



Athletics

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About the Tutorial

Athletics is a collection of sports that include competitions like running, throwing, jumping, and walking. In this tutorial, we will get to know the basics of athletics and discuss all the relevant facts and information about various different types of athletics and their culture.

Audiences

This tutorial is meant for all those readers who want to know and learn about athletics and/or want to participate in an athletic event. With the help of this tutorial, one can build his/her foundation on the sport with the help of this tutorial.

Prerequisites

If you have the spirit and passion for athletics, we guess there is no one holding you back. All that you need to have is a passion for the sport and eagerness to acquire knowledge on the same.

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1. Athletics – Overview

Athletics is a collection of sports that include competitions like running, throwing, jumping, and walking. The most common types of athletic competitions include track and field, road running, cross country running, and race walking.

The objective depends on what the sport exactly is. In races, the objective is to run from the starting point to the destination before the opponents do. We will get to know about the objectives in detail later in this tutorial.



History of Athletics

In the 17th century, a sport festival called the **Cotswold Olympic Games** came up in England which featured athletics in the form of **sledgehammer** throwing competitions.

Similar competitions like the **L'Olympiade de la Republique** were held in the revolutionary France. It is an early variant of the modern Summer Olympic Games. The major event of that competition was a running event with various ancient Greek disciplines.

In 1880, the Amateur Athletic Association or AAA was established in England as the first national body for athletics and it began organizing its own athletics competition every year called the AAA Championships.

The New York Athletic Club of the United States also started organizing national competitions called the USA Outdoor Track and Field Championships in 1876. These sports became codified and standardized by the English AAA and some other general sports organizations in the late 19th century like the Amateur Athletic Union.

In the Olympic Games in 1896, an athletic competition was included as one of the competitions at the quadrennial multi-sport event. At first, it was organized for men only. In 1928 Olympics, women's events were introduced in the athletics program.



The International Amateur Athletics Federation or IAAF is an international governing body founded in 1912 which changed its name as the International Association of Athletics Federations in 2001. The IAAF established a separate outdoor World Championship in 1983.

The first competitions organized internationally for athletes with physical disabilities (except for deaf), began in 1952 when the first international Stoke Mandeville Games were organized for the World War II veterans. These exclusively included athletes on wheelchairs which introduced the first Paralympic Games which were held in 1960.

Athletics – Categories

Athletics can be divided into five different categories:

- Masters Athletics
- Senior Athletics
- Under 23
- Junior
- Youth

In the Masters of Athletics group, age groups spanning five years for athletes aged 35 and above are put. In senior athletics, there is no upper age limit but younger people competing in endurance events have some limitations. Under 23, as it suggests, athletes under the age of 23 are put. Age groups under 20 are kept in the junior group and under 18 are in the youth group.

2. Athletics – How to Play?

According to the International Association of Athletics Federations, athletics includes the following disciplines:

- Track and Field
- Relay Races
- Field Events
- Road Running
- Race Walking
- Cross Country Running
- Mountain Running

All these forms of athletics are individual sports except relay races in which athletes participate in a team.

Track and Field

The track and field competitions came up in the late 19th century and typically athletes who represented rival schools and colleges, military organizations, and sports clubs participated in it. Athletes participated in one or more events according to their choice and favored sport.



In these events, men and women compete separately. These are played in indoor and outdoor formats. All the indoor competitions are held in winter while the outdoor events

are held in summer. Therefore, the name, track and field competitions was defined by the venue of sport.

A variety of running events are held on the track and are categorized according to distance:

- Sprints
- Middle-distance
- Long-distance

Some combined events like decathlons are organized for men and heptathlons for women, where the athletes compete in various track and field events.

The prestigious track and field competitions are held within athletic championships at multi-sport events like the Olympic Athletics Competition and World Championships. The Paralympic Athletics Competition and the IPC World Championships are also organized.

These track and field events have become the most prominent part of the major athletic championships. Many famous athletes come from the world of sports to this discipline.

Relay Races

In relay races, there are four runners in each participating team. When the race starts, the runner has to run to his milestone where he has to pass the baton to his teammate and then he will pass on to the next teammate, with the aim of being the first team to finish.

Running events with hurdles and steeplechase are variations of the flat running themes where the athletes must clear all the obstacles on the track during the race.

Field Events

The field events include jumping and throwing competitions.

Throws

In throwing events, the athletes have to throw an instrument like javelin, discus etc. and the distance to which the instrument is thrown will be measured. Events like shot put, discus throw, javelin throw, and hammer throw are throwing events.



