

## **An Expanded Understanding of IAAF Rule 230.3a**

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**Introduction:** The creation of IAAF Rule 230.3a was a very important addition to the general rules of race walking. Rule 230.3a allows the Chief Judge to disqualify a walker in the last 100m of a race regardless of the prior number of red cards. Without this rule, a walker could literally run to the finish if he had no prior red cards and there were not three judges in the last stages to write a red card.

In fairness to the athlete that may be disqualified by Rule 230.3a that athlete is permitted to finish the race. This also means that the decision of the Chief Judge can be challenged under the provisions of IAAF Rule 146 "Protests and Appeals". The major difficulty facing the Chief Judge is the word 'obvious' in the rule. Generally understood, the Chief Judge is to be more lenient than he would be if he were one of the other members of the judging panel during the competition. It ('obvious') also requires that the Chief Judge be even more subjective, and have absolute conviction in his evaluation of the walker than at any other time in the competition.

In the following paragraphs I hope to more clearly define how 'obvious' is to be applied and how a Jury of Appeal should be required to review a protest to a Rule 230.3a ruling.

**Purpose of Rule 230.3a:** The Jury of Appeal in Osaka said, "...in its decision (it) noted that the purpose of Rule 230.3a is to prevent athletes from improving their position in the closing stages of the competition by obviously failing to comply with the mode of progression defined as Race Walking". I would add, even if the athlete did NOT improve his position but still obviously failed to comply with the mode of progression defined as Race Walking, and then Rule 230.3a should be applied. This may be important when a record is broken.

**What does 'Obvious' mean?** The worst-case violation of Rule 230.1 would be where the walker's mode of progression changed to that of a runner. In this case the change is, very specifically, to the biomechanical gait of a runner (support leg never straightens at knee), which is very different than that of a race walker. No doubt, this would be 'obvious' and is the most egregious violation of Rule 230.1. However, this should not be the sole determination of an 'obvious' illegal progression in the final 100m. We must not ignore the fundamentals of Rule 230.1, 'Definition of Race Walking'.

During the competition, the judges' responsibility is to evaluate the walkers' progression without consideration for any advantage gained. Poor technique may result in a Rule 230.1 transgression but may simply be inefficient walking and therefore not gaining an advantage for the walker. A bent knee infraction where there is no advantage may be when the knee having been straightened, then flexes before the vertical resulting in a breaking action. A bent knee advantage might be when the walker has a 'soft knee', which eases knee fatigue. Loss of contact that is not an advantage is when the walker has vertical movement that slows his forward speed. The loss of contact that results in an advantage (an increase in forward speed produced by an extended step length) is seen as 'straight-legged' running by the judges. This walker's 'gait' is still that of a race walker but is very much a candidate for a red card during the race.

Perhaps, in the final 100m any progression that results in a measurable advantage or is such that it is making a mockery of the rules is to then be considered 'obvious'; then Rule 230.3a is to be used and upheld.

**The Chief Judge and a Split Second Decision:** In a split second, the race walking Chief Judge is required to decide if a walker is 'obviously' in violation of breaking Rule 230.1. My proposal

is that his expertise provides him with the ability to decide if the walker is gaining an advantage and if so, apply Rule 230.3a. Is this officiating expectation different from that of officials in other sports? No. With television cameras following every move of athletes and officials it's not unusual to have the commentators conduct their own unofficial 'instant' replay. Not surprising, the official is usually correct. In some sports, an official review of a 'call' may be conducted if requested by the coach. In this instance, the official reviewer **MUST** be able to clearly see the play that is under review and the review of the play **MUST** also show that the official was incorrect in his 'call' in order to over rule his decision.

This is what is required in Rule 146 "Protests and Appeals". Paragraph 6, "The Jury of Appeal shall consult all relevant persons, including the Referee and Judges. If the Jury of Appeal is in doubt, other available evidence may be considered. If such evidence, including any available video evidence, is not conclusive, the decision of the Referee shall be upheld."

It should be required that the 'available video evidence' show, at a minimum, as clear a view of the infraction as the Judge had in making his call. Without this, no reversal can occur. Additionally, in any review, the Jury must have the capability to determine if an advantage was gained. It is unfair to the athletes involved and to the Judge making the call to have a review conducted by individuals that do not have this ability.

