

The 2004 World Orienteering Championships

A real festival for the public

BY ERIK BORG

Fantastic athletes, a big screen, short distances to travel, the world's most enthusiastic speaker team and very spectator-friendly arenas will mean that the World Orienteering Championships in September 2004 will be a great festival for the spectators and general public.

– There was such a great atmosphere and lots of spectators at the World Championships in Switzerland, but I believe that there could be even more spectators and crowds during the World Championships in Västerås”, says Lars Jakobsson.

Swedish pickled cucumbers

Lars Jakobsson (54) is the General Secretary of the 2004 World Orienteering Championships and he has orienteered since 1966–67. He has also been involved in the whole project that ended with Västerås being appointed as the World Championships host city. He was in Leibnitz, Austria where he served Swedish pickled cucumbers to the delegates at the IOF Congress, but where Japan won the final vote to host the 2005 Championship.

A year later it was clear that there would be a World Championships in Sweden nevertheless as the IOF made the decision



Lars Jakobsson, here inspecting the terrain, is the General Secretary of this year's World Championships.

that the championship would be organised every year instead of every other year.

– We estimate that the event, including all the preparations, will require between 2,800 and 3,000 man-days. A lot of time is currently being spent to try to fill all the different roles and positions in the organisational teams during the actual period of the championships, says Jakobsson.

A bit cooler than last year

Can the weather in September in Sweden be as good as the month of the World Championships last year?

– Yes, the weather will be good, promises Jakobsson.

September in Sweden is normally slightly cooler than the warmest months of sum-

In this issue: The 2004 World Orienteering Championships: A real festival for the public; The Sprint Champion is aiming far; Simone Niggli-Luder: All distances are equally important; Became a better orienteer after becoming a mother; Aiming for more presidential invitations; Joint IOF-CISM Event Advisor's Clinic.

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PHOTO: ERIK BORG



The big screen will also be onsite during the World Championships in Sweden.

Västerås is a delightful city with both water and forest within the city limits.

mer, but it is not unusual to see people still wearing shorts. It can also be an advantage for more than just the athletes themselves if it turns out to be not quite as hot as during last year's World Championships. Of course the warm weather then was enjoyable, but it was rather too hot for sport. So hot an August had never been registered before in Switzerland since temperatures first began to be recorded in 1753.

The reason why this year's Championship is being held in September and not in August as last year is because the Olympics will take place in August in Athens. By choosing September instead, the World Orienteering Championships does not have to fight a losing battle for attention with the Olympics.

20,000 spectators

There were a lot of spectators at last year's event. There will be a lot this year too. Jakobsson is hoping that there will be at least 15,000 spectators in the course of the week, and attendance will be by ticket sales as in Switzerland.

– To get non-orientees to visit the races it would be good if the Swedish team achieves some success, comments Jakobsson.

Sweden, which last year won the men's relay and won five medals in all, is aiming for six medals this year, two of which should be gold.

The speaker team of Per Forsberg and Kjell-Erik Kristiansen has considerable

experience of major sporting events and they both have extensive orienteering experience themselves. They will be assisted in holding the interest of the spectators by a big screen which will be in place on all the race days. This will display pictures from various locations out on the course.

Has a lot been done to make the race arenas as spectator-friendly as possible?

– Yes, indeed. We have been guided by the Leibnitz Convention so the arena will be the main focus of the events. Our planning process started with arena production. Spectators will have the opportunity to see the athletes close up on many occasions, both when they pass through the arena during the races, and also with pictures from the terrain on the big screen. We are offering a top event for both participants, spectators, sponsors and the media. Everyone should feel that the championship is for them. Of course the best place to experience the World Championships is to come to Västerås, but we are also focusing in particular on coverage on the internet, states Jakobsson.

New World Championships

By mid-June, 30 different countries have entered their national team for the 2004 World Championships. A few more nations will probably be added before the event itself. Västerås has also been given the honour of organising the first-ever World Championships in Trail Orienteering. It is hoped that teams from over 20 nations will be represented in this event.

