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## New wireless scoring systems make world debut at Trials

by Amby Burfoot

Some things in the Olympic Track Trials don't change. The basic simplicity of running from one point to another. The drama of talented athletes fighting for scarce spots on the U.S. Olympic team.

Other things do change, and several technical advances have made these Trials faster than any other, even if no world records have been set yet. For the first time in track history, the starting blocks are connected to the timing system through a wireless ethernet. There are no wires dangling from the backs of the blocks-wires that previously fed into the timing equipment. Now each block is totally wireless and totally portable. The complete system is called ReacTime.

One result, reports Giles Norton of the FinishLynx company that owns the timing system, is that the blocks have now become a training tool. An athlete can "take the blocks home" and use them in practice sessions, which Marion Jones has already done.

That's because another component of the blocks includes a speaker system and a microcomputer programmed to deliver the "on your marks" and "go" commands at randomized intervals. After the sprinter bolts from the blocks, the computer also delivers an instant readout of his/her reaction time. The sprinter can try different start techniques, and find out with precision which one works best.

Norton says he gave one of these blocks to a high school sprinter in his hometown, and the sprinter improved from 11.4 seconds to 10.8 in the 100 meters. The sprinter had assumed that his most comfortable starting-block position was also his most efficient. The computerized blocks quickly proved him wrong.

"We have always been involved in data collection at sporting events," says Douglas DeAngelis, president and cofounder of FinishLynx. "Now we are offering a new wireless capability that can really help the athletes."

FinishLynx has also equipped field event officials with wireless Palm devices for recording the throws and jumps. These devices instantly relay each new effort to meet officials who can post them on the stadium results boards.



**There's more to it than the shoes** (Matthew Linde photo)

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