

Accepting Nothing Less than Perfection

Playing a crucial role at the World Athletics Championships Tokyo 2025 is the Seiko Timing Team, known for flawlessly recording athletes' scores.



The Seiko Timing Team gathers at the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest, Hungary.
Photo: courtesy of Seiko Time Creation Inc.

Excitement is poised to reign at the Japan National Stadium from September 13-21, 2025, when Tokyo will host the 20th World Athletics Championships (WCH). Helping to make this possible is the Seiko Timing Team, which is responsible for the equipment that tracks and records competition performance scores—including those of the world's top athletes.

The team members are in charge of measuring and displaying athletes' time scores during the WCH and other domestic and international competitions. They arrive at the venue well in advance to ensure that all on-site timing equipment functions with impeccable accuracy.

"We provide full support to ensure consistently reliable and accurate measurements throughout each competition," explains Kobayashi Kazumasa, Manager of the Seiko Timing Department of Seiko Time Creation Inc. "Since any error could potentially impact athletes' careers, failure is not an option. Perfection is our consistent goal."

A New Technological Era

Kobayashi explains that while past methods for measuring scores were manual and time-consuming—

such as using long sticks, tape measures, and raising flags—recent technological developments have revolutionized the process. Image-based processing now allows for efficient tracking of athletes, with innovations like the Jump Management System to detect takeoff-line fouls and high-resolution cameras to measure jumping distances. Work is also underway to conduct measurements wirelessly, such as tracking road racing athletes using GPS.

Other new developments incorporate the use of LEDs for scoring display panels and opening and closing ceremony presentations.

The Seiko Timing Team comprises roughly 60 to 70 people, with the majority located in a Seiko group company in Manchester, England, along with additional members from Japan, the U.S., Germany, and Australia. The two-pronged team consists of sports and technical channels, whose members remain in constant communication with each other while also picking up essential knowledge from the other half of the team.

In fiscal 2023 only, the team provided support for 115 competitions and events for children. Seiko's timing technology is used for various competitions, including domestic swimming championships and other sports, such as gymnastics, judo, and marathons. In addition,

Seiko's timing equipment is positioned permanently at the Japan National Stadium and at nearly every swimming venue in Japan.

Setting up the WCH for Success

The WCH, which focuses on track and field events, involves 23 tons of equipment for 49 different championship events, requiring a total of around 70 professionals from the Seiko Timing Team. In order to achieve flawless competition, members conduct multiple advance checks on all cables and equipment, with multiple backup plans also in place.

Once the competition begins, the team rapidly calculates scores and transmits them to officials on the ground while continuing to calibrate their equipment throughout the competition.

Still, however, events out of the team's control can sometimes derail their meticulously laid plans despite all of their best preparations.

During the 2022 WCH held in Eugene, Oregon, in the U.S., for example, the team faced delivery delays due to pandemic-era global container shortages and transportation issues, as well as on-site power supply and networking problems. When the competition was held the following year in Budapest, Hungary, heavy rains sparked fears of possible electrical malfunctions when turning on the equipment.



Seiko Timing Team members set up scoring display panels ahead of a competition.
Photo: courtesy of Seiko Time Creation Inc.

"At every competition, we feel extreme nervousness and pressure at the start of the first day," Kobayashi says. "If the equipment fails and there is no sound, or if the timing is not recorded, this would damage not only Seiko but also the athletes—we can't really ask them to start swimming or running again."

"So that moment when the event is over and the team members are shaking hands brings an enormous relief and a sense of achievement."

To ensure perfection for the Tokyo 2025 WCH competition, Kobayashi's team held a meeting about a year in advance among the members of their technical supplier network, including electricity and infrastructure-related companies, wherein all needs were delineated in advance.

"The fact that we can rely on these partners is a huge benefit that gives us an extreme amount of confidence," he observes.

Kobayashi also notes a particular sense of excitement since the 2025 WCH will mark 34 years since Tokyo last hosted the event.

"In 1991, there were legendary athletes performing there, including Carl Lewis and Mike Powell, and world records were established," he recalls. "I was only two at the time, so the thought of hosting the competition next year in Tokyo is extremely exciting."



The Seiko Timing Team is working restlessly to ensure that the World Athletics Championships Tokyo 2025 is a great success.
Photo: courtesy of Seiko Time Creation Inc.