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Olympic hopeful Joe Styles practices his starts using ReactTime from Lynx System Developers.

Lynx links up athletes and their times

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By [Matthew French](#)

Man has been running in competitions since time immemorial, but now, a high tech twist by a local company could affect the way future competitive athletic events are conducted.

Woburn-based Lynx System Developers Inc. has for years been involved in the sporting world, monitoring the official timing for such events as the Tour de France, the Goodwill Games and the U.S. Amateur and NCAA track and field competitions. Now the company has secured its place in its highest profile venue to date: the 2000 U.S. Olympic trials in track and field, which will be held in Sacramento, Calif. later this week.

“We have always been involved in the timing, scoring and data collection at sporting events,” said Douglas DeAngelis, president and cofounder of Lynx. “We have been involved in some of the more technical aspects of the games, like digital photography for a photo finish, the accuracy of timing events and the like. Now, we are offering a new wireless capability that can really help the athletes determine where they stand at any given moment.”

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DeAngelis said in the past, an athlete participating in an event with multiple parts — such as the decathlon — had no real idea where he stood in the rankings at any given time. While one athlete was participating in the pole vault, another might be in the long jump or in a running event and would not know how well to score to remain in competition.

“Now we have developed a real-time wireless connection so athletes and their coaches and trainers can access a database to see exactly where they stand at any given second,” he said. “It can be accessed by a handheld wireless device from anywhere on the field.”

The company has developed four separate components for monitoring the timing in several racing fields:

- FinishLynx is a color digital photo-finish camera.
- FieldLynx is a Palm-based field event administrative tool.
- ReacTime is a false-start detection system that uses a new methodology to analyze a sprinter’s motion in and out of starting blocks and report this information in real-time via wireless Ethernet to a command center.
- CyberScorecard is a real-time display of event results in a searchable database.

The ReacTime system and equipment, of which DeAngelis said he is most proud, detects false starts to an accuracy of 1/1000 of a second and instantly signals this information to the starter. Unlike some simpler systems, ReacTime has no “contact pads” and it cannot be tricked, he said.

The system can show information on the entire field of athletes together, and can also display information for an individual athlete. Lynx products can determine winners to two thousandths of a second. For the last seven years it has been the official timing system for many events covered by NBC, CBS, and ESPN.

DeAngelis said the Olympic trials will give Lynx some much-needed exposure in the sporting world.

“We got involved in the Olympic trials when a service group that has worked with us at sporting events in the past requested us,” DeAngelis said. “We are not involved in the Summer Games in Sydney. The companies that do that have to pay for the right to be the ‘official timekeeper of the Olympic Games.’ We are getting paid to do this for the trials and our business is really the product development and installation.

“We did the Tour de France and the event was great for us in the overall scheme, but we don’t get great exposure there,” he continued. “When our products and technology are working, they’re invisible. The Olympic trials will be an opportunity for us to show what we’ve got to a very wide audience.”

“We have done some really big events in the past — the Tour de France, world championship speedskating, Nordic skiing, canoe/kayaking and the Olympic trials in rowing — but the exposure really hasn’t been there,” he said. “Now our data feeds will be available to people watching on television, surfing the Internet and the actual scoreboards at the field, all simultaneously.”

A privately held company, Lynx was founded in 1991 by DeAngelis and two fellow MIT graduate students.

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