

South African Youth Orienteering Team Germany and Slovakia Tour -June / July 2012

Team Manager Report by Colin Dutkiewicz

The Youth squad went on Tour in July to Germany and Slovakia to attend two multi-day orienteering competitions. The competitions were relatively low key for the Youth squad, but were in conjunction with the World Masters Championships and Junior World Championships. They thus provided an opportunity for the squad to see what a championship event is all about, to compete on quality maps and difficult courses, but without serious competitive pressure.

The tour was a resounding success. The squad thoroughly enjoyed themselves and learnt a lot - a lot about orienteering and a lot about Europe. In Germany they came to terms with continental terrain with relatively open forests and technical rock detail, and a very controlled obedient society. After this relatively easy introduction, they had to contend with multiple different terrains in Slovakia - Karst terrain, continental terrain and complex vegetation, not to mention the run down less law abiding Eastern European culture. And of course there were a few urban sprint events thrown in for good fun. Most of the squad particularly enjoy sprint events and the development of this version of the sport is particularly useful for the fun element so important to children in sport.

Due to the limited time we were not able to have a large training portion before going into the competitions, so some competition days had to be more training in nature. This is not ideal. By the end of the tour they had raced 8 times in 16 days, with an additional 10 training runs.

Performance wise, Christie Courtnage and Tim Chambers performed very well. Christie came in the top 3 in both competitions, keeping ahead of many Scandinavians of pretty good pedigree.

Athlete detail

The youth squad largely suffers from poor physical conditioning. This resulted in us having relatively light training and the athletes struggling in the longer races and towards the end of the tour. We focussed on compass work (not bad), contouring (bad) and attack points. This last technique showed significant improvement for the squad. It instantly removed the large (>5 minute) errors that the squad typically have. The selection of a few basic techniques that are repeated in different terrain was the objective to not overload the squad with theory.

The structure was as follows:

- First day: walk in the forest and discuss the map and terrain in detail
- Second day: jog in pairs in the forest and spend a lot of time talking about the method of mapping, the significant features and the type of technique that is appropriate given the terrain

- next few days: training exercises on training maps and model maps, using specific techniques that are appropriate for the race terrain
- on at least one of the days the squad were tired, so we changed to doing fun competitive training (star relays), or skipped training altogether
- we had at least one day with no orienteering at all
- every day the squad looked over their courses, drew on what they did and discussed this with the coach. This is essential to embed the lessons and pick up the repetitive week points

The Future

The argument for a tour such as this, i.e. doing the public events at major championships is sound and proven. It shows the young athletes top class terrain, maps, courses, as well as the vibe of a championships, but without any pressure on them. However, for those who are now a little more experienced, a big multi-day event in Europe might be better. This will give them a lot of competition and hopefully this will push them to improve (but it might demoralize them). In order for them to handle a proper training camp and a competition, they would need to be a lot fitter, but also do a 3 week trip -1 week training, 1 week recover and 1 week racing.

Colin Dutkiewicz

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