

GLOBAL EVOLUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN RACEWALKING DISTANCES, TECHNIQUE, PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: *This paper aims to present the evolution of racewalking in the global program, by highlighting the important phases from the technical point of view; competition distances deployment, the regulation, as well as increase performances in competitions. It presents the famous and recognized racewalking schools in various countries, which influenced the movement technique and overall development of this group of samples. This led to a wider participation in major competitions, as well as in highly trained athletes, solicitous in achieving great performance. Within this context, Romanian athletes perform in a particular style and thus contribute to the evolution of global racewalking program.*

Key words: *history, racewalking school, global performance, technique.*

1. Introduction

Racewalking is a unique athletics event, which combines technique and endurance, two key-ingredients that the athlete must concentrate on. Of course, strength and motility are important qualities and the athlete must possess a significant mental focus capacity and tenacity in order to maintain optimal physical shape.

Among the athletics events, racewalking stands out through its purpose and its aesthetic traits. Technique in racewalking is a very sensitive issue, as many athletes are being disqualified in major competitions, after years of training, because of inadequate technique.

One of the specialists in the racewalking technique, which studied the changes that

have occurred in these samples, is the Italian coach Armando Zambaldo. This is the one that followed the racewalking's evolution from its origins until today.

2. Material and Methods

For the purposes of the research approach was used the bibliographical study method, theoretical analysis and synthesis of information [3]. The primary method used in research was the historical method, which highlights various aspects of racewalking systems and schools, in their dynamics deployment [4].

3. Results and Discussion

According to Zambaldo, A. [5] the

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origins of racewalking can be identified ever since the origins of mankind when people were forced to travel long distances to support their living, without any assistance from mechanical devices which had not been invented yet.

Since the 15th century racewalking started to be performed in various shapes by various people, some even at a professional level, who accidentally or for some reason, sometimes by themselves, were travelling very long distances. The most famous of these people was the American Edward Payson Weston, who crossed the trans-continental route from New York to San Francisco (more than 6000 km) several times.

The first regulation for athletic racewalking is created and it separates racewalking from running events and the first British championships take place on the 23rd of March 1866 in London, on the Beaufort House track, covering a distance of 7 miles [6].

At the end of the 19th century in racewalking competitions athletes still had to travel very long distances and after this turning point distances over 50 km disappear from the international competitions as racewalking events. The only exception is the Paris-Colmar race, which covers 500 km even nowadays.

Racewalking began to be an event in the Olympics since 1906, with two very short-distance events: 1500 and 3000 m. The winner in the 1500 m event was the American athlete Bonhag with 7'12", and in the 3000 m event the Hungarian Stancsis won with 15'12".

In the Olympic Games held in London in 1908 the competition distances were: 3500 m and 10 miles. The medals for both events were won by George Larnier, with 14'55" in the 3500m event and 1h 15'57" in the 10 miles event.

In the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm most participants were Anglo-Saxons as well.

Still other European countries began to participate, among which Italy through Fernando Altimani (bronze medal in the 10 km event), the only racewalking event in these Olympics. The winner was a Canadian, Ames Goulding, with an excellent 46'28" which was the Olympic record until London 1948.

Competition racewalking technique was influenced by military marching.

A great period of Italian racewalking successes comes; Ugo Frigerio must be mentioned, who in the Anvers Olympics in 1920, aged only 19, won both racewalking events in the programmed: in the 10 km event with 48'06" and in the 3 km event with 13'14"; the same thing happens four years later in Paris, where he wins again the 10 km event in 47'49".

Racewalking competitions increased in number as well as the participants. Despite all this racewalking is excluded from the Amsterdam Olympics in 1928. Then it reappears in 1932 at the Los Angeles Olympics and the winner is the British athlete Thomas W. Green with 4h 50'10"; in Berlin in 1936 the 50 km event is won by the British athlete Harold Whitlock with 4h 30'41", Olympic record.