It will be a while until it is known exactly how many orientees will be taking part in the spectator races accompanying the World Championships as the entry deadline is not until shortly before the championship week. In several of the spectator races the participants will get to run on the championship maps and also on some of the individual legs of the World Championship courses and so have the opportunity to measure themselves against the world's best orientees.

Although it is some time until the entry deadline, the organisers have noticed that many people have already booked accommodation in the district. Within orienteering circles there is no doubt that many people will be travelling to Västerås in September. It is estimated that there will be a total of 32,000 guest days in connection with the World Championships.

No live TV broadcast

A lot of hard effort has gone into trying to obtain live TV broadcast for the championship, but without success. It would be simply too expensive.

– Svensk Radio (SVT), the Swedish national broadcaster, wanted several hundred thousand euro to broadcast the event live. We are now working so that a summary of the individual races can be transmitted via EBU, which will then be available to TV stations in many countries, says Jakobsson.

The Sprint Champion is aiming far

BY ERIK BORG

Last year, Jamie Stevenson won the sprint distance at the World Championships. This year it is the long distance race that attracts him the most. He is not even thinking of defending his sprint title.

– The classic or long distance race is orienteering's original race format. It is the longest and toughest race. It is the distance in which I have had most difficulty in performing optimally in international races until now. I believe that I can develop best as a person and as a sportsperson by aiming at the biggest challenge.

You don't want to even try to defend your sprint gold medal?

– I want to have new challenges and believe that the long distance race is the biggest challenge of all in orienteering. The World Championships programme also makes it difficult to combine the two distances, adds Jamie.

His WOC goal is to perform well and have a good o-technical long distance race. Three years ago in Finland he made over ten minutes of mistakes in the long distance event. Jamie thinks though that it will be hard to achieve a top result in Västerås, but he thrives on competition and rises to a challenge.

– My aim is to perform well in Sweden this year, better in Japan in 2005 and best in Denmark in 2006, states Jamie.

Fantastic feeling, little financial reward

Jamie was the first British man to win a World Orienteering Championship gold medal. The gold medal was a fantastic experience for him.

– Having an optimum race on the right day after years of hard training is a fantastic feeling. In other respects, though, my life has not really changed. The title has not really gained much attention in the UK. Unfortunately, UK Sport (the national sports governing body) has decided not to support orienteering athletes any longer, so the financial support we benefited from previously has disappeared, Jamie comments.

Jamie works for Göteborg's Orienteering

www.orienteering.org



PHOTO: ERIK BORG

Jamie Stevenson won the sprint race in the centre of Rapperswil in front of huge crowds of spectators.

Federation. He assists clubs with youth activities and coaching development.

– Having an interesting and flexible job is an important prerequisite for achieving success, especially now when orienteering athletes no longer receives financial support from UK Sport.

Stronger mentally

It is primarily in respect to mental strength and focus that Jamie feels that he has developed as an orienteer after winning WOC gold. He no longer needs confirmation in terms of results that he is one of the best orienteers in the world. This allows him the opportunity to concentrate on orienteering optimally instead of focusing on the result.

Jamie has spent time training in South Africa as part of his preparations for this season.

– Seeking new surroundings and terrain is vital in our sport. Orienteering is about navigating in unknown terrain. As soon as you master one type of terrain, it is time to seek new terrain challenges in order to develop as an orienteer. Travelling in itself is also interesting and good for personal development. In South Africa it was more a question of training in new surroundings and not so much about maps and orienteering technique. The training camp was a way of finding new inspiration too.

A lot of time in Denmark

Jamie has trained less in the World Championships terrain in Västerås as he had planned. On the other hand, he has trained more than he originally intended in Denmark where the European Championships will take place in July. The Danish terrain suits him, and he will run the same distances there as in the WOC in September: the medium and long distances and the relay.

– Those who believe it will be easy in Denmark or like it often is at the Spring Cup terrain will be in for a surprise, he comments.

He has not been bothered by injury or illness during the winter, but the questions concerning finances and employment have cost him both time and energy. The unsolved issues meant that there was a period in which he was not able to focus fully on his training.

