in each stride. But this must be kept to a minimum.

## 17 COACHING

When coaching beginners it is very important to forget about speed and concentrate on technique.

The athletes will walk faster as their technique improves. The best way to begin is to let the children walk the normal way and gradually introduce the various techniques as listed. This should start with the movement of the arms, gradually introducing other techniques pertinent to the other parts of the body.

A coach must be wary not to bore the children and should keep the session interesting. If a child is slow in producing the required results for one part of the body – move on to another part, return to the original part at a later date. For the children to derive the most benefit, it is essential that a program be drawn up with as much variety as possible to eliminate boredom.

## 18 TRAINING

Proper training is essential. Whilst coaching is more involved in learning techniques, training is the acquisitions of stamina and speed, depending on the type of training undertaken. Normally a training program would involve the acquisition of both aerobic and anaerobic skills.

It is not always possible for the coach to supervise all the training sessions, nevertheless it is up to the coach to draw up the program and supervise at least some parts of it to ensure that the correct technique is being maintained. Alternate if possible between distance and speed work.

### 19 WARMING UP AND STRETCHING

Warming up prior to the coaching session, or any walk training is most important. This pre-requisite becomes more vital as the athlete reaches maturity. Therefore it is important to teach young athletes good habits from the start, explaining the reason why the warm up period varies depending on the age of the athlete.

There are many types of stretching exercises that can be taught. Some of these have been included at the rear of these coaching notes. (Walking Mobility Exercises)

One important point in the selection and usage of stretching exercises is to select those that will cover all the vital parts of the body, and then to alternate between the lower and upper part of the body during the warm up session.

### 20 TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND DRILLS

In this section there are lessons that are outlined with accompanying drills. These lessons are designed to develop in beginners a sound walking technique. The emphasis throughout the lesson is on maximising involvement and minimising inactivity.

#### LESSON 1 – WALKING POSTURE

The first lesson is designed to develop good posture in those walkers who do not already have it, and to reinforce good posture in those walkers that do.

Ask new athletes to do a lap using their normal street walking styles. This will show the coach what needs to be done to adjust and improve their techniques.

#### Points to look for

- Slumped or rounded shoulders or upper spine
- Bending forward from the hips
- Sway back

Walkers with any of these postural problems need a corrective drill.

## Drills

- Arms behind the back, clasp hands, push the backs of the hands against the hips, shoulders back.
- At this stage posture should be fairly correct.
- Now commence brisk walking, with arms behind back, pushing the hips into a forward position.
- If done correctly, the walker, when viewed from side-on will have the shoulder joint in a straight line through the hip joint, the knee joint, and the ankle joint.

## LESSON 2 – ARM CARRIAGE

In lesson 2 we introduce arm carriage. It is extremely important to develop the correct arm action, because arm action controls balance and speed, and can have a quite positive effect on stride length.

- Have athletes set their arms at 90 degrees. Modify any incorrect arm action such as:
- Arms held too high (acute angle) allowing action to come up into line with the neck region and allowing forward swing to cross midline.
- Arms commencing in the 90 degree angle, then dropping to 120 degree with the backward swing.
- Shoulder lifting, tension around the neck and shoulder area.
- Shoulders too rigid and head lifting too far backwards or forwards.
- Shoulder swinging forward too much.
- Forearms chopping downwards on the rear drive.

## Arm Drills

Arms high, one can also get athletes to walk with arms folded on chest.

# VLAA RACE WALKING

26

## LESSON 3 – LOWER BODY ACTION

The aim of Lesson 3 is to develop a good lower body action. Assemble athletes in a circle (with experienced role models in the centre). Emphasise that driving force should be applied along a straight line – the direction of the hips, knees and feet must always travel in a straight line.

Stand athletes with arms at 90 degrees, good posture, with feet 5 – 10cm apart. Now bend one knee and at the same time lift the heel of this leg, ask them to feel their hip drop and move forward toward an imaginary line, without their toe leaving the ground. At this stage, correct any athlete whose support leg and hip is not holding firm – the support hip must not be thrust sideways.

Now straighten this knee, bend the other knee and repeat the sequence. Keep this exchange going, emphasising the hips/knees moving forward towards a centre line and the arms moving rhythmical with the hip action, while breathing is controlled.

This is called “walking on the spot” and can be practiced at home in front of a full-length mirror where the athlete can get an immediate feedback of an incorrect action – and correct it.

## LESSON 4 – PROGRESSION

Commence with a “walking on the spot” movement as soon as the body weight is over the dropped hips, have the opposite foot push the body forward.

Stop when this step is taken and restart on the opposite leg. Ask the athletes to push hips, knees and feet along a straight line.

The next step is to supply sufficient speed only to omit the hesitation between each step.

**Points to look for:**

- (1) The sideways drift of the support hip.
- (2) Lifting the rear foot off the ground before the rolling action finishes at the toe drive.
- (3) Feet and hips landing in line with the shoulders.
- (4) Poor arm action.
- (5) Postural problems.

**Drills**

**To correct 1.** With correct posture, walk up a flight of stairs with only the toes on the steps, using vertical movement of the hips, combined with mobility and strength of ankles to climb the stairs.

**To correct 2.** Go back to the first part of this lesson – the stop-start action. Have the athlete concentrate on the rolling action of the foot while avoiding flickering the lower leg and straightening the knee too soon, as this forces early contact, pulling the support foot off the ground before the roll is completed.

