

## Fostering Walking the Walk in Walking Football

Walking football emphasizes maintaining physical activity, social interaction, and enjoyment rather than intense competition. The rules may vary slightly depending on the specific organisation or body, but the walking requirement is a fundamental aspect of the game. It allows individuals to participate in a sport they enjoy while reducing the risk of injury associated with running and intense physical activity. Many players of the game forget this key tenant.

The key and obvious rule in walking football is that players must have one foot on the ground at all times, meaning that running is not allowed. This slower pace makes the game more accessible to people of various ages and fitness levels, including those who may have mobility issues. Leaning back helps your walking gait as does swinging your hips and bent elbows.

Policing the no-running rule in walking football relies on the cooperation and sportsmanship of the players, as well as the vigilance of the officials or referees overseeing the game.

Here are some common approaches to enforce the no-running rule in walking football:

- **Player Honesty:** Walking football relies on the integrity of the players. Participants are expected to adhere to the rules voluntarily and refrain from running. This spirit of fair play is crucial for the success of walking football. Many players forget this once the game starts.
- **Referee Enforcement:** Referees play a significant role in monitoring and enforcing the rules during a walking football match. They can issue warnings, penalties, or free kicks for instances of running. The referees should be well-versed in the specific rules of walking football and be vigilant during the game.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Before every game, organizers should conduct briefings to remind players about the importance of following the no-running rule. Emphasizing the benefits of a slower pace, reduced risk of injury, and the inclusive nature of walking football can contribute to players understanding and respecting the rules more.
- **Structured Tournaments:** Walking football tournaments should have a clear set of rules and demand consistent refereeing interpretation so there is a standardized approach to enforcing the no-running rule across different matches and teams.
- **Team and Player Accountability:** Teams and players should also take on the responsibility of policing themselves. Encouraging a sense of accountability within the teams is a quick fire way to foster a culture where players remind each other to adhere to the no-running rule.
- **Technical Measures:** In some cases, where possible, organizers could make use of video cameras to play back specific incidents which will highlight disputes or concerns about adherence to the rules.

Remember that the primary goal of walking football is to promote physical activity, social interaction, and enjoyment among participants. Emphasising these aspects and fostering a sense of camaraderie will contribute to a positive and inclusive walking football experience.

When policing whether a player runs or walks in walking football, it's essential to focus on specific aspects of their movements. Here are three things to look out for:

- **Both Feet Off the Ground:**
  - Watch for instances where both feet are off the ground simultaneously. In walking football, players should maintain contact with the ground at all times. Running typically involves a phase where both feet are in the air, and observing this can help identify rule violations.
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- **Pace and Stride Length:**
  - Pay attention to the overall pace of a player's movement and the length of their strides. Walking football is intentionally played at a slower pace, and players should take shorter, controlled steps. If a player is covering ground quickly with long strides, it may indicate running rather than walking.
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- **Changes in Speed or Intensity:**
  - Be alert to sudden changes in speed or intensity. Walking football is characterized by a constant and moderate pace. If a player starts moving rapidly, sprints, or displays bursts of acceleration, it suggests running. Consistently enforcing the rule against abrupt increases in speed helps maintain the intended low-impact nature of the game.

These observations can be effective in quickly assessing whether a player is adhering to the no-running rule in walking football. Clear communication from referees during the game and a constant focus on educating players about the importance of maintaining a walking pace contribute to a positive and fair playing environment.

Here are two very simple things you can do to actively promote your own walking gait:

1. Lift your arms up and bend them at the elbows - then swing these elbows and your hips from side to side as you walk.
2. Lean back when walking - promotes having one foot on the ground at all times and substantially diminishes the running gait.

Anonomous - a practicing referee.