

**Biathlon** is the winter Olympic sport combining cross-country skiing and rifle marksmanship. Alternating skiing and shooting, biathletes compete under the pressure of the clock that continues to run even as they stop to shoot. There is a penalty for each missed shot so biathletes must balance speed on the course and on the range with shooting accuracy. The athletes shoot from two positions - Prone and Standing - in various different sequences depending on the competition. In each shooting stage the athlete has five shots to hit five targets 50m down range. The target hit area for prone is 4.5cm (less than 2 inches) and 11.5cm (about 4.5 inches) for standing. When hit, the black target turns white showing everyone the shot hit the target - or not.

Biathlon has five Olympic disciplines for both women and men. The chart below shows the details of each competition.

<b>COMP TYPE:</b>	<b>Individual</b>	<b>Sprint</b>	<b>Relay</b>	<b>Pursuit</b>	<b>Mass Start</b>
Start Type	30 sec interval	30 sec interval	Simultaneous	Pursuit	Simultaneous
Shooting	P-S-P-S	P-S	P-S	P-P-S-S	P-P-S-S
Penalty	1 min.	150 m	150 m	150 m	150 m
<b>CLASSES:</b>	Distance/ Climb	Distance/ Climb	Distance/ Climb	Distance/ Climb	Distance/ Climb
Women	15 km/ 400-500m	7.5 km/ 200-300m	4 x 6 km/ 150-250m	10 km/ 200-350m	12.5 km/ 350-500m
Men	20 km/ 600-750m	10 km/ 300-450m	4 x 7.5 km/ 200-300m	12.5 km/ 350-500m	15 km/ 400-500m
Jr. Women	12.5 km/ 350-500m	7.5 km/ 200-300m	3 x 6 km/ 150-250m	10 km/ 200-350m	10 km/ 200-350m
Jr. Men	15 km/ 400-500m	10 km/ 300-450m	4 x 7.5 km/ 200-300m	12.5 km/ 350-500m	12.5 km/ 350-500m
Y. Women	10 km/ 200-350m	6 km/ 150-250m	3 x 6 km/ 150-250m	7.5 km/ 200-300m	
Y. Men	12.5 km/ 350-500m	7.5 km/ 200-300m	3 x 7.5 km/ 200-300m	10 km/ 200-350m	

**INDIVIDUAL COMPETITION** The Individual is the original competition discipline in Biathlon. The course is usually a 3 to 4 km loop skied five times. The competitor must complete four firing stages of 5 rounds in the sequence prone - standing - prone - standing. The competitor chooses his own firing lane and fires at targets 50m away. In the Individual, the competitor is penalized one minute for each missed target. Coaches watch the first prone shooting stage and give *sight corrections* to athletes on the course if their shots were off target. Because the competition is based on interval start with one athlete starting every 30 seconds, and a minute penalty for each missed target, the coaches work hard to calculate the athlete's place and pass that information on to them as well. Top athletes finish in 50 to 55 minutes.

**SPRINT COMPETITION** Competitors in this sprint competition are normally started at 30 seconds intervals. The first firing stage is 5 rounds from the prone position and usually comes after 3 to 3.3 km of cross-country skiing. The second stage is after about 6.5 km when 5 rounds are fired from standing position. In contrast to the Individual competition, for each target they miss the competitors must cover a 150m handicap loop taking approximately 23 seconds. In the Sprint firing is faster and more risky, because the biathletes believe they have a chance to "catch-up" on the penalty loop. But the time it takes to go around the loop is only part of the penalty as each meter of skiing takes its toll on the athlete's body. As with the Individual, coaches stand on the course and calculate an athletes place in this interval start competition. The passing of this information is called *giving splits* and can help motivate athletes to fight for every second and try to pass athletes who have already finished. Top athletes finish the competition in 22 to 24 minutes.

**RELAY COMPETITION** One of the most exiting competitions is the Relay. Each team has 3 or 4 Biathletes each of whom must ski the course stopping twice to shoot - first prone and then standing. The competition begins with an impressive simultaneous start by each team's first competitor. The field usually arrives "en masse" at the firing range for the first prone stage, where the competitors fire on the lane corresponding to their starting number. Unlike any other biathlon competition, each Biathlete has eight rounds of ammunitions for five targets. The first five rounds are loaded in the normal way - from the magazine. If all the targets are hit with the first 5 rounds, the athlete can immediately continue skiing. If not, the athlete must hand load the extra round one at a time until either all the target are hit or there are not rounds left. Each extra round takes about 5-7 seconds to load and fire - thereby acting as a partial penalty. Some of the fastest shooting happens in the relay where athletes know they have extra rounds in case of a miss. This head to head dueling on the range and the course makes the Relay a favorite with spectators. In the handover zone, the next *leg of the Relay team* is sent on his way with a tag from his teammate. The best teams finish in about about an hour-twenty.

**PURSUIT COMPETITION** The starting times in the Pursuit are based on the finish times of a previous competition. The field is limited to just 60 athletes who normally start in less than five minutes. The first place competitor starts first followed by the rest of the competitors in rank order according to their time behind in the previous competition. Athletes and spectators alike know the standings at every moment as the first athlete is the leader. Interestingly, the first starter is rarely the winner in this unpredictable pressure filled competition. Athletes must take their firing positions in the order in which they enter the range - meaning that the leader takes firing point number one (on the far right of the range), the second athlete takes point number two and so on. The athletes shoot prone - prone - standing - standing and the coaches watch the first prone shooting very carefully to be able to give sight corrections to the athletes before the second prone stage if needed. For each miss, the athlete must ski the 150m penalty loop - often looking over their shoulder to see how many athletes are passing them. Filled with duels on the range, tactics on the course and photo finishes at the line this competition is a favorite with athletes and spectators.

**MASS START COMPETITION** With a simultaneous start by all of the competitors, the Mass Start offers the ultimate in excitement and suspense for spectators and athletes alike. The format of the is similar to the Pursuit except the course is a little longer and, of course, all the athletes start at the same time. The field is limited to just the top 30 athletes in the overall World Cup standings and will make its Olympic debut in 2006. [Return to competition chart above.](#)

**SUMMER BIATHLON** The combination of running and rifle marksmanship is a spin-off of the winter Olympic version of cross-country skiing and shooting. In the past, virtually all summer biathletes were winter crossovers looking for a way to stay in shape during the off-season. This is no longer true. People of all sizes and ages, who are not interested in just skiing, are participating in summer biathlon. With events taking place in New Mexico, Georgia, and California, it is clear that summer biathlon isn't just for skiers. A new sport has emerged.

In Summer Biathlon the standard race distance is 5 kilometers. The rifles are .22 caliber and the standard shooting distance is 50 meters. Summer Biathlon races use the same format as the Winter Olympic sport, except that running is substituted for cross-country skiing.

Competitors, starting in waves of 2 or 3 per minute, begin by running a loop that brings them to the shooting range. They lay down, pick up the rifle, shoot 5 shots at the metal knock-down targets, walk to the end of the range, and continue the running. They run another loop and come back to the range. This time it is five shots from the standing position. The race

ends with a dash to the finish. Scoring is based on the competitors' total time, which includes the number of penalty loops run for each miss.