

Coaches Conference 2023

Report FRANCE

Charly Boichut's presentation offered interesting insights not only into French orienteering, but also the French culture as it brings along some specific strengths and challenges for sports and orienteering.

Context and structure: One of them is the system of „sports professors“ – the big advantage of these functionaries is that they are paid by the ministry and working for the federations, but on the other hand there is a limited number of them and it is hard to get new ones. Another challenge arises from the tradition that one has to study or work full-time – it is almost impossible to find part-time jobs. As a result, many athletes move to abroad once they start working. One strength is that France is a very big country with lots of different and interesting terrains for orienteering. Due to that fact U18 and junior teams don't need to go to abroad for training camps (except JWOC preparation).

Individual training: There are three training centres in Fontainebleau, Clermont-Ferrand and Lyon (before St-Etienne). The athletes' daily training is covered quite well there, for runners living somewhere else national team coaches try to cover individual coaching. However, this is quite a challenge due to the large number of athletes and only one elite coach.

Gender considerations: France has a very patriarchal culture which exerts a lot of pressure on girls (family, studies, work). As a result, it's much harder for them to focus on sports the same way boys can. In their U18 team they established a quota of 10 male and 10 female athletes about 15 years ago. While it was sometimes problematic in the beginning as the level of the selected girls was much lower than that of the selected boys, it has changed over time and now they are equal or it's even the other way round!

Performance diagnostics: On the physical side, there is a 3.000 m test (nowadays only recommended with target times depending on age), a terrain test (as part of U18 team selections) and MAS + lactate tests (at Lyon training centre). On the technical side, youths can gradually validate „colour flags“: They have an individual notebook with a very detailed list of competences to acquire. It helps them and their coaches to see their technical development and enables coaches to set appropriate courses.

Recommendations for Austria: As we have very few youth runners, we must do our best to keep them. Orienteering must be fun for them, so we should offer a lot of camps, ideally in all holidays, which are not just about training, but moments shared together. Not all youngsters will be interested to move on to high-level orienteering, but if they have good memories from such activities, they can become the volunteers of tomorrow!

Future of elite orienteering: Among other aspects Charly pointed out the climate change impacts which will affect our sport in the future: extreme temperatures and forest fires, maybe denser vegetation, limited terrain access due to wind turbines and solar panel fields, the need to reduce travelling and the end of ski-orienteering when there is no snow anymore.