**An Example of an Advantage in Final 100m:** The following information and pictures are taken from a DVD provided by the Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) of the finish of the men's 20k championship in Osaka.

- Overhead view of last 50m, it runs in real time (same view as on IAAF web).
  - Shows that the Spanish walker is 10m behind the Tunisian walker with 50m remaining.
  - Shows the Spanish walker off ground for last 50m. No change of gait but clearly 'straight-legged' running.
  - Shows the Spanish walker stepping on steeplechase start line, the distance from there to finish line is 35.5m and is covered with 25 steps in 6.8 sec.
- Side view close up and in slow motion; last 9 steps.
  - Stop action shows Spanish walker off ground by 3 to 5cm. (Pic. 2)
  - Stop action shows Spanish walker gaining 20 to 25cm per step while displaying loss of contact. (Pic. 1 & 3)
  - Shows Spanish walker not straightening support leg before crossing finish line. (Pic. 4)

Based on 25 steps in the last 35.5 m, the Spanish walker gained between 7m and 8.8m over the last 50m while off the ground (violation of 230.1). At the finish the Spanish walker was 2 m in front of the Tunisian walker; this is a net change of 12 m in the last 50m. With a maximum gain of 8.8m off the ground, the Tunisian walker would have been at least 3.2m in front at the finish if the Spanish walker had NOT been off the ground. This is a clear measure of an advantage gained in violation of Rule 230.1 and easily a call for Rule 230.3a to be upheld. Furthermore, by covering 35.5 m in 6.8 sec. the Spanish walker's pace over the last 35.5m is 5.2m per sec. This is unreasonable considering that the Spanish walkers' pace for the 20km was less than 4.1m per sec. By comparison, this is a pace of 15:58 for 5000m where the world record is 18:07. This is clearly a closing speed advantage created by the loss of contact step gain.

How easy is this infraction to see? The human eye has sensitivity to movement of approximately 0.02 seconds. Anything faster is invisible to the human eye. With the Spanish walker at a minimum of 3cm off the ground, it takes 0.08 seconds for him to 'fall' back to the ground. When



including the time to rise to the 3cm, the total time off the ground of 0.16 sec is eight times longer than the minimum time to be visible; making it visible to the average untrained eye.

**Expectations of the Jury:** 1. Keep in mind the purpose of Rule 230.3a. 2. Use video that has at least as clear a view of the walker in the last 100m as the view of the Chief Judge. 3. Per Rule 146.6, the video must show that the chief judge was in error before reversing his decision. 4. The Jury evaluation must consider if the athlete in question gained an advantage in violation of Rule 230.1. 5. If all members of the Jury are not familiar with the rules of race walking, have a race walking expert on the Jury or in attendance. 6. Make the Jury secretary known and make transcripts available.

**Conclusion:** The purpose of 230.3a should not only consider if an athlete is improving his position but also improving his time. The extended understanding of Rule 230.3a must include the evaluation of the progression of the athlete in question and whether the athlete gained an advantage in violation of Rule 230.1. The disallowed progression that is to be considered 'obvious' must include 'straight-legged' running as well as a classic running gait. Video used by the Jury must show as clear a view of the infraction as the view of that of the Chief Judge. Lastly, remove the word obvious from the rule it adds unnecessary subjectiveness.

**For Consideration:** With the TBS DVD clearly showing that the Spanish walker gained a substantial advantage (in violation of Rule 230.1) during the closing 50m of the Osaka World Championship 20km race walk, one should consider Rule 119. Rule 119, Jury of Appeal, allows for the reconsideration of a Jury decision when "...new conclusive evidence is presented, provided the new decision is still applicable." A reconsideration and new decision would be applicable because it would be similar to finding an athlete guilty of a drug offense years after the competition and deleting him from the official result.



Picture 1. Toe-off. Arrow indicates where heel should make ground contact to comply with Rule 230.1.



Picture 2. Shows height of 3 to 5cm off ground. Arrow where heel should have made ground contact.





Picture 3. Heel contact. Arrows show distance gained in air of 20 to 25cm.



Picture 4. No leg straightening on contact with ground on last step.