

# EYOC 2023 Report

## By Oliver Prince



### Preparation for Bulgaria

Before even heading out to Bulgaria we spent a lot of time geeking terrain and what courses could possibly look like. Alongside footage of test races, this gave us all boosted confidence going out to Bulgaria. More physical training that I performed before going out to the event, was having high intensity track sessions a couple weeks prior and extending my hill rep sessions to work on the tough climbs ahead.

### Wed 21st - Thu 22nd - Training in Bulgaria

Heading out to the event a couple days early with most of the team allowed us to get some vital last minute training in. The two main reasons why we went out early was to get first hand contact with the terrain and to start adjusting to the warmer weather conditions. First notes on the terrain was that the forest is very runnable with the visibility only really changing dramatically in the dark green, which was best to avoid as they were incredibly unrunnable. The shape of the hills and contours are very accurate and are very helpful to navigate off of but the streams and gullies in the bottom of re-entrants have thick vegetation along the sides. So following them is difficult as you are having to fight your way through. So best to avoid the streams as they are not a good line feature to run along. This allowed us to discuss what would affect route choice and what tricky legs could potentially be on the forest courses.



Preparation for the sprint was slightly different as the main topic on the table was our comfortability running at high speeds in the heat. Looking at the maps provided beforehand, the area looked very fast and not very technical. This meant we would need to be pushing the pace all the way round the course and using 'travel legs' to our advantage making sure we had plans for the next leg.

### **Fri 23rd - Sprint Race**

Had a very early start in the first race of the event so was one of the first from the team in quarantine. Started warming up slowly. I wanted to keep my movement slow and warm up steadily as I don't want to put strain on my body before the race itself.

Unfortunately during the race I went over on my ankle and struggled to get up to an ideal pace until the end but at that point the damage had already been done. It is a shame that it happened so early on in the competition as it really stopped me from pushing as hard as I could. Despite this I was able to complete the race just sadly not with the time I wanted.

That evening Rona kindly arranged for me to talk to a Swiss coach who happened to be a physiotherapist. Obviously no miracle would happen overnight and knowing this I wasn't expecting to race the following day. However, the Swiss coach reassured me that nothing serious had happened (sprained or broken) and that I had damaged the ligaments and tendons around it. This will take a while to fully heal but I was able to still run on it.

### **Sat 24th - Long Race**

In the morning I had to keep a positive mindset. Because I was one of the last starters, I knew that it was going to be a long wait in quarantine, which I dwelled upon. But for the most part I wasn't alone, and I was able to occupy my mind with playing card games with teammates. However, as the time to get ready grew nearer I had to repeatedly tell myself that it was possible to run through the pain.

Thankfully by the end of my warmup my ankle didn't feel too bad, the pain was easy to ignore, and my mind was more focused on the race itself. The call up time was eighteen minutes with fifteen of them being a jog out of the city to the start boxes. This small time alone was