Several years in Sweden

Jamie has lived in Sweden since 1999. Before coming to Göteborg last year he lived in Borlänge and Hedemora in the province of Dalarna in the middle of the country.

– We'll see how long I stay in Göteborg. I am really happy in the club and also have many friends here, he concludes.

Simone Niggli-Luder:

All distances are equally important

BY ERIK BORG

Simone Niggli-Luder has lived in Sweden since mid-March in order to prepare for this autumn's World Championships. The undisputed world number one doesn't really mention anything about gold medals in Västerås, but she is aiming to run well in all the distances again.

– I will be fighting for medals, though it is clear that it will be almost impossible for me to repeat the amazing results of last year's World Championship. That is why my goal is not to try to do so, says Simone.

But you will be running all the distances this time too?

– Right now I think I will run them all, but whether I actually do so in September will

of course depend on my training and form at the Championship.

Are any of the distances more important to you than others?

– All of them are equally important to me, she states.

Last year Simone won everything possible at the World Championships in her home country of Switzerland: she won gold medals in the sprint, medium and long distance races and also anchored Switzerland to the gold medal in the women's relay with the best leg time too.

Sportswoman of the Year

Her phenomenal performances received considerable attention in Switzerland. By

the end of the World Championships week Simone could be seen on advertising posters and the press featured extensive coverage of the incredible Swiss girl. Later on in the year, as expected, she was awarded the title of Swiss Sportswoman of the Year.

What has it been like with all the days of celebration since last autumn?

– Absolutely fantastic. There has been huge interest from the media and the general public since the World Championship. The interest increased even more when I became Swiss Sportswoman of the Year. Many people recognised me when I was out and about, comments Simone.

Her incredible results mean that everyone expects her to be at the top of the results – every time.

– I am always the big favourite. It can sometimes be tiring to have all these expectations resting on you as everyone thinks that I can win every race. With time I have got used to all the pressure, adds Simone.

A new life

In the middle of March, Simone and her husband Matthias moved to Ulricehamn in Sweden. Ulricehamn is a small Swedish town of just 9,000 inhabitants, located roughly 100 km east of Goteborg. There are only 22,000 living in the whole municipal area which covers over 1,050 square kilometres. This equates to an average of just 21 persons per square kilometre. Even if Ulricehamn could be termed just another small Swedish town, it has a fantastic orienteering environment and receives good support from local business.

– We are really happy in Ulricehamn and Sweden. The training and racing opportunities are excellent and we really like the club and its members, Simone comments.

Is there anything in Sweden that is not as good as in Switzerland?

– The long distances we have to travel to races is something I don't like too much, but then Sweden is much larger than Switzerland. You have to travel a lot, and a car is a must. In Switzerland you can travel by train throughout the country without any



This year, with Simone on the anchor leg, Ulricehamn won both TioMila and the Venla Relay for the first time ever.

problems. That is impossible in Sweden. Otherwise life in Sweden is very similar to life at home in Switzerland. Of course, I miss my family and friends in Switzerland but as we are happy here in Ulricehamn, we are enjoying life here, she states.

Although life seems good in Sweden, the plan is to move back to their home country after the World Championships in September.

Did you have to move to Sweden to be able to train for this year's World Championship?

– Yes, we believe it is important to train and compete as much as possible in relevant terrain. It is good for your confidence and this is very important for the World Championships. Besides the purely sporting perspective, moving to Sweden is also an “adventure” for us, adds Simone.

A more technically consistent orienteer

This year, with Simone on the anchor leg, Ulricehamn won TioMila for the first time ever. Simone has also won the Swedish Long Distance Championships and the Swedish Orienteering Cup, the Elitserien, during the short time she has been in Sweden.

– I have been preparing in Scandinavian terrain since the World Championships last year. I feel more confident in terms of orienteering technique and have more map control. I still make a few mistakes, but there is still a while until the World Championships.

What is the difference between orienteering in Switzerland and Sweden?