Jumps

There are mainly four types of jumping events:

- Long jump
- Triple jump
- High jump
- Pole vault



In long jumps and triple jumps, jumps are measured by the distance to which the athlete has jumped. In high jumps and pole vaults, the measurement is done according to height up to which an athlete has jumped.

Road Running

In road running competitions, the athletes have to run long distances on roads which are conducted on course of tarmac roads or paved roads. Most of these races finish in some track of a stadium. The most popular form of this event type are marathon races.



These can be of any distance, but mostly are classified into marathon, half marathon, 10 km, and 5 km races. The marathon races are only one of these events which are held at the IAAF World Championships in Athletics and also in the Summer Olympics.

Half marathon races are held in the IAAF World Half Marathon Championships annually. The marathon races are the only running event held in the IPC Athletics World Championships and in the Summer Paralympics.

The five most prestigious marathon races at the elite level are conducted in the World Marathon Majors series which include the Berlin, Boston, Chicago, London, and the New York City marathons.

This road running sport originated among the male servants who ran alongside the carriages of the aristocrats in the 18th century, and also the people who ran errands for long distances for their masters.

The first modern marathon was held in the 1896 Summer Olympics and this event led to the growth of road running competitions into yearly events like the Boston Marathon, the Lake Biwa Marathon, and Fukuoka Marathons.

Race-Walking

Just like it sounds, race-walking is a form of competitive walking which takes place in the open air – on roads and on running tracks as well. Race-walking is the only sport in athletics which is judged on the basis of the technique used by the athletes.



The athletes must have one foot on the ground with the other advancing leg straightened as to not get an advantage by running a little bit. If the advancing leg is bent at the knee, the athlete is disqualified from the race.

Race-Walking Competitions

The common race-walking events are 10-kilometers, 20-kilometers, and 50-kilometers on roads. In indoor tracks, 3-kilometers race-walking is held for women and 5-kilometers for men.

The topmost level of race-walking competitions is held at the IAAF World Championships in Athletics and also at the Summer Olympics. Race-walking also has its own major competition called the IAAF World Race Walking Cup held since 1961.

In the seasonal competition of the IAAF World Race Walking Challenge, the athletes earn points regarding their performances in the ten selected race-walking competitions. The highest scoring athletes enter into the year's IAAF Race Walking Challenge Finals.

Cross Country Running

This is the simplest and the most naturalistic sport in athletics. Cross country running events take place in open air courses over surfaces like grass, woodland trails, and normal ground. It can be held either as an individual or as a team sport.

Runners are judged based on their individual performance and points-scoring methods are used in case of teams. These races are held over long distances, as of 4 kilometers or more in the season of autumn and winter.

The first recorded instance of an organized cross country competition was the **Crick Run** in England, in 1838. Then it gained popularity in British schools and then in American schools in the 19th century. This popularity led to the formation of the International Cross Country Championships in 1903.

Many cross country competitions are held in Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. The cross country competitions were held in the athletics program of the Olympics from 1912-1924, but they are no longer held at the Olympics ever since. However, it is still present as one of the events in the modern pentathlon competition since the Summer Olympics of 1912.

There are various forms of cross country running like mountain running, fell running and orienteering.

Mountain Running

Mountain running also known as Fell Running and Hill Running where racers race with each other off road. The participants must have mountain climbing skills in order to participate in this race. Mountain Running has some common characteristics with cross country and orienteering. In comparison to cross country running, the race courses of mountain racing is long and steep. In comparison to orienteering, the courses are longer but steepness is less.

The participants shall have the capability to navigate the mountains as choosing the route and determining poor weather condition can increase time to reach the destination. In most races, route is published and runners can observe the route which helps them to complete the race in less time. **Trail racing** is a type of mountain racing in which the course is easy to follow.

