

WHY TECHNICAL STANDARDS IS NEEDED IN ATHLETICS

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1. TECHNICAL STANDARDS

Technical Standards ensure that the sport is accessible to men and women of all age categories. It regulates the imbalances that exist as a result of all athletes not been the same gender or age.

Technical Standards are annually negotiated by Administrators and implemented by the Technical Officials as the need is identified by the Athletes and Coaches. The Technical Standards contain the following regulation factors:

1.1. Age groups in athletics

The use of age group categories in Athletics is one of the main reasons why the sport is so accessible. All ages from as early as 5 years old to a Master Athlete of 100 years and beyond can participate in athletics on equal ground.

In athletics all athletes in the same age group will compete against each other, e.g. athletes turning 15 this, will be competing against all other athletes also turning 15 this years. Athletes older than 15 years of age will not be allowed to compete against a 15 year old athlete in the same race because they are physically stronger.

The opposite however is true e.g. a 16 year old athlete may participate in a competition for 17 year old athletes. It is assumed that the 16 year old athlete is weaker than a 17 year old athlete and by competing against older athletes he or she will be at a disadvantage.

The range of age groups is broken down in groups identified as Senior, Junior, Youth, Sub-Youth and Masters.

1.2. Race distances

Due to the athlete's muscle composition and physical shape, some athletes will be more comfortable in participating in events ran over shorter distances, while other athletes will enjoy running longer distances.

The races distances vary from the 50m sprint to the marathon. The athlete who prefers to sprint will run the shorter races such as 50m, 100m, 200m, etc. The athlete who prefers endurance type races will run 1500m, 5000m, 10000m, etc.

1.2.1. Maximum Races Distances

During the growing phase of the child, the body shape and strength is continuously changing. The skeleton of a baby consist of soft cartilage at birth and become hard bone only when the athlete is an adult.

The cardiovascular system and hormonal systems of the child is not as developed as in the case of an adult and the energy systems are not as developed as that of an adult.

To avoid growth disorders in the child, the distances of races are regulated e.g. the 10 year old athlete will run a maximum distance 1200m on the track and 5km on the road as appose to the 10000m on the track and the marathon on the road for senior athletes.

1.2.2. Disparities regulations according to age and distance

To protect the growing child from overzealous coaches, parents and administrators, disparities (limitations) are defined to ensure that the athlete do not participate in events of which the weight or distance of the event are detrimental to the physical and psychological growth patterns of a child e.g. a 10 year old girl is not allowed to run against a 15 year old girl in track and field events.

1.3. Gender

Due to the difference between the physical strength and abilities of men and women, separate races are organized for men and women.

1.4. Weight categories of implements

Due to the difference in physical strength between men, women and children, the weight of the implement in field events varies e.g. in Shot Put the weight will be 7.26kg for men as appose to the 4kg for women, and 3kg for a 10 year old boy as appose to 7.26kg for men.

1.5. Height of equipment and distance between equipment

In hurdle races the ideal is for the athlete to run over the hurdles rather than jumping over the hurdles and avoid getting injured in the process. The height of athletes varies according to age. A child is much shorter than an adult.

To compensate for the difference in height of the athlete, the height of the hurdles, the distance between the hurdles, the distance of the total hurdle race and the amount of hurdles is regulated according the age of the athlete e.g. a 10 year old boy will run a hurdle race 70m long, the height of the hurdles will be 68cm and there will be 8 hurdles in the race and the hurdles will be 7m apart.

The hurdle race for senior men will be 110m long; the height of the hurdles will be 106cm, with 10 hurdles in the race, 9.14m apart.

1.6. The amount of events an athlete is allowed to participate in on one day is limited

To protect the growing child from overzealous coaches, parents and administrators, the amount of events an athlete can participate in on one day is limited to ensure that the strain competition places on the body of the young child is not detrimental to the physical and psychological growth patterns of a child e.g. the athlete is allowed to participate in only 2 middle and long distance events in one competition.

1.7. Starting Heights – Vertical Jumps

The capacity of an athlete to execute vertical jumps in one competition is limited to approximately 10 – 15 jumps. If no starting heights are set, as many as 30 jumps may be required to determine the winner which will be time consuming and not a true reflection of the winner's potential.

To avoid the athlete to be exhausted before the athlete has reach his or her full potential, the bar is set at a height that will limit the amount of jumps from the start to the finish of the competition e.g. if it is expected that the winner in high jump will reach a height of 2.20m, the starting height of high jump will be 1.80m.

1.7.1. Height increments – Vertical Jumps

The capacity of an athlete to execute vertical jumps in one competition is limited to 10 – 15 jumps. If the cross bar in vertical jumps is raised with too small increments, as many as 30 jumps may be required to determine the winner which will be time consuming and not a true reflection of the winners potential.

To avoid the athlete to be exhausted before the athlete has reach his or her full potential, the height increments will be 3 – 5 cm per round.

The height increments will be determined by the athlete prior to the competition, e.g. if the athlete expect to reach a height of 2.20m in the competition, the athlete may ask for a starting height of 1.80m. If the bar is raised with 5cm increments, the athlete will reach 2.20m after 8 jumps.

1.8. Colour coded equipment

The physical appearance of a 5kg Shot and a 6kg Shot is very similar. To ensure that the correct implement is used in the right age category, the implements are colour coded e.g. the 5kg Shot is painted green and the 6 kg Shot is painted blue.

1.9. Consistency in the list of events of a competition

The primary function of a competition is to identify and rate athletes according to their performances. Athletes that perform well will get the opportunity to compete at a higher level of competition. The events listed in the competitions at lower levels will be determined by the list of events in the competition at higher levels e.g. Provincial Championships. If the 100m for Junior Women will take place in a Championship, the competition leading up to the Championships will also offer 100m for Junior Women.

