

O-zine

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Four World Champions in World Games line-up

BY CLIVE ALLEN

Four of the current World Champions will be competing for the medals in this year's World Games, the second-ever to include orienteering, being held in Duisberg, Germany in mid-July.

In the women's individual race, Long Distance World Champion Karolina A Höjsgaard (Sweden) and Sprint World Champion Simone Niggli-Luder (Switzerland) will have plenty of strong competition for the title of World Games Champion 2005. Anne Margrethe Hausken (Norway) and Jenny Johansson (Sweden) were both successful in the first round of this year's World Cup, winning the sprint and middle distance races respectively. Niggli-Luder, best known for her outstanding 4-gold-medal haul in the 2003 World Championships, also showed excellent form in winning the long distance World Cup race.

Other names to watch out for amongst the leading runners in the women's start list include Germany's Karin Schmalfeld, near her best form and keen to do well on home terrain, Sweden's Emma Engstrand, and Heather Monro from Great Britain. Hanne Staff from Norway, World Games Champion in 2001, has now retired from top-level competition.



PHOTO: PIRJO VALJANEN

Watch out for Karin Schmalfeld: she is keen to do well on home terrain.

Gueorgiou is big favourite

Middle Distance World Champion for the last two years, Thierry Gueorgiou (France) will be the big favourite to take the men's title: the World Games distance of 6.6 km (estimated winning time 35 minutes) is just right for him. He will certainly be strongly challenged by Sweden's Niclas Jonasson, Sprint World Champion, and the defending World Games

Champion, Grant Bluett from Australia. Switzerland has entered two of their best younger athletes – Daniel Hubmann, sprint winner in the first round of this year's World Cup, and Matthias Merz. Both are former Junior World Champions and becoming well established in the senior ranks.

Yuri Omeltchenko, Ukraine, is probably the most experienced top runner in the

In this issue: Four World Champions in World Games line-up; Time for the next technology step in orienteering; Simone Niggli-Luder: I am more stable now; Time for the first Russian gold?; France a new name for the relay.

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field – he was World Champion over short distance back in 1995, also in Germany, but is still very much at the top with a sprint bronze medal from last year's World Championships to prove it.

Sweden come with a very strong team. In addition to Jonasson there is Matthias Karlsson, who took the long distance silver medal in the 2004 World Championships, Emil Wingstedt and Johan Näsman. François Gonon and Damien Renard, France, have shown particularly good form this year and will also be striving for the top positions.

Runners from 16 nations

The start lists for the individual races over middle distance to be held on Saturday 16th July comprise 40 women and 40 men, representing 16 nations in all. The number of start places allocated per nation is based on results from last year's World Championships. The mixed relay race, for national teams made up of 2 women and 2 men, will be held the following day; the defending champion nation is Norway.

The 2005 World Games are the seventh overall. 32 non-Olympic sports are included, and the Games organisers expect over 500,000 spectators in all with TV transmission to many countries across the globe. The arena for orienteering, site of the finish for both individual and relay races, will be the Jahnstadion in Bottrup.

It all promises to be another excellent showcase for orienteering!



Sweden's Niclas Jonasson, Sprint World Champion is one of the favourites to take the men's title.

Time for the next technology step in orienteering

BY CHRISTER NORMAN*

I remember the autumn of 1992, when I saw the first prototype of Emit's electronic punching system being demonstrated at the Nordic Orienteering Championships in Østerdalen, Norway. I must admit I saw it mainly as a curiosity at that time. But two years later their system had, in fact, developed to a commercial level, on the threshold of becoming generally used and taken for granted in orienteering events. The Emit system was followed a few years later by a similar system from SportIdent. The technology base for these systems is therefore 10–15 years old today. This is basically true even though a few enhancements have been made over the last few years.

All credit to Emit and SportIdent, they have certainly contributed to bringing our sport up to a high level of technology, nowadays indispensable for orienteering organisers and competitors.

From a technological point of view, 10–15 years is a very long period. Computer and mobile phone innovations are obvious examples of the fact that price / performance and functionality have seen a dramatic evolution over the period. Today we find transit systems with touch cards that only have to be placed on a sensor to debit fares. Vehicles are reliably electronically tolled on city highways at 100 km/h. The Danish King Harald Bluetooth may have been dead and buried since the end of 900, but the wireless communication technology named after him is alive and kicking! With such technology already implemented in commercial systems, I have no doubts that the development of a new generation of systems for timing and punching, and orienteering results services, in general, should be affordable on an international, national, district and eventually club level.