3. Athletics – Venues

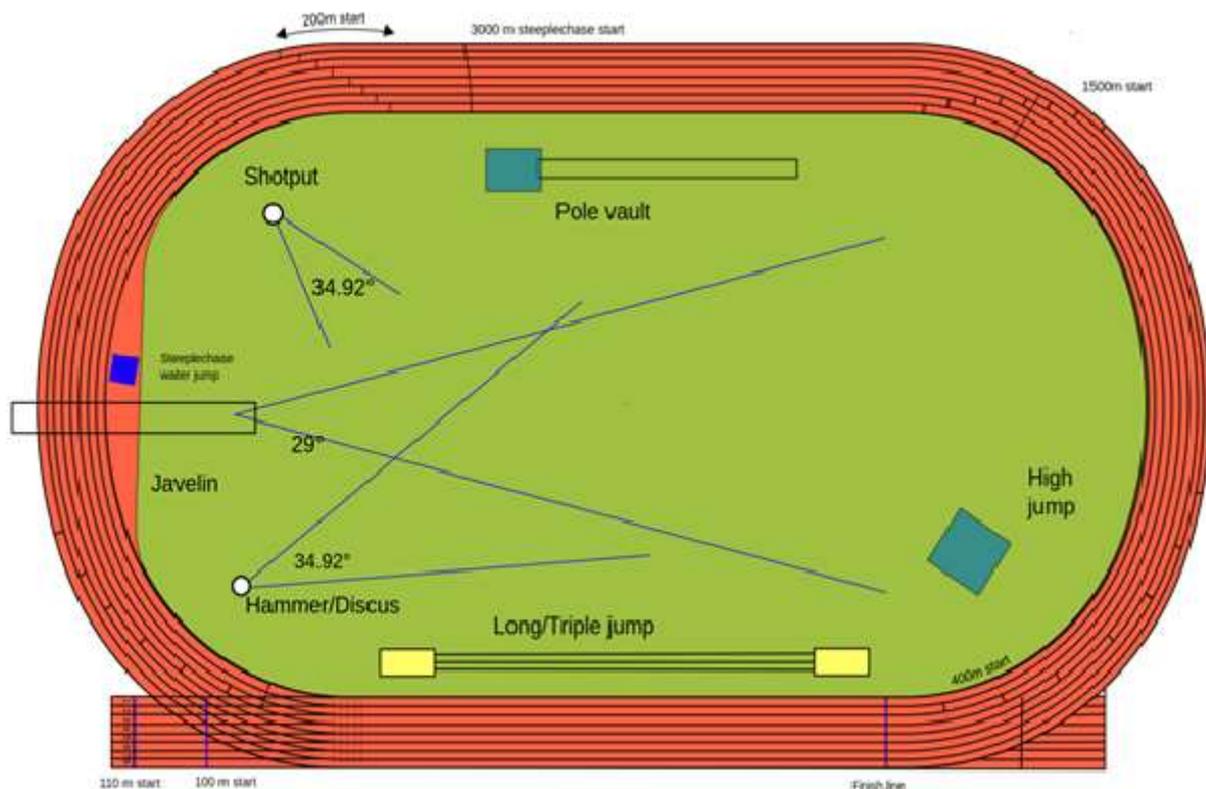
The professional athletic competitions almost always take place in either of these venues:

- Stadiums
- Grass courses
- Woodland
- Road-based courses

These venues ensure that all the athletic events that take place in a standardized manner, improving the safety of athletes, and the enjoyment for the spectators.

Track and Field Stadium

A standard outdoor track for athletic races is in the shape of a stadium which is 400 meters in length, and has at least eight lanes. Each lane is about 1.22 meters wide. Earlier, the tracks were covered by a dirt surface. The modern all-weather running tracks are covered by water-resistant synthetic running surface.



The indoor tracks are designed quite similarly to that of outdoor tracks, but these tracks are only 200 meters in length and have about four to eight lanes with each 0.90 meters to 1.10 meters in width. The bends of these indoor tracks are banked to make up for the smaller turning radius.

There is a 160-yard indoor track at Madison Square Garden used for the Millrose Games of athletics.

Cross-Country Courses

The cross-country competitions are held at venues which have long distance courses for running. As these are performed in open air and over long distances, the courses are heavily dependent and affected by the environment. The natural obstacles, tight turns, and irregular surface make it challenging enough.

In the professional and elite levels of cross-country races, the courses have to be looped. Each lap has to be at least 1750 meters to about 2000 meters in length. All natural and/or manmade obstacles like deep ditches, thick undergrowth etc. must be completed on foot throughout the course.

Road Courses

According to the IAAF, all the courses must be along man-made roads, bicycle paths, or footpaths. The traffic has to be cordoned off the roads during the competition. These races might start and/or finish at a track and field stadium.



These races can either be looped or from point to point, depending on the area and the organization. The athletes have to cover the distance of 5 km to 10 km. There are medical professionals alongside at certain points for taking care about the health of participants of long distance running.

4. Athletics – Championships

International Association of Athletics Federation

The international governing body for athletics is the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) which was founded in 1912. The organization was initially known as the International Amateur Athletics Federation but changed in the late 1970s as to remove the word amateur from the name and focus on professionalism.

The IAAF currently has 213 member nations and territories which are divided into six continents – Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania, North America, and South America.