This arrangement is necessary to avoid subjectivity during the selection of teams for the next level of competition e.g. if competitions are ran over 50m but at the Championships a race over 100m will take place, selectors will have to guess which athlete is most likely to maintain speed for the additional 50m in the Championships.

1.10. Order of Events in a Combined Events Competition

Combined events were the cornerstone of athletics competitions in ancient Greece. Combined events consist of 5, 7, 8 or 10 events depending on the age or gender of the athlete.

To ensure consistency, the order in which the events take place, are regulated e.g. in the Pentathlon (5 events) the competition will start with hurdles, followed by Long Jump, High Jump and Shot Put and the competition will finish with the 800m race.

1.11. Cut of times for distance races

Elite male athletes can cover the 42.2km distance of a marathon in less than 2hours 10 minutes. An athlete that is not fit can take 5 – 10 hours to finish the marathon. For organizational reasons, the following must be taken in consideration:

- 1.11.1. The health of the athlete become at risk if the athlete is too long on the road. Due to dehydration, exhaustion, sunstroke, etc., organs such as the heart, lungs, kidneys, etc are at great risk the fail as a result of the strain been placed on the body and can put the athlete's life at risk.
- 1.11.2. The winners of the competitions needs to be honoured by awarding them with medals, prizes etc. The winners finish the race at least 3 hours faster than the slower runners. If the elite athlete has to wait too long for the prize giving, they will not be able to go home to recover and recuperate for several hours.
- 1.11.3. The road, on which the race takes place, can not be closed off for too long. The local community will object to this and may lead to the local government to refuse assistance for future races.

To ensure the smooth running of the event, and to limit the injury and health risks involved in running for a too long period of time, a cut of point is effective at the half way mark of 20km races and longer e.g. if a Race Organizer allows for 5 hours for a Half Marathon to take place, the cut of time at the half way mark will then be 2½ hours.

Athletes not at the half way mark 2½ hours after start of the race will not be allowed to continue with the race.

In distance longer than a marathon a cut of time will be effective at the finish line as well e.g. if the cut of time at the finish is 10 hours for a race over 80km, any athlete taking longer than 10 hours to finish the race will not be considered for placing in the race.

1.12. Starting times of long distance races

Races over long distances can take many hours to complete e.g. a marathon can take up to 6 hours to complete. If the race takes place in the heat of the day, especially in summer, the athlete will experience great discomfort because of the heat and humidity, and there is a strong possibility that the athlete will become ill or injured.

The starting time of the race is therefore predetermined to be at times more suitable to distance running e.g. at 06:00 or 18:00 when the temperature and humidity is lower.

2. THE FOLLOWING AGE RESTRICTIONS ARE APPLICABLE IN ATHLETICS:

2.1. SENIOR EVENTS: (16 years and older)

To be able to compete in a Provincial Senior Championships event, the athlete must turn at least 16 in the year of competition. The following exceptions are applicable:

- 20km Race Walk and longer - the athletes must turn at least 20 in the year of competition
- 40km Road Races and longer - the athletes must turn at least 20 in the year of competition

2.2. JUNIOR EVENTS: (19 years and younger)

- To be able to compete in a Provincial Junior Championships event, the athlete must turn at least 17 in the year of competition but must not turn 20 in the year of competition.
- At a Provincial Junior Championships, the Junior Athlete should not participate in more than 2 Track Event longer than 800m.
- The athlete should not participate in more than 3 events excluding the relay events at the mentioned Championships.
- At an International Junior Championship, the Junior Athlete should not participate in more than 2 Track Event longer than 400m.
- The athlete should not participate in more than 3 events excluding the relay events at the mentioned Championships.

2.3. YOUTH EVENTS: (17 years and younger)

- To be able to compete in a Provincial Youth Championships event, the athlete must turn at least 15 in the year of competition but must not turn 18 in the year of competition.
- At a Provincial Youth Championships, the Youth Athlete should not participate in more than 2 Track Event longer than 800m.
- The athlete should not participate in more than 3 events excluding the relay events at the mentioned Championships.
- At an International Youth Championship, the Youth Athlete should not participate in more than 2 Track Event longer than 400m. The athlete should not participate in more than 3 events excluding the relay events at the mentioned Champs.

2.4. SUB - YOUTH EVENTS: (15 years and younger)

- To be able to compete in a Provincial Sub-Youth Championships event, the athlete must turn at least 13 in the year of competition but must not turn 16 in the year of competition.
- At a Provincial Sub-Youth Championships, the Sub-Youth Athlete should not participate in more than 2 Track Event longer than 400m.
- The athlete should not participate in more than 3 events excluding the relay events at the mentioned Championships.
- At an International Sub - Youth Championship, the Sub – Youth Athlete should not participate in more than 2 Track Event longer than 400m. The athlete should not participate in more than 3 events excluding the relay events at the mentioned Champs.

2.5. PRIMARY SUB-YOUTH EVENTS: (6 - 13 years)

- To be able to compete in a Provincial Primary Sub-Youth Championships event, the athlete must turn at least 6 in the year of competition but must not turn 14 in the year of competition.
- The age difference of athletes participating in the same competition at a BA Sub Youth Event, must not be more than 2 years, e.g. athletes taking part in a competition for 13 year old athletes have to be 12 or 13 years of age.
- At a Provincial Sub Youth Championship, the Sub Youth Athlete should not participate in more than 2 Track Event longer than 400m.
- The athlete should not participate in more than 3 events excluding the relay events at the mentioned Championships.

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