

How road races record runner's times

By **JENNIFER GISH**, Staff writer

[Click byline for more stories by writer.](#)

First published: Monday, May 26, 2008

Although the stampede of arms and legs at the Freihofer's Run for Women in Albany on Saturday, May 31, will look chaotic, the scene will be well organized by the time athletes begin crossing the finish line, thanks to a tiny piece of technology.

Ever wonder how marathons and large 5Ks keep track of all those athletes when finish within seconds of each other? Look at their shoes.

Since 2000, the Freihofer's race has tracked its runners by the ChampionChip, a computer chip that registers runners' bib numbers, times and places as they cross a mat laid across the finish line. The mat can record as many as 1,500 athletes per minute, and the chips are handed out before the race and are attached by cable tie to each runner's sneaker.

The time for all participants is still based on when the starting gun sounds, with runners capable of maintaining the fastest pace given a spot closest to the start line.

Before the race used ChampionChip technology, a team of officials hit a button as each runner crossed the line electronically recording place and time. The runners were then funneled into one of several chutes in the same order they crossed the finish, and had to remain there until their bib numbers were matched up with the corresponding time/place. That process took dozens of volunteers, and race results would take hours to tabulate.

The ChampionChip saved organizers the trouble.

Now, within the next year or two, George Regan, event director for the Freihofer's Run for Women, says organizers would like to move even further in race technology by using a scanning system similar to anti-theft devices used by retailers.

In that radio-wave system, sticky-backed, plastic bar-code tags would be attached to each runner's bib, registering their finish as they run past a finish-line scanner.

"That's the next generation, I think, of road race management, of event scoring," Regan says. "It's already being implemented. It's just a matter of time (until Freihofer's uses it)."

Unlike the chip system, in which volunteers must collect the chips (valued at \$20 each) from runners after the race, the tags in the radio-wave system would be disposable, he says.

Because it's radio-wave based, Regan says, results could also be sent out immediately to virtually anyone with a computer.

The technology will be tested at a few other races before becoming part of the Freihofer's event, possibly as early as next year.

And it could mean even smoother running for the approximately 3,500 athletes who attend each year.

Jennifer Gish can be reached at 454-5089 or by e-mail at jgish@timesunion.com.

All Times Union materials copyright 1996-2008, Capital Newspapers Division of The Hearst Corporation, Albany, N.Y.

[HOME](#) | [CONTACT US](#) | [SUBSCRIBE TO NEWSPAPER](#) | [HOW TO ADVERTISE](#) | [PRIVACY RIGHTS](#) | [COPYRIGHT](#) | [CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT](#)

HEARST newspapers