All the sports which come under athletics do not have their own independent governing bodies at international or continental level, rather all fall under the athletics authorities:

- **AAA** – Asian Athletics Association
- **CAA** – Confederation of African Athletics
- **CONSUDATLE** – South American Athletics Confederation
- **NACACAA** – North America, Central America and Caribbean Athletic Association
- **EAA** – European Athletics Association
- **OAA** – Oceania Athletics Association

All these organizations are responsible for regulation of athletics within their respective countries. The major competitions have a form of permit from their respective national body.

Competitions

The athletic competitions are divided into three types:

- **International Championships** – In international championships, athletes who represent their country or region compete with each other.
- **National Championships** – National championships are endorsed by a national governing body which decides the best athletes of the events for the country.
- **Annual meetings and races** – Annual one-day meetings and races are the basic level of competition. They are often invitational and organized by sports organizations, sports promoters, and other institutions.

Olympic Games

The first event of athletics in a global arena was held at the Summer Olympics in 1896. The four major sports of athletics have been featured in the Olympic athletics program since its very beginning in 1896. However, the cross country races have been dropped out the program.

The competitions of the Olympic are the most prestigious athletics contest as they are the most watched events of the Summer Olympics. There are a total of 47 athletics events held at the Olympics, in which 24 are for men and 23 are for women.

Paralympics Games

The Summer Paralympics are organized for athletes with a physical disability. Competitions of track and field, and road events have featured the Paralympic athletics program since its origin in 1960. This competition is the most prestigious athletics contest for the physically challenged.

Athletics events like **wheelchair racing** are held in which the athletes compete in lightweight racing chairs. A sighted guide is provided to the visually impaired contestants. In 2012 Summer Paralympics in London, medals were given to the guides for piloting in cycling for the first time.

International events for athletes with physical disabilities are held since 1952. The International Paralympic Committee is responsible for the competitions in athletics, and hosts the Paralympic Games for the physically challenged since 1960.



In the elite level competitions, the competitors are classified by their disability so as to keep the athlete with similar disability in the same event. For example, a T12 classified athlete is visually impaired, so all visually impaired participants will be kept in T12.

The following is the order of classification for physically challenged:

- F – Field athletes
- T – Track athletes
- 11 to 13 – Visually impaired, they compete with a sighted guide
- 20 – intellectual disability
- 31 to 38 – Cerebral palsy
- 41 to 46 – Amputation and athletes with dwarfism
- 51 to 58 – Wheelchair

In wheelchair racing, the athletes compete on lightweight racing chairs. Most of the major marathons have separate divisions for people on wheelchairs and the elites consistently beat the runners who were on foot.

The speed of the wheelchair can, and has caused issues for the race organizers as they cannot properly stagger their start times as compared to runners. There was a case of collision of wheelchairs between Josh Cassidy and Tiki Gelana at the 2013 London Marathon.

World Championships

The primary global athletics championships are held by the IAAF called the IAAF World Championships in Athletics. This features an event program quite identical to the Olympics. Athletics like road running, race-walking, and track and field are featured in the competition.

Although cross country running is not held at the World Championships, it has its own discrete global championships called the IAAF World Cross Country Championships. These cross country championships have been held annually since 1973.



IAAF Championships

Exclusively for track and field events, there are championships by the IAAF called as the IAAF World Indoor Championships in Athletics. There are IAAF World Half Marathon Championships annually as the foremost separate road running event.

For race-walking, there is no world championship status but the IAAF World Race Walking Cups fills in the job for race-walking. The outdoor track and field is the only sport which is not competed globally as a championship but has its own genre made by the IAAF called as the IAAF Continental Cup.

The IAAF Continental Cup is made for the sole purpose of outdoor track and field events. There are other world championships like the IAAF World Junior and World Youth Championships in Athletics, for the athletes who are under the age of 19 and 17, respectively.

Commonwealth Games

At the Commonwealth Games, athletics is one of the sports which gets quite a lot of attention along with other major events. It has been in the Commonwealth Games since its inaugural edition, the 1930 British Empire Games.

5. Athletics – Champions

There are many events held in athletics like races, jumps, throws, and many more. Some of them to mention are races, marathon, long jump, high jump, triple jump, javelin throw, shotput, discus throw and many more. Some athletes take part in one event only while others take part in multiple events. Here is the description of some of them.

Usain Bolt

Usain Bolt is a runner from Jamaica who has made records in 100m and 200m races. Along with these, he has also set record in 4 x 100m relay race. He has won six gold medals in Olympics. He has won 100m and 200m races consecutively in 2008 and 2012 Olympics.