Up to the Olympics in Berlin the athletes from the Baltic countries are worth mentioning: Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, winners in major competitions.

Later the world conflict paralyzes all international athletic activities for more than eight years.

Sporting events begin again in 1946 in Oslo with the European Championship and the first places are won by Anglo-Saxon athletes. The news in these championships was: the re-introducing of the second racewalking event in the programme and the emersion of the new Swedish *school* which won both titles: for the 10 km event won John Mikaelsson and for the 50 km event John Ljunggren.

After the war the Olympic Games came

back to London; here both events took place and the winners were members of the Swedish school: Mikaelsson and Ljunggren. The nations that were spared from the war Switzerland and Sweden won 5 out of 6 medals.

The Olympics in 1952 from Helsinki were dominated by Giuseppe Dordoni. The Romanian athletes Paraschivescu and Baboie ranked 7 and 8 in the 50 km event in the Swedish competition. Helsinki was the place where the Soviet Union appeared for the first time and their team won the bronze medal (Brun Junk).

The technical elements combined from the three schools that existed in 1952 – British, Italian, and Swedish [5] – can be summarized as follows:

- *The British school*, very conservative, continues to make present the influence of military marching;
- *The Italian school*, through the amazing Giuseppe Dordoni, tries to improve their technique by executing longer steps, even if they were performing a military-like racewalking;
- *The Swedish school* makes the transition from the military marching technique to what shall be recognized as the future year's technique, through John Mikaelsson, the most technical racewalker at the moment.

In the Australian Olympics in Melbourne – 1956, the 20 km event was held on the highroad and the medals were won by the athletes belonging to the new Soviet school: Leonid Spirin, Antanas Mikenas and Bruno Junk. Here the Romanian athlete Paraschivescu ranked 14. The Soviet Union ranked 2 in the 50 km event. *The Soviet school* came with a new technique with new methods, their technicians sensing that the step length must be proportional to the athlete's characteristics. The 10th place was taken by the Romanian athlete Barbu.

In the Rome Olympics in 1960 the

Russian racewalking confirmed its leading position through Vladimir Golubnichiy in the 20 km event, and he was the most important representative of this school.

In the Tokio Olympics in 1964 Italy wins the Olympic title with their only representative, Abdon Pamich, in the 50 km event. The Romanian athlete Popa ranks 28. The 20 km event was again won by the British, through the fast racewalking of Kenneth Matthews who dominated from the start to the last step, setting a new Olympic record with 1h 29'34".

At the beginning of the 60s, the Swiss athlete Armando Libotte from Lugano, international referee and member of the racewalking Committee within the IAAF came up with the idea of a *team competition*, based on the two classic racewalking events: 20 and 50 km. at the end of the 70s a final stage of this competition was organized and it was officially called the World Cup.

In the Ciudad de Mexico Olympics the Russian athlete Vladimir Golubnichiy won again the gold medal in the 20 km event, followed closely by the local favorite Jose Pedraza. Romania ranked 9 through Leonida Caraiosifoglu.

At the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s *the German democratic school* started to stand out. During that period Peter Frenkel, Hans-Georg Reimann, Gerhard Sperling, Peter Selzer and Cristoph Hohne definitely dominated the competitions in Lugano and won many medals at the European Championships and Olympics. All these athletes of similar heights chose a technique based on frequency and on raising the center of gravity, where the hip movement was limited.

All these years the medals went to the great athletes of East (Democratic) Germany and of the Soviet Union, with few exceptions. These exceptions were called: Paul Nihil (British), who won the

gold in 1969 in Athens in the 20 km event, followed by the Romanian athlete Leonida Caraiosifoglu.

In the Munich Olympics, West (Federal) Germany wins its first gold medal in the 50 km event through Berna Kannenberg with the unbelievable time of 3h 56'11", the four hour threshold being conquered.

