

Chip Time Awards versus Gun Time Awards

USATF Rule 245.1 states "The order in which the athletes cross the finish line will be the official finish position." Further, Rule 245.3 - regarding transponder timing - "the actual time elapsed between an athlete reaching the starting line and finish line can be made known to the athlete, but will not be considered as official time." In short, official time per USATF rule is gun time.

Also, USATF Rule 165.16 covers the use of transponder timing systems (i.e., the chip) and Rule 165.16(h) states that "times for other competitors will be adjusted, based on the official winning time." In other words, "chip" timing cannot be used for official time(s) nor records unless the "chip" time is properly adjusted (i.e., gun time) except for LDR Masters age group records if the record setter wins his/her age group and the timing mats are properly placed before the start line and after the finish line (Rule 265.10).

Unofficial chip times should never be used for age group or any other awards in a road race.

Unofficial chip times for awards destroys head-to-head competition. The winners are based on a separate time trial and it is not always the first runner to the finish. No one really knows who the winners are until the chip times are posted. Runners will have to wait until everyone in the age group is finished and has his/her time posted. It could be anyone in any order of finish in the age group.

Here is an example; two 50-year-old men are in a 5 km chip timed road race. The first 50-year-old runner starts with the gun and has an 18:00 official gun time. The second 50-year-old runner sits on the curb or is in the rest room when the gun goes off. Five minutes after the gun fires and the field clears he crosses the starting mats and finishes in a gun time of 23:00, but has an unofficial chip time of 17:59. The 18:00 minute runner is the first 50-54 runner to cross the finish. His competition finishes five minutes later and after waiting for the results to be posted it is determined that the second runner has a faster chip time. The race organizers give the award to the faster chip-timed runner and not the real winner even though Rule 245.1 states "The order in which the athletes cross the finish line will be the official finish position."

The same two runners are in another race. They are sprinting head-to-head toward the finish line with the announcer recognizing the competition. One runner edges the other by a step. After the results are posted it is determined that the runner finishing second had a faster unofficial chip time. Again the award goes to the faster chip time and not the real winner.

A runner could be the last to cross the finish line in his/her age group and still be the winner by having the fastest chip time

Chip timing for awards encourages runners to wait around until the start field clears. By waiting long enough runners could have a clear course from start to finish.

There are literally hundreds of examples on how this system does not work. It defeats the whole purpose of competitive racing.