In addition, he has won 200m race in 2013 World Championship. Bolt started his career in 2004 from Carifta games at a junior level. Previously also, he has won many races at junior level.

Dai Greene

Dai Greene is an athlete who plays for Wales and Great Britain. He is a specialist in 400m hurdle race. At junior level, he won a silver medal in 2005 European Junior Athletics Championship and gold medal in 2007 European Athletics U23 Championships.



He started his career at senior level in 2009 where he set a record in 400m in Josef Odložil Memorial. In 2009 World Championship, he won a silver medal in 400m hurdles. He won a gold medal in 2010 in European Athletic Championships and another gold in 2011 in World Athletic Championships.

Ezekiel Kemboi

Ezekiel Kemboi is an athlete from Kenya who is the winner of 3000m steeplechase at 2004 Olympics. He also won many championships in the years that followed.



He started his career as a junior athlete in 2001 where he won African Junior Championship and finished second the following year in Commonwealth Games. He won a silver medal in 2005 and 2006 in various championships. Then he won a gold in 2011 World Championships.

Derek Drouin

Derek Drouin is an athlete from Canada who takes part in high jump. He won two bronze medals one in 2012 Summer Olympics and other in 2013 World Championships. Currently, he is a world champion in Pan American Games and Commonwealth Games.

He achieved his first success in 2009 Pan American Junior Championships. He took part in 2012 Summer Olympics and won a bronze medal in high jump. Then he again won a bronze medal in World Championship in 2013. After this, he won a gold medal in 2014 Commonwealth Games.



Greg Rutherford

Greg Rutherford is an athlete who represents Great Britain in various competitions. He has won gold medals in various championships like 2012 Olympics, 2014 Commonwealth, European Athletics Championship, and 2015 World Athletics Championships. Rutherford started his career in 2005 where he became the youngest long jump champion by winning AAA Championships.

In the same year, he also won European Junior Championships. Then he took part in 2006 Commonwealth games but could not succeed. In the same year he again won AAA and European Championships. He could not win any medal in the following years due to injuries and now he is looking up for 2016 Olympics.



Caterine Ibarguen

Caterine Ibarguen is an athlete from Columbia who takes part in three athletic events namely high jump, long jump, and triple jump. She has won two gold medals in IAAF Championships and silver medal in 2012 Olympics.

Besides this, she participated in Pan American Games held in 2011 where she won two golds. In 2014, she won diamond league as she got a gold in triple jump. After this, she won a silver medal in 2012 Olympics and a gold in IAAF Championships in 2013.



Valerie Adams

Valerie Adams is an athlete from New Zealand who participates in shotput throw. She won two times in Olympics and three times in Commonwealth Games. Besides this, she also won World Championships four times and World Indoor Championships three times.

Adams started her career in 2001 where she won World Youth Championship. In 2002, she won World Junior Championship and a silver in Commonwealth Games. In 2005, she won a bronze medal in World Athletics Final but was promoted to gold as the results were nullified for Nadzeya Ostapchuk.



In 2007, she won IAAF World Championship where she has to compete with Nadzeya Ostapchuk. After this, her next achievement was a gold in Beijing Olympics.

Denia Caballero

Denia Caballero Ponce is an athlete from Cuba. She mainly participates in discus throw event and has the best throw of 70.65 metres. In 2011, she won Pan American Games. In the starting part of her career, she took part in Javelin Throw and became Cuban Junior Champion.

Caballero won a bronze medal in 2010 in Barrientos Memorial Championship in the discus throw event. In 2011, she won a gold medal in 2011 Central American and Caribbean Championships in Athletics. In the same year, she won a bronze medal in Pan American Games.



Christina Obergföll

Christina Obergföll is an athlete from Germany who has made many records in Javelin Throw. She won a silver medal in 2005 World Championships. In 2006, she ranked fourth in European Athletics Championships and later she won European Cup Super League in 2007.

She is also a winner of bronze medal in 2008 Olympics whereas in 2012 Olympics, she won a silver medal. In 2013 World Championship, she won a gold medal.



Anita Włodarczyk

Anita Włodarczyk is an athlete from Poland who participates in hammer throw event in athletics. She holds the record of 81.08 metres throw and is the first woman athlete to make this record. She won National U23 Championship in 2007 and in the same year, she competed in European Championship. In 2008, she won a bronze medal in 2008 World Athletics Final.



She won her first gold medal in 2009 World Championships. In 2010, she won Meeting Grand Prix IAAF de Dakar and a bronze medal in 2010 European Championship. In 2012 Olympics, she won a silver medal in hammer throw.