– There are more paths and tracks in Switzerland. Swedish terrain is also more detailed and is therefore more technically challenging. The terrain is “softer”, which makes running more physically demanding, states Simone.

While last year Simone was troubled by injuries in late winter and early spring, everything has gone well so far this year. She has suffered inflammation of her foot on a couple of occasions, but was able to continue training and the inflammation healed quickly.

– I have trained well in recent weeks, and I believe top form will come at the right time, says Simone.

It will not be easy to beat her this year either.

Became a better orienteer after becoming a mother

BY ERIK BORG

When Karolina “Karo” Arewång Højsgaard (33) returned to the sport after giving birth to her son Oscar, she suddenly became one of the best orienteers in the world. Her sporting performances had become better as a result of becoming a mother.

– I received a major boost, both mentally and physically, almost immediately after giving birth, says Karolina.

Oscar was born on 11 July, 2002. His mother had her best ever season in 2003. She won silver medals at the World Championships in Switzerland in the women's relay and in the long distance race. Her success came when sport was no longer as important as before.

– Before I had felt that orienteering meant everything and I put a lot of pressure on myself. If I got good results, I felt that everyone liked me. If I didn't, then the world fell apart for me. Now I race because I enjoy orienteering so much. My relationship to orienteering has become more relaxed. In terms of physical training I don't train as much as before but the training is as good. In the years before I got Oscar I had many small injuries whereas now I haven't had any injuries of any kind. This is probably the explanation for my physical improvement, not the fact that I have actually given birth, adds Karolina.

Not able to plan everything

How difficult is it to combine the roles of being the mother of a small child and a top athlete?

– The different roles go well together, but it is not possible to plan everything any more. If Oscar is ill and has for example been coughing all night long and it has not been possible to sleep, it might be necessary to skip training the next day, but being a mother is so fantastic. It gives me so much and gives balance to my life, she smiles.

Oscar is a lively toddler who is always moving around. It is perhaps no surprise with two so active orienteering parents (his father Thomas is also an ex-Danish international team member) where Oscar likes to be most – outdoors.

– He is an outdoors person – he wants to be outside the whole time. If he is not ill, then he sleeps the whole night, adds his mother.

No longer working

Karo will combine her two roles of mother and elite athlete until the World Championships. She worked part-time until this summer. Oscar was looked after by a childminder when she was working. When she was not working Oscar and Karo were always together, so that she had to train in the evening when her husband Thomas was at home.

– It was quite a job to get everything to go together, states Karo.

The perfect race

What is your goal for the World Championships?

– I want to run the perfect race. I want to be able to say at the finish that I could not have run any better in any way. I hope that will be enough to win a medal, but I don't have any specific goal in terms of results.

Karolina feels that having the World Championships in her home country gives her that bit extra inspiration and motivation to do well.

– My original come-back plan was to return to form for the World Championships in Sweden this September. I hadn't thought that I would be able to run as well as I did last year, she states.



PHOTO: ERIK BORG

Little Oscar in mum Karolina's arms.

Aiming for more presidential invitations



Thierry Gueorgiou took the first ever individual French gold medal in orienteering last year.

PHOTO: ERIK BORG

BY ERIK BORG

Thierry Gueorgiou was the first French man to win an individual World Orienteering Championship title and one month after winning the gold medal he was invited to an audience with the French President, Jacques Chirac. Now Thierry is aiming for further audiences with the President. He wants more success in Sweden in September.

Gueorgiou had an incredible race in the medium distance event at the World Championships in Switzerland last year. His victory was not a surprise, but the way he did it was extraordinary winning by over two and a half minutes.

The time following his triumph has of course been fantastic for him and for French orienteering. A month after the World Championship, the French President held an audience for all the French world champions in sport. This included

both Thierry and Laure Coupat, the women's World Mountain Bike Orienteering Champion.

– Orienteering is becoming more and more well-known in France, but it is still a minority sport. For this reason it is still very hard to obtain new sponsors or financial support in order to have good training conditions. I believe though that my title is a very good thing for young orienteers, as they can see what is possible and gain motivation to achieve the same level in the future. People are also happy to see me when I run in competitions in France, but of course I am not quite as popular as Zidane, France's footballing hero. So for the moment my life is quiet and peaceful! comments Thierry.

