

50 km walk for women – here to stay!

According to the recent performance in Taicang, hopefully – that is true! Women proved not to be any less capable of walking 50 km than men. Starting with the participation – a healthy number of 32 female walkers were selected by their national federations to take part in the first official 50 km race for women in the history of World Team Race Walking Championships, and before even a full year passed from the introduction of the discipline to the IAAF World Championships. Surely, drawing any reliable long-term conclusions based on the single competition with limited number of participants (not qualified but selected) may be misleading. Nevertheless, the results of this short analysis of data from Taicang are interesting!

Women are strong and walking nicely!

On average, more women finished the race – 90,6% as compared to 83,1% in the male 50 km competition. Still, abandoning the race was not the main reason, with unusually low percentages for both men and women, most likely due to nature of this competition, whereby team standings provided additional motivation to finish the race. Only 5 (8,5%) male walkers DNF-ed, with even better outcome for women - just 2 (6,3%) were not able to get to the finish line.

In addition, it seems that women are biomechanically well adapted to the needs of 50 km race with only 1 disqualification and average 0,56 red cards for a female competitor, as compared to 5 DQs and exact 1 red card for average male walker. It seems that women need more experience in this endeavour while only 6 (18,8%) managed to achieve faster second part of the race, as compared to 16 (27,1%) in the male competition. Perhaps, even better is still to come in female race walking!

Outcome of the IAAF World Race Walking Team Championships, Taicang, PR OF CHINA 05 MAY 2018 - 06 MAY 2018

	Male		Female	
	Persons	%	Persons	%
Started	59	100,0%	32	100,0%
Finished	49	83,1%	29	90,6%
DNF	5	8,5%	2	6,3%
DQ	5	8,5%	1	3,1%
Red cards	59	100,0%	18	56,3%
Negative split	16	27,1%	6	18,8%
Finished within 10% margin	38	64,4%	15	46,9%
Result above 1150 IAAF points	12	20,3%	11	34,4%
Result above 1100 IAAF points	29	49,2%	17	53,1%

Let us try to evaluate the relative quality of the results using the IAAF scoring tables, although surely a small historical number of results for the 50 km female race walking caused a difficulty in calculating these tables. The outcome is rather surprising with 34,4% of the field (11) women scoring more than 1150 points as compared to only 20,3% (12) man. Also, at the 1100 points threshold women stand slightly better with 53,1% of competitors above that margin, as compared to 49,2% for men.

How many women can we expect in Berlin?

Well, according to the IAAF tables for now (23/5/2018), there are 21 women that met the European Athletics standard for 50 km walk (4:50) in 2017 and 2018, out of which 19 may compete with the 3-per-country rule. There may be additional entries through the alternative standard (1:39 for 20km walk), while also some women may choose not to compete or their federations may set stronger standards. However, should we witness (roughly estimated) 20-25 women starting 50 km walk at continental championships, it shall not be considered as a very low number, having in mind a short history of this event, proving once again that women are stronger than maybe perceived!

And what about Doha?

With the recently announced combined quota for the 50 km race walking within the IAAF World Athletics Championships in Doha in 2019, let us assume that the selection shall be based on the unique list of scores. We will try to make some constructions based on the Taicang results only. In the reality, ranking tables would be somewhat more complex with the average of 2 races counting, one 20 km result allowed, and bonus for placement in the high-level competitions. Nevertheless, it seems that women shall be able to get a significant share in the total combined quota. Out of 46 walkers in Taicang with the results score above 1100 IAAF points 17 are women; (slightly less than 37%), meaning that, within the framework of this very reduced and trivial analysis, we may roughly estimate that out of 60 walkers starting the 50 km race in Doha, some 22 could be women, if perhaps, Mr. DeMeester would have nothing to say and do regarding that. The quality of women racewalking in the 50 km distance shall not be neglected, with 38 names in the world list below the 4:50 Berlin standard Berlin, as compared to no more than 63 men below the 4:08 standard.

This way or another, a balance is not easy to find, while the number of 50 km male competitors in the previous WCs (54 in Beijing, 49 in London) may be further reduced to (estimated) 38. My personal opinion is that there is still time left for further analyses and perhaps increase of combined quota for the 50 km to 80-90 places would be the best solution to provide for not harming the male competition with incorporating this surprisingly strong and growing new women event

Krešimir Jurlin, Croatia