From an information distribution point of view, the Internet has provided us with a completely new dimension for broaden-

ing spectator experience of major sport events. The dramatic progress of the World Orienteering Championship competitions in Västerås, Sweden, 2004 could, for example, be enjoyed live all over the world through online video, sound and results – new systems must employ technologies with this new dimension in mind.

I am, accordingly, an advocate that the time has come for the orienteering movement to move to a higher technology level when it comes to orienteering results services. It is time to phase out the old systems and replace them with new ones based on today's technology.

Why is this necessary?

Firstly, by taking advantage of new technologies, we can improve the security, simplicity and functionality of the basic systems that generate the results in our sport. This benefits all participants, competitors and officials alike.

Secondly, we must develop the systems to a level acceptable to the Olympic movement as we strive to become an Olympic sport. On the way to the Olympics, we also have an obligation to support the Arena Production concept that the IOF is implementing and which will mark all high level international orienteering events from now into the future. The focus on information distribution is the key to the Arena Production concept as well as to Olympic success.

Thirdly, it is time that the orienteering movement took the lead and turn our experience into the specifications for the systems we need. We can then drive the suppliers to produce systems that fill the needs of the sport and its development.

Time perspective

We are unlikely to see Ski-O, MTB-O or Foot-O in the Olympics for at least the next decade. This does not mean that we



The arena production concept was implemented at the 2004 WOC races in Västerås, Sweden.

can wait until later embrace new technology. The Arena Production concept is being implemented now, and demands the best possible technological support. The immediate requirement is that we must gradually enhance the systems we have today, however, always in the direction that we see most beneficial for the future. And we must remember that broad technological evolution never stops; it goes on as we speak. The challenge for orienteering is to constantly identify, evaluate and take best advantage of technology known today, as well as that vaguely understood today and that which we today have no clue!

Possible Developments

We can now look at some directions for development, based on our current experiences as well as the known next steps such as Arena Production.

Security

There have been too many occasions lately with disqualifications due to “missed punching”, where the competitor has obviously punched at the control in question. Also, we see too often that the punching equipment at the controls does not work as intended and has to be replaced at the last minute.

This is not acceptable for our orienteering
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sport – it gives low credibility and a poor image of our ability to organise fair and correct events. For the competitors, we have to support them with systems upon which they can rely 100% and basically not have to pay attention this aspect during the race.

Future systems must be designed to be robust, with backup facilities encompassing quite a lot of redundancy and yet still affordable. We must raise our own level of expectation and our own requirement for a 100% error free performance of the technology used by our sport. It must be virtually impossible for a competitor to miss punching due to faulty equipment. Future missed punches shall always be the result of the competitor not following the punching rules.

Simplicity

More security and functionality built into our punching equipment also means more complexity. This complexity must never be seen by the organiser or competitor, but stay within the equipment itself. Instead, the systems must support the organiser so that all equipment involved can be set up in a foolproof manner, accommodating even late changes. For example, the punching equipment at the controls could be designed to integrate with the course setting software as defined in, for example,

today’s OCAD 8, not as a one-time transfer from the course setting system to the software loading the punching equipment but continuously synchronised and available.

Functionality

Today’s technology should allow considerable enhancements in functionality to both the electronic punch card (e-card) and the equipment at the control points. Basically, communication and intelligence have to be built in.

We can, and should, discuss whether the e-card should be designed with “intelligence” or if we should leave that to the punching equipment at the controls. Maybe it should be enough to keep the e-card “simple and stupid”, just extending its capacity to store more information, enhance security by implementing more redundancy and components, use smaller, speedier and very reliable components, design it for better touch-free “punch-without-stopping” usage in speedy Ski-O and MTB-O competitions. If we were to move away from this, we could, for example implement GPS capabilities in the e-card to send positioning data to a central computer program for online and post tracking of route choices, and so on.

This could be the first approach and bridge



to a future generation of e-cards with “intelligence”.

The electronic punch card, instead of being emptied before start, could then be loaded with information about each individual’s orienteering course and have a small display showing the control descriptions and the progress of punching along the course. We have often remarked that e-cards do not give the progress feedback that a paper control card does.

