

Three gold medals for Sara Hagström

This autumn it was the central coastal region of Portugal that formed the stage for a major international Foot Orienteering competition. A huge organizing success, the 2013 European Youth Championships brought tomorrow's idols into the limelight. With three gold medals, Sara Hagström was the clear top name in the list of notables. But there was more, much more.

By Joaquim Margarido

For the second time this year, Portuguese orienteering dressed up in its best costume to receive an international competition entirely dedicated to youngsters. After the ISF World School Sports Championships of good memory, played out in the Eastern Algarve in the Spring, it was now the turn of Peniche, Caldas da Rainha and Óbidos to receive the European Youth Orienteering Championships, EYOC 2013.

Initially allocated to Israel, EYOC 2013 was "relocated" to Portugal in

2012. A process that was almost "in stage of completion" had to return to "ground zero". But in the short time of eight months the Portuguese Orienteering Federation managed to prepare and implement an event of the highest quality; not just technically, with good terrain and challenging courses, but also with all the essential ingredients to enable the 362 participants from 32 countries to feel "at home" and have them leave at the end with the most fantastic memories.

Sprint and Long Distance: almost the same winners

Set inside the walls of the medieval town of Óbidos, the Sprint race opened the hostilities. In four competition classes, the participants were faced with demanding courses requiring high concentration and constant focus on the map. In the M16 and W16 classes the Finn Olli Ojanaho and the Swiss Simona Aebersold were the big winners. In W18 the Swede Sara Hagström knew how to be at her best, beating the Finn Anna Haataja by the narrow margin of 18 seconds. But it was in the M18 class that we saw the most intense struggle, with the top two in the end separated by a scant second. Tobia Pezatti brought to Switzerland a second gold medal of the day, with the Polish athlete Krysztof Rzenca taking second position.

Sun and heat on a perfect morning, the beauty of a fresh and fragrant forest and challenging courses both physically and technically: these were the ingredients that have the power to put a smile on the faces of the athletes who, at Ferrel, disputed the Long Distance course. Almost a re-run of the successful start-up of the Championships, Sara Hagström, Tobia Pezatti and Olli Ojanaho took their second gold medals, while Josefine Lind provided the one note of sensation, offering to Denmark the most desired medal in the W16 class.

EYOC double gold medallist Tobia Pezatti (SUI) in Portugal. Photo: Joaquim Margarido



The big winner of the Championships, Sara Hagström.
Photo: Joaquim Margarido

Sara Hagström, again

Eagerly awaited, the Relay held in Vale Benfeito (Óbidos) ended the Championships in a carnival atmosphere. Involving a total of 92 teams, the event was marked by the uncertainty about the winner until the very last second. Sweden triumphed in the W18 class and Sara Hagström was crowned the "Queen" of the Championships, winning everything there was to win. Russia in M16, the Czech Republic in W16 and Finland in M18 completed the final batch of winners on the last day.

Sweden, Switzerland and Finland concluded with a total of three gold medals each, but a better performance by the Finnish team's "second strings" gave them overall victory in the event.

The 2014 EYOC will take place in Strumica, Macedonia, from 25th to 28th June.



Olli Ojanaho is a young promising talent from Finland. Photo: Joaquim Margarido