

The Computer Timing/Tear Tag System or What do you mean there is no chip?

Lots of runners these days think chip timing is the only way you can possibly get a race result. At every race we get the puzzled looks and the doubting questions. Yes, you can get race results without chips. And they can be more accurate than chip timing. Yes, I said more accurate.

Chip timing has two advantages. It can be used to determine the (approximate) time you crossed the start line and combined with the (approximate) time you cross the finish line to give you the net time of your run. With our system you only get the "gun" time – the time from the start signal to crossing the finish line. In a large race, chip time is a very nice thing to know. In a small race there is just a small delay in crossing the line. Many small races done with chip timing do not use a start mat so all times are gun time. The other advantage to chip timing is that in a large race it is quicker to produce results.

Now to the advantages of our system.

One is definitely **cost**. We charge \$1.40 per participant with no minimum charge. Some of the chip companies are charging \$1000 – 1500 minimum. We do include a small charge for gas if we have to travel over 60 kilometers to your race. Ask your local chip time operator for their charge and compare. For those who care about the ever rising cost of entry fees we are a very nice solution. Small races may be paying over \$10 per participant for chip timing.

Accuracy. Yes, accuracy. Our timer sits exactly at the finish line and times the torso of each competitor as it crosses. Our times are more accurate than those provided by some of the chip timing systems. There is a variety of types of chips but all involve being read while passing through the field put out by an antenna. An antenna produces, not a line but a volume of field – a volume that can extend well in front of and behind the actual finish line. Therefore, a chip is not necessarily sensed exactly at the finish (or start) line but could be read well before the line or well after. You have seen the finish lines with one or more timing mats providing backup to the original. Your chip may not be read until the second mat, or third.

In a small race we can put out results as quickly as the chip time system, mostly determined by how often you want to print another list of finishers. In a large race we are a bit slower because we have a manual input step.

What slows results the most for all systems in a smaller race is people problems – data input incorrectly, incomplete data, people who switch races midstream, those who wear the wrong bib or chip and so on.

But your results are in seconds where some of the chip companies have results to 1/10 or even 1/100s of a second? Doesn't that mean you are less accurate? Our timing system can produce times to hundredths of a second but we follow IAAF guidelines for road races which calls for times to be rounded up to the second. 1/10s or 1/100ths of a second are meaningless in road racing and reporting them indicates an unfamiliarity with the rules of timing.

So how does our system work?

Before race day we get the data on each preregistered participant from the race director. Bibs are supplied by the race. Bib numbers are assigned to each person, either by the RD or by us and the bibs are prepared (labelled and sorted). Preferably the bibs have tear-tags. On race day we input late registrants to our computer system. We can input registrants after the race has started so late registration can go on right up to race time.

We use a computer as timer and the program Race Director to produce results. The timing computers are checked for calibration regularly. As people cross the finish line, the primary timer gets the time and as often as possible adds a bib number to produce a select time – a time that is definitely associated with a bib. Once the runners cross the line, they are encouraged into single file in finishing order and the tear tag is removed from the bibs and strung on a hanger. This determines finish order so it is important that runners remain in the order they crossed the line. The strings of tear tags go to the results computer where they are entered. The times from the timing computer are downloaded and the two lists are compared to ensure that they match. We also have a back-up timer also getting select times in case of the rare problem with the primary system.

We can work with wave starts, starting the computer timing with the first wave and subtracting the subsequent waves from that.

We produce overall results as well as age group results, teams results in cross country or other formats, random draw prize lists and can produce various pre- and post-registration reports. We provide the results on paper at the race and electronically to the race director as well as posting them on our website (www.runninggoals.ca)

Experience

We have been timing road races for over 20 years. We have done races of fewer than 50 and events of over 1500 runners. We have timed charity events, local races, provincial and national championships and international events like the World Transplant Games. We time road, trail and cross country races. We also time track meets using the FinishLynx phototiming system.

For more information on our timing services contact Sherry at runninggoals@yahoo.ca