Concerning the future punching equipment at the control, it should, however we implement the e-card, communicate wireless with a central computer program and it should both be possible to supervise and maintain them from a central point. Basically what is needed is a “telephone” with a suitable communication technology, for example GPRS, that is in constant contact with the central computers. With a built-in GPS device, it should be possible to be alerted if the equipment is removed from the control point, for example more than one metre.

Olympic level

Technology is an important tool in the drive to have orienteering, in some form, accepted as an Olympic or Winter Olympic discipline. The technology selected for any Olympic sport must be of a very high level. We must remember that as an Olympic sport we are not in the driver’s seat any more, we are, at best, co-drivers. The Swiss Timing company controls Olympic results services from the Athens 2004 Olympic Games and onwards for several years. It, and therefore the IOC, will not accept any technology that cannot guarantee a smooth, error-free results service. At the moment, orienteering does not live up to Olympic level technology expectations. If we are serious about becoming an Olympic sport, we have to act now!

Technology must primarily support TV coverage of the Olympic orienteering events, I am not going into what disciplines could attract the billions of TV viewers over the world, however, I strongly feel that the courses must be shown and explained to TV viewers on a very basic level, just before the race. Digital TV will enhance the presentation of the map and the courses for the viewers; however, it is probably wise to suggest experimenting with a direct interface between the course setting software (for example, OCAD 8

today) and a TV graphic device to come up with maximum clarity of the picture. If that includes transforming the orienteering map into a more understandable terrain model for the general public, maybe in 3-D, is a question that must have an answer but which I don’t want to judge here. However, I believe that we can learn from our own experiments, for example at the 10-Mila 2004, and from the computer games industry, to show digital terrain maps being converted to terrain models in real time. Perhaps this technology can be harnessed to show the real-time decisions facing orienteering athletes.

Where Olympic TV coverage has to be kept relatively simple, the complex intricacy of our sport should instead be available through Internet. In contrast to TV, Internet offers a two-way, interactive environment that we should take full advantage of. This is the environment for tracking route choices through GPS, this is the environment where you can analyse the courses beforehand and during the actual race, and this is the environment that allows you to follow the progress of the race as you decide yourself. An Internet solution is not only well suited for orienteering knowledgeable people around the world, it is also a solution for onsite or home based media people, TV commentator support teams and for the organiser’s quality assurance teams.

Leading the development

With all respect to Emit and SportIdent, the specifications for the next generation of timing, punching and results services must be developed by the orienteering movement itself. The IOF IT Commission is currently working within the IOF’s Arena Production project to specify the technology requirements for punching in orienteering. This requirements specification argues a somewhat shorter horizon than discussed in this paper to allow for solutions to be implemented “soon” and will be available later this year.

The IOF IT Commission plans to follow these requirements with specifications on results services, specifications that will bring us closer to those you see for Olympic sports and support the IOF’s Arena Production concept.

**Christer Norman is a member of the IOF IT Commission.*

Simone Niggli-Luder:

I am more stable now

BY ERIK BORG

Simone Niggli-Luder believes that she is now more stable at a higher level. On the other hand, it would seem as if her fellow competitors have come a bit closer to her level. The Swiss world champion is going to compete in both the World Games and at the World Orienteering Championships.

– I won't prepare myself as much for the World Games as for the World Championships, she says.

Not all of the elite runners will do as Simone. Some of them will concentrate entirely on the World Championships. One of them is the new Norwegian elite runner Anne Margrethe Hausken who won the sprint distance race at the World Cup in England earlier this year.

Simone won only one distance in England but that was an overwhelming victory. She was completely in a class of her own in the long distance event.

– When I compare my recent performance with those of past years, I feel that I am more stable on a higher level now. My run in the long distance World Cup race was a very good one, she says.

Three winners

The first round of the 2005 World Cup saw three different winners in the women's class. Simone won the long distance, Anne Margrethe Hausken the sprint race and Swedish Jenny Johansson was best in the middle distance event.

At the Open Nordic Championships, in late May, Simone did not win a title at all. She gained three silver medals on the individual distances and bronze in the relay. Hausken won the sprint again, whilst Simone's compatriot Vroni König-Salmi and Finnish Minna Kauppi won the long and the middle distances, respectively. It certainly looks as if there will be a tough fight for the gold medals in Japan. No doubt, Simone is one of the big favourites though. She has declared that she aims to win a medal at this year's World Championships. It will be a bigger sensation if she does not take any medal at

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PHOTO: ERIK BORG

Simone Niggli-Luder made an incredible race at the first long distance in World Cup this year.

all, than if she wins four gold medals, no matter if the other top-ranked girls have trained very hard and come closer to her standard.