**To correct 3.** Have the athlete walk along a marked line (eg, lane line). Work on improving their pelvic rotation. Correct any incorrect arm swing as this will also prevent straight line walking. All athletes should be able to travel down a straight lane line, with feet falling on the centre of the line, without looking down.

### TAKING CARE OF FLAWS

#### **Arms held too high**

Leads to lifting as the body's centre of gravity is pulled higher.

To correct this flaw, get the children to walk with arms folded on the chest or with hands grasped at the small of the back.

#### **Tilting the head too far forward or back**

This causes mainly fatigue, in addition if the lean is too far forward the trailing foot is pulled away too soon. To correct this flaw is to relax the neck and upper body.

#### **Walking with feet tracking two parallel lines turning the feet too far outward**

This practice leads to lifting because the correct heel-toe contact is not possible. To correct this flaw, walk with both feet coming down on a straight line viz: a lane marker on the track.

#### **“Goose Stepping”**

Walking with the thigh coming forward too quickly and the leg extended before touching down.

Correct heel-toe contact is not possible, and it may result in loss of contact.

#### **“Flat Footed Running”**

Landing with the forward foot flat instead of on the heel.

Correct heel-toe contact should be concentrated on. If not corrected this may result in loss of contact or not allowing the knee to be straight at first point of contact.

**Excessive backward or forward lean**

- These flaws can be corrected by walking with a pole held behind the back in the bend of the elbows. Stand with the forward foot in contact with the ground at the heel, trailing foot in lift-off position, in contact with the toe. Shift the body weight back and forth between the two.

**Insufficient hip rotation**

- The walker's stride is limited, and if speed is attempted a short stride inevitably leads to lifting.

To correct – exaggerated proper hip motion by overstriding and crossing over (drunken walking).

Sometimes a combination of two or more of the above is required, and it is only through perseverance and experience that the problem can be detected and corrected.

**21 THE START AND FINISH OF THE RACE**

The walkers must be trained to walk the full distance, maintaining the correct technique throughout the race. Many disqualifications occur at the beginning and at the end of the race. Teach them to walk each lap at the same time, increasing speed if possible on the last lap. Too many walkers come out of the start very fast and then fade away.

## VLAA RACE WALKING

30

### THE START

When the gun goes off, dig the heel of the front foot in hard so that positive contact is made, and depending on the position draw, decide on the best line to take to the inside of the track.

### Outside Draw

Stay outside until the scrimmage clears.

### In the Middle

Same procedure as above.

### Inside Draw

The hardest position of all. An all out effort must be made to hold the position.

### THE FINISH

The walker must maintain the correct technique until well past the finishing line, especially in a close finish. The competitors are tired and their technique starts to breakdown as they race to the finish line. It is easy to pick up 3 reports in the last 60 metres of an event, particularly for loss of contact.

## 22 WALKING MOBILITY EXERCISES

Before embarking on the following exercise program, coaches should make their own assessment of the ability of each child to safely carry out the exercises as described. In some cases, it may not be in the best interests of the child to attempt an exercise unless it can be modified to take into account some form of disability, or other limiting factor.

Coaches must also ensure that any exercise program to be delivered must be carried out in a safe environment, clear of obstruction and without risk to the health and safety of the children, or the adults involved in conducting the program.

**Appropriate exercises can be selected from the following list:**

Stand with feet together. Arms hanging by sides. Bend each knee in turn so that the hip drops. Brace the other knee back straight.

- with feet kept flat on the ground.
- with heels lifting from the ground.

Repeat above with arms bent at right angles driving as though walking. (walking on the spot)

Stand with feet together. Arms out to the side. Keep arms as still as possible while rotating hips slowly.

Repeat above with arms in walking position. Speed up rotation of hips and arm drive while keeping a good turn of hips. (not just a bottom wiggle)

Walk along a straight line.

Walk in a snaking path (snaking walk) across two lanes; then across one lane.

Snake walk using a straight line to guide you. Take two or three steps on either side of the line each time you cross it.

“The Drunken Walk” Walk slowly with shorter than normal strides, placing left foot to right side and right foot to left side of a straight line.

## VLAA RACE WALKING

32

Walk at varying speeds with arms folded behind back.

Walk with arms folded in front –

- held low
- at shoulder height

Walk with long strides, hands clasped in front of the body at shoulder level with arms bent at right angles at the elbows.

Repeat above while taking shorter strides, and with feet crossing either side of a straight line.

Walking with hands clasped and arms up straight over the head.

Repeat above with arms swaying from side to side in time with each stride.

Walk with arm out to sides, concentrating on hip rotation.

Walk holding one arm straight by side, while other is held at right angles to the body as though giving a turn signal.

Repeat above with turn signal arm rotating in an anti-clockwise direction.

Walk at moderate speed in a circle. Start with a large circle and make the circle smaller, keeping the stride long.

Keeping the stride long, walk in a figure-eight path.

Walk, swinging the leg through relaxed until heel touches the ground. Then tense the leg, keeping it braced as it drives the body forward.

## 23 CONCLUSION

Practice makes perfect. Athletes must practice and train to achieve their goals; likewise Walk Judges and Coaches should train and practice if they want to achieve a good consistent standard.

Train your eyes and minds to detect infringements of the rules, and to recognise the flaws which in most cases are causing the infringements.

It is important to act as a judge frequently, and to attend as many coaching sessions as possible. Listen to and watch the experienced walk judges and coaches. Ask them questions.

Finally, remember that as officials of the VLAA our main concern is the welfare of the children. We are, in association with their parents and teachers, moulding their characters and installing in them a sense of fun and enjoyment, fair play and sportsmanship.