The world title though has changed Thierry's way of orienteering.

– I now have more confidence in my orienteering skills and ability. Now when I stand

on the starting line I am really relaxed, Thierry says.

Probably no sprint distance

Thierry is still only 25 years old and he is very focused on the World Championships which will take place in Sweden in September.

– My main goal in the WOC in Västerås is the middle distance race. The terrain looks challenging and I think it will suit me really well. This year however I have been training a lot for the longer distance so that I am ready to run for 100 minutes at 100 per cent speed and concentration. I am aiming to compete in both the middle and long distance races. I am not so interested in running the sprint race. Anyway my goals in Västerås are to run perfect races, not to focus on medals, states Thierry.

Why don't you want to run the sprint race after your tremendous sprint races at both

last year's WOC and in the PWT series?

– I haven't yet definitely said: "I will not run at all in the sprint race at World Championships 2004". It will depend on my state of fitness and form in late August. If I am feeling 100 per cent fit, then the long and middle distance races are my ambition. But it is also true that the sprint race is still the easiest way for me to achieve a good result although it is not as much fun as running the middle or long distance races in very demanding terrain as the terrain at the 2004 World Championships will probably be.

Almost perfect

There have been some really good orienteers from France for a few years now and they have featured at the top of the results in a lot of major international competitions, so a World Championship medal and even a victory for France was no real surprise. The way in which Thierry achieved his victory though was. He won the middle distance race by 2.37 minutes ahead of Bjørnar Valstad of Norway.

– My race in the middle distance final was almost perfect. My goal is to be able to repeat it again. Once is not enough, adds Thierry.

What is the goal for the French men's

relay team?

– We haven't yet achieved a good result in the relay. Even though the team is still young (average age of 24), a top 6 position is a realistic result but many teams have experienced runners so it will be a tough fight!

Two months in Sweden

How are you preparing for the World Championships in Västerås? Have you spent a lot of time in Sweden?

– I will be in Sweden for between one and two months prior to the Championships. I believe this is long enough to get accustomed to Swedish maps.

Have you made any changes to your training this season?

– This winter I have been almost fully focused on my training. It has been my best ever winter training with only a few minor illnesses and injuries. But the months of June and July are really important for finding a really good orienteering rhythm in the terrain, states Thierry.

This year Thierry is a full-time orienteer but he will resume his university studies in biology from October 2004. He will also compete at the European Championships taking place in July in Denmark, but is not

focusing on these races in the same way as the World Championships.

– I will try to compete in each distance to see if I am able to run both the long and middle distances races at the WOC, but I don't have any specific ambitions in Denmark. Of course, it would be nice to achieve at least one good result there in order to keep my motivation level high, Thierry comments.



PHOTO: PIRJO VALJANEN

Joint IOF – CISM Event Advisor's Clinic

Through the years, the IOF has had an exceptionally good relationship with the International Military Sports Council (CISM). In mid-June, a new form of co-operation was introduced. On the initiative of the Finnish Delegation to CISM, an Event Advisor's Clinic with both military and civilian participants was organised at Niinisalo, Finland. The clinic participants had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the organisation of, and were also offered the chance to participate in, two orienteering events, the so-called Forssa Phone Games, a middle distance event with some 1,000 participants, and the Jukola Relay with more than 12,000 runners.

Brazilian Captain Eduardo Oliveira was amazed at the size of the Jukola relay.

– Until now I wasn't even able to imagine that an orienteering event can be this big. I find it absolutely amazing that every-



PHOTO: PIRJO VALJANEN

LtCol Ramon Pineiro (left) and Capt Eduardo Oliveira participated in the Event Advisor's Clinic.

thing works so well despite the enormous number of runners and spectators.

Captain Veysel Güler from Turkey described his first impression in an even

more colourful way.

– When I first arrived, the size of the event came as a shock to me, he says, still shaking his head in disbelief.