Two training camps in Japan

Simone has been in Japan twice. The first training camp was in November 2004, and the second in May this year.

– I believe that these two training camps will be enough, but I also feel that it was extremely important to go to Japan before the WOC, she says.

Because of the training camps, she knows what to expect, both in terms of terrain and Japanese culture.

Simone and her husband Matthias lived in Sweden for some months. In late June they moved back to Switzerland. Simone is happy to be closer to her family, her Swiss friends and to be able to live in her native country.

– It's good to be home again, she says.

With a view to the WOC in Japan, Swiss terrain would also seem to be very appropriate, perhaps even better than Swedish terrain. In Japan there is going to be a lot of contours and route choices and there is more of that kind of orienteering in Switzerland than in Sweden.

– Yes, we do have some steep hills in Switzerland, she smiles.

Time for the first Russian gold?

BY ERIK BORG

The World Games is the main goal for Leonid (21) this summer, while older brother Valentin Novikov (30) is concentrating on the World Champs. Is it time for the first Russian gold in orienteering this year?

Valentin has been among the best in the world for some years. His younger brother is a new man internationally. Neither took part in the first round of the World Cup but they have both showed strength. Valentin beat all the Swedes and won the Swedish cup called Elitserien. Leonid won middle distance at the military world championship (CISM).

Now they are ready to achieve different goals. Leonid is going for Duisburg and the World Games. The World Championship is Valentin's big goal. Russia has yet to gain gold in either the World Games or the World Championships.

– I don't think about medals. I think about how I can do my best orienteering performance in Japan, says Valentin.

Three distances

Valentin won two medals in Sweden last year. He has the strength to be one of the best in Japan, but there are quite a few strong men that cover a lot of distance.

– I will run middle and relay and sprint or long, says Valentin. – It will be too much to run all distances.

No training camps

While a lot of countries have been in Japan at training camps, Valentin's first meeting with Japan will be when he goes there for WOC. There hasn't been money for that. At least there is some terrain a little like that of Japan at home in Russia.

– The contours are a bit similar, but the vegetation is different, he says.

– I don't think that it will be so technically challenging in Japan, the challenge will be to take the right route choices.

Have you improved as an orienteer?



PHOTO: ERIK BORG

The brothers Leonid (left) and Valentin Novikov are ready for success.

– My orienteering is of higher quality than before, says Valentin.

A lot of Novikovs

The brothers think that their father, Yuri,

has been a big influence on their success in orienteering. The brothers also train a lot together, especially at training camps. There is even one more Novikov among the best in the world. It's Julia, the wife of Valentin. She has also attained a high international level.



PHOTO: ERIK BORG

Damien Renard (left), Thierry Guergiou and Francois Gonon into the first relay World Cup victory to France ever.

France a new name for the relay

BY ERIK BORG

In the World Cup in Great Britain, France gained its first ever relay victory. In Japan, France is heading for another one. It has a good team and a superb last leg runner.

Thierry Gueorgiou is not only the phantom of the middle distance with victories in the last two championships, but also an incredible last leg relay runner. At the Jukola relay, in Finland, both last year and this year he ran into victory with Kalevan Rasti. At the World Cup he ran into the finish with his team mates Francois Gonon and Damien Renard with a big gap to other competitors.

– This is something special for French

orienteering. It's a first time victory in such a big race, says Thierry.

– It's a positive experience before WOC in Japan, says Francois.

– We can do it. I hope we can also do it again, says Damien.

The French team always runs in the same order and last year they were sixth at both the European Championship and the World Cup final, without Thierry in the team.

– With Thierry in the team we know we can win, says Damien.

The men's relay in WOC is quite open. France is not the only team with three

strong runners. In the women's class there may be fewer teams that can win and Sweden and Switzerland are perhaps the favourites. They have very good teams with experienced and strong runners.

Individually, Simone Niggli-Luder, Switzerland, Minna Kauppi, Finland, Jenny Johansson, Sweden, and Anne Margrethe Hausken, Norway, are the biggest favourites for gold.

The men's class is perhaps more open, but hard to beat will be Thierry Gueorgiou, France, Mats Haldin, Finland, Jani Lakanen, Finland, Emil Wingstedt, Sweden, Holger Hott Johansen, Norway, David Brickhill-Jones, Australia, and Valentin Novikov, Russia.