Orrington native to time short-track speed skating at Olympics

By Gladys Ganiel
For The Weekly

It has been more than a decade since Doug DeAngelis designed FinishLynx, a computerized timing system for racing events.

Next month, the Orrington native will take his technology to the Olympics in Salt Lake City A crew of four from his company, Lynx System Developers, Inc., will provide race results on-venue for short-track speed skating.

Seiko also will use cameras manufactured by Lynx System Developers in long-track speed skating, short-track speed skating and Nordic skiing.

DeAngelis, a former track and cross country runner at Brewer High School and the University of Maine, originally designed the system to time track meets.

FinishLynx works by linking a camera at the finish line to a personal computer — eliminating photographic paper. Software included in the system can send a competitor's place and time to stadium scoreboards, other computers, Web sites or television producers.

DeAngelis said his company strives for efficiency

"Our goal is simplicity We want to make technology more transparent and more usable," he explained. "[At the Olympics] it seems a lot of money is thrown around making things complicated. That's not a lot of fun."

Each member of the Lynx System Developers team at Salt Lake City will perform a specific task. DeAngelis jokingly refers to himself as the "spiritual leader," or overseer, of the crew.

Another crew member operates a computer at rink side along with a meet official. One works alongside the scoreboard operator to get the results on the board, and another works behind the scenes relaying the data to the World Press Center, where it will be distributed to media outlets around the world.

FinishLynx is used worldwide for sports including cycling, horse racing, greyhound racing, rowing, canoeing, kayaking, skiing, soapbox derby and street luge, as well as track and speed skating.

FinishLynx has been used at the U.S. Olympic track and field trials, the Tour de France, and the U.S. Rowing Club national championships

DeAngelis said he was pleased that his equipment was used exten-

Doug DeAngelis (left), an Orrington native who designed a computerized timing system for events such as short-track skating, and Murage Njoroge, a former Kenyan runner and author of the software DeAngelis' system uses, confer during October's qualifying event for the Olympics at Delta Center in Salt Lake City. (Photo courtesy of Doug DeAngelis)

sively for track meets at the high school and college levels. In 1994, DeAngelis donated a FinishLynx system to Brewer High School. Lynx System Developers also invests part of its proceeds to promoting land conservation in Maine.

"The Olympics is not really our market. Our market is mainstream. We want to make the technology usable for sport at the lower levels," DeAngelis said. "I'm sure I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now if not for what I did at Brewer."

As a sixth-grader at Center Drive School in Orrington, DeAngelis convinced the principal to buy a Radio Shack Model I personal computer — and he became the only person who could figure out how to use it.

As a freshman at Brewer High, he joined the track team at the urging of coach Dave Jeffrey

"Dave Jeffrey was a great recruiter. He didn't care if you were any good or not — which was great for me, because I wasn't," DeAngelis said.

DeAngelis blossomed athletically the summer before his junior year at Brewer, when he grew 9 inches and "got serious about the sport."

At the University of Maine, he majored in engineering — and made a name for himself on the track.

"In high school I was known as the smart kid. But in college I was much more known as an athlete than a geek," DeAngelis said with a laugh.

DeAngelis developed the idea for FinishLynx while enrolled in a

graduate course at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management in 1991.

His experience competing and officiating at track meets spurred him to 'develop a more advanced and efficient timing system.

Lynx Systems Developers now is based in Woburn, Mass., and employs 25 people.

DeAngelis said the company is constantly striving to improve its products.

"We're trying to push the envelope with new digital cameras, higher speeds and different applications," he said. "We are also embedding wireless technology into what we do so data can move quickly from the race site [to off-site locations such as Web sites]."

Lynx System Developers has provided the official timing system for

the International Skating Union since 1995. The company works 10 ISU events every year, including the world championships of short-track speed skating. It also organizes data management for ISU, which includes compiling world rankings and athlete biographies.

DeAngelis, who will oversee Lynx System Developers' involvement in Salt Lake City, said short-track speed skating is a sport he particularly enjoys.

"Short-track speed skating is a fantastic sport. People should be watching it," DeAngelis said. "It's also one of the few sports where the U.S. has a lot of contenders and could win some hardware."

Lynx System Developers is one of many companies that will provide timing equipment and data management services at the Olympics.

SEMA Corp. of France, the official information technologies provider for the games, has subcontracted IT responsibilities in each sport to different companies.

Given its relationship with the ISU, Lynx System Developers was an obvious choice for short-track speed skating.

As the "real-time" provider, Lynx System Developers' equipment will supply the clock that television viewers see in the corner of the screen.

Lynx System Developers also will be responsible for sorting data from preliminary heats and assigning skaters to races in subsequent rounds. It will convey electronic results data to the World Press Center.

DeAngelis attended the 1998 Olympics in Nagano, Japan, where he served as a consultant for IBM, the IT provider for those games.

He said the proliferation of IT companies at the games can be confusing.

"There's way too much technology at the Olympics, too many different companies connecting their stuff together," DeAngelis said.

"We normally do the world championships of short-track speed skating with four people and an amount of equipment that we can check as luggage," he said. "At the Olympics, you'll see tractor-trailer loads of equipment from some of the other companies. It's just overload."

DeAngelis said Lynx System Developers has been manufacturing the high-speed cameras Seiko will use for other events for about four years. Seiko also used that equipment at the 1998 Olympics.

"We have a long relationship with Seiko and manufacture a lot of their equipment for the Japanese market," he said. "They approached us to see if we were willing to manufacture cameras specific to their needs. All the software is in Japanese."

DeAngelis said his company's main markets are track and field, horse racing and greyhound racing. The company has supported equipment installations in more than countries.

DeAngelis counts himself lucky to have a career that combines his love of technology and sports.

"You don't get that kind of cosmic convergence very often in life. When you do something you like, it's not as much like work," he said.