

The Biggest event ever in Portugal!

With the winter now over, Portugal is welcoming the great names of orienteering once again. But don't think that this is just another event! The European Orienteering Championships and the European Trail orienteering Championships are the most important orienteering events ever held in Portugal.

By Joaquim Margarido

Between 9th and 16th April, the municipalities of Palmela and Sesimbra, jewels of the Costa Azul, will be welcoming the finest orienteering athletes world-wide. It will be the 10th edition of the European Orienteering Championships (EOC), with three stages scoring for the 2014 World Cup, and the 4th edition of the European Trail Orienteering Championships (ETOC). Seven days of competition at the highest level, that will assign the Foot Orienteering titles in Sprint, Middle Distance, Long Distance and Relay and also the Trail Orienteering titles in the PreO (Open Class and Paralympic Class) and TempoO, this last one a première.

The entries for EOC so far are 311 athletes – 178 men and 133 women - representing 29 countries. For the ETOC the number is somewhat lower, with a total of 127 athletes from 19 countries, 82 in the Open Class and 45 in the Paralympic class. In parallel will run the EOC Tour, with open courses for all ages from 10 to 90 years old; the Tour will pass the milestone of one thousand participants on every day of competition.

Among the participants, a special note about the presence of the Norwegian Olav Lundanes, who will defend his Middle Distance and Long Distance titles here, and the Swedes Jonas Leandersson, Ola Jansson and Marit Wiksell, the first to defend the title of Sprint and the other two currently the PreO European Champions in the Paralympic and Open classes respectively. Other big stars challenging them for the honours include, in FootO, the Frenchman Thierry Gueorgiou, the



Winners of the Portuguese O'Meeting 2014, . Photo: Joaquim Margarido

Swiss Daniel Hubmann and Matthias Kyburz, the Swede Tove Alexandersson, the Finn Mårten Boström and the Russian Leonid Novikov. In TrailO, the Finns Jari Turto and Pinja Mäkinen and the Czech Jana Kostova are just three of those worthy of mention. The great absentee is of course Simone Niggli, who retired from top competition in October 2013 and therefore will not be defending her European titles in Sprint, Middle Distance and Long Distance.

A handful of hope

With twenty-four athletes, fourteen in FootO and ten in TrailO, Portugal's representation at the European Championships will be with well-founded hope of good results. And whereas Portugal will be there in the TrailO competition to learn and gain experience,

consolidating the foundations of a discipline where Portugal has only taken the initial steps, in FootO the Portuguese athletes seek to build, in Palmela and Sesimbra, on their strongest results ever in the World Championships last year in Vuokatti, Finland.

For Ricardo Chumbinho, Director of EOC/ETOC 2014, "the event almost under way can be expected to be characterised by a marked balance between the great and the possible, always keeping in mind that our primary responsibility is to ensure that the European titles are allocated fairly and in a situation of equal opportunities for all athletes". Remembering that "this event will be a major factor boosting the local economy", he leaves a final message: "Let's all support an event that is created by and planned for everyone".