A few years before the Montreal Olympics, the Mexican racewalkers started to rise. Thus the *Mexican racewalking school* emerged. With the help of some European technicians, in a few years they managed to form exceptional racewalkers such as: Jose Pedraza, Roul Gonzalez, and Daniel Bautista. Through an open step, the center of gravity close to the ground, and a relaxed motion resulted from the joint mobility; they presented a completely different image from that of a runner. They even increased the length of the racewalking step due to an increase in the strength of the lower limbs and to an improvement in the joint mobility.

At first, this technique was enthusiastically accepted by the referees but when the Mexicans began to rank first in most competitions their adversaries started to take pictures of them and record their technique on cameras in order to observe the flying phase of their technique.

In the Montreal Olympics in 1976 the 29 km event was won by Daniel Bautista and the 50 km event by the Mexican athlete Bermudez with 3h 43'36".

The 50 km racewalking event was excluded from the Olympic programme but it was re-introduced in 1980 at the Moscow Olympics.

In the Moscow Olympics one of the Damilano brothers, with a technique based on frequency and hip motion, won the gold medal for the 20 km event.

Meanwhile, among debated disqualifications and dubious withdrawals, the olympic, world, and European titles were being disputed between Italy,

Mexico, Soviet Union, East Germany, and the new Spanish school.

The IAAF racewalking committee decided to adopt a *table*, expose it near the track, which would *announce the warnings and disqualification proposals* which went to the president of the jury. This table helped the athlete to find out the opinion of the referee commission on his/her racewalking style throughout the entire competition [6].

The Mexican supremacy lasted until 1984 in Los Angeles when Ernesto Canto and Roul Gonzales won the Olympic titles.

Through video recorders the technicians had the possibility to watch the racewalkers' technique and find the way to correct the mistakes.

The Seoul Olympics title in 1988 is won by the Czech athlete Pribilinec in the 20 km event and by the Russian athlete Ivanenko in the 50 km event.

In the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992 the titles are shared between Spain, Canada, and Italy in the 50 km event and between Russia, Mexico, and Germany for the 50 km event.

In 1996 in Atlanta in the 20 km event the winner was Perez from Equador followed by Markov from Russia and Segura from Mexico. In the 50 km event the gold went to Korzeniowski from Poland, followed by Russia and Spain. The Romanian athlete Bălan ranked 45 with 1h 29'41" (compared to 1h 20'07" first place). So it can be noticed that over the last years the medals have been divided among several countries indicating that performance develops in many countries in various geographical regions.

In Sidney Korzeniowski from Poland wins the medals for both events: 20 km and 50 km, with a relaxed, excellent technique, in a detached style.

In 2004 in Athens the 20 km event is won by the Italian athlete Ivano Brugneti, followed by the Spanish athlete Francisco

Fernandez and the Australian athlete Nathan Deakes. The second event, the 50 km race is won again by Robert Korzeniowski followed by the Russian athletes Denis Nizhegorodov and Aleksy Voyevodin.

In Beijing in the Olympic Games in 2008, in the 20 km event the podium is occupied by the Russian athlete Valery Borchin with a performance of 1h 19'01", followed by Jefferson Perez from Ecuador with 1h 19'15", and Jared Tallent from Australia. The gold medal for the 50 km event went to Alex Schwazer from Italy with 3h 37'09", the silver went to Jared Tallent from Australia, and the bronze to Nizhegorodov Denis from Russia.

In the London Olympics the 50 km event the Russian athlete Sergey Kiryapkin, double world champion in 2005 and 2009, was first to cross the finish line in 3h 35'59", and won one of the fastest races in the history of the discipline. Besides the olympic record set by the winner, the athletes in the following six places set either personal records, season records, or national records. The Australian athlete Jared Tallent repeated his Beijing performance by winning the silver medal in 3h 36'53". The podium was complete with Tianfeng Si from China who covered the 50 km in 3h 37'16".

Romania was represented by Marius Cocoran in the 50 km event who finished the race the 39th with 3h 57'52", career record.

The Chinese athlete Ding Chen won the gold medal and set a new olympic record in the 20 km event finals in the London Olympic Games. The 20 year old athlete finished the race in 1h 18'46", 13 seconds less than the last olympic record which belonged to the Polish athlete R. Korzeniowski in 2000 in Sidney. The silver medal went to Erick Barrondo from Guatemala with 1h 18'57", who also had a faster time than Korzeniowski's olympic

record. Barrondo managed to obtain the first olympic medal in the history of his country which participated for the first time in the most important competition on the planet in 1952. The podium was completed on the third position by another Chinese, Whang Zen who finished the 20 km race in 1h 19'25".

3.1. Emergence and Evolution in Women Racewalking

Women racewalking was ignored for a long time by the international athletics organisations. *The first official event took place in 1975* and was included in the olympic programme for the first time in 1992 in Barcelona [2].

The technical evolution of women racewalking all over the world proved that women have adapted themselves very well to this discipline and their physical characteristics allowed a whole series of facilitations due to their pelvis anatomy and to a better joint mobility.

In 1979 in Rouen takes place the first official competition between national teams from Italy, France, Great Britain, and Belgium, and in 1980 women racewalking is to be acknowledged by the IAAF.

The 1979 World Cup included a 5 km event and was won by the British athletes Fawkes and Tyson, followed by Gylder T. From Norway.

In 1981 the distance of the race remains the same, 5km.

Starting with 1983 the race distance rises to 10 km. World Cups, World Championships, European Cups maintain this distance until 1999. Usually the medals went to countries like: Soviet Union (Russia, after 1992), China, Spain, Sweden, Mexico, Australia, East Germany, Italy, Finland. In the European Championship in Split in 1990, the Romanian athlete Oprea ranked 22.

The first Olympic Games including women racewalking take place in Barcelona in 1992, with a 10 km event. The first place was occupied by the Chinese athlete Chen Yueling with 44'32" followed by the Russian athlete Nicolayeva Yelena and Li Chiunsiu.

Romania is present in the European Championship in Helsinki in 1994 with Norica Cîmpean (disqualified). After this year, the Romanian school of racewalking makes its presence felt more and more in international competitions.

In World Championship in Goteborg (1995) N. Cîmpean ranked 20 with 44'26".

The Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996 are won by the Russian athlete Y. Nicolayeva (41'49"), followed on the second position by the Italian athlete Perrone Elisabetta, and on the third position by Wang Yan from China. Cîmpean ranks 29 with 46'19".

In 1997 in the World Cup Romania is represented by Norica Cîmpean again, who ranked 17.

In the European Championship held in Budapest in 1998 a future member of the national and olympic team, Claudia Iovan, ranks 12 and Cîmpean is disqualified. In the European Cup in Dudince, C. Iovan ranks 3 (43'12"), Cîmpean ranks 12 and Daniela Cîrlan (junior) ranks 32.

In 1999 the official distance for the race rises to 20 km in women competitions as well. The first two places in the World Championship in Seville are occupied by the Chinese athletes, followed by Australia. Iovan C ranks 11.

The Mezőidő World Cup in 1999 brings major performances for Romanian racewalkers. *Cîmpean Norica ranks 3*, with a great performance of 1h 27'48", and Iovan Claudia ranks 6.

In the Olympic Games in Sydney (2000, the first olympic competition where race distance is 20 km) the winner is the Chinese athlete Wan Liping (1h 29'05")

followed by Norway and Spain. Romania enters the competition with two racewalkers: Norica Cîmpean, who deservingly ranks 6 (1h 31'50"), and Groza Anamaria on the 13th position.

In 2000 in the European Cup in Germany, Romania ranks 3rd in the team competition and gets the bronze medal with Cîmpean (rank 6), Groza A. (rank 10), and Cîrlan D. (rank 13) as members of the team.

In 2001 the World Championship takes place in Edmonton and Cîmpean ranks 6. The same year in the European Cup in Dudince Cîmpean ranks 6 again, followed by Isar Elena (14) and Budileanu Veronica (37). Cîrlan D. was disqualified.

In 2002 in the European Championship in Munich, Iovan succeeds in getting a very good position ranking 5 with 1h 29'57".

In 2002 in the Turon World Cup, the Romanian team wins *the third position for teams* with: Iovan C., Cîmpean N., Groza A. și Cîrlan D.

In 2003 in the European Cup, Romania ranks 9 with Cîmpean N., Cîrlan D., Groza A. Also in 2003 in the World Championship in Paris, Cîrlan D ranks 23.

In World Cup in 2004, Cîmpean ranks 13, Cîrlan D 15, and Romania wins a medal again.

In the Olympic Games in Athens the gold medal goes to the Greek athlete Athanasia Tsoumeleka, followed by Olimpiada Ivanovna from Russia, and Jane Saville from Australia. Romania is represented by Cîmpean N. (rank 25) and Cîrlan D. (37). Cîrlan withdraws from the 20 km competition and starts participating in the marathon.

In 2005 in the European Cup, Iovan (Stef - married) wins a well-deserved 4th place, and Cîmpean N. Ranks 15. In the World Championship same year Iovan C. ranks 8.

In the world Cup in 2006 Romania is represented by Iovan. C and Cîmpean N.

That year Cîmpean retires from the athletic activity.

The European Championship in 2006 is won by the Byelorussian athlete Ritya Turava with 1h 27'08".

The World Championship in Osaka in 2007 places Iovan on the 6th position, the gold medal being won by the Russian athlete Olga Kaniskina with 1h 30'09".

In 2008 Romania participates in the World Cup with Stef Claudia and Groza Anamaria.

In the Olympic Games in Beijing Anamaria Groza is the only representative for Romania in the 20 km event and ranks 24. The olympic title goes to the Russian athlete Olga Kaniskina, followed by Pltazer K. From Norway and Eliza Rigaudo from Italy.

In the 2012 Olympic Games in London the Russian athlete Elena Lashmanova sets a new world record – 1h 25'02". Claudia Stef finished the 20 km race 38th with 1h 33'56".

It can be noticed that women racewalking is more present and active in international competitions than men racewalking [1].

4. Conclusions on Racewalking History

It can be noticed that, over the past few years, the medals are being won by several particular countries, which indicates the event development and a specific increase in the performances in more countries from different geographical regions. Thus the global nature of racewalking events is emphasized and also the assertion possibilities of racewalkers in different countries of the world;

Technique improvement can determine racewalking to become an increasingly spectacular event, with more admirers every day. Racewaking competitions have become increasingly numerous, with an

increasingly growing number of participants, despite the fact that the effort has become more intense, almost to the human limit;

Racewalking events have become faster and faster and it is obvious that amazing performances have been reached as far as times are concerned; hence, for the 20 km event the world record is of 1h 16'43" and was set by the Russian athlete Serghei Morozov, and for the 50 km event the world record is also held by a Russian athlete, Denis Nizhegorodov with a performance of 3h 34'14".

The world record in women 20 km event was set in London in 2012, at the Olympic Games, by the Russian athlete Elena Lashmanova with an astonishing performance of 1h 25'02".

- Racewalking events have become faster and faster and it is obvious that amazing performances have been reached as far as times are concerned; hence, for the 20 km event the world record is of 1h 16'43" and was set by the Russian athlete Serghei Morozov, and for the 50 km event the world record is also held by a Russian athlete, Denis Nizhegorodov with a performance of 3h 34'14".
- In the feminine event the world record is of 1h 25'02".
- It can be noticed that, over the past few years, the medals are being won by several particular countries, which indicates the development of performance in more countries from different geographical regions. Thus the global nature of racewalking events is emphasized and also the assertion possibilities of racewalkers in different countries of the world;
- Technique improvement can determine racewalking to become an increasingly spectacular event, with more admirers. Racewaking competitions have become

increasingly numerous, with an increasingly growing number of participants, despite the fact that the effort has become more intense, almost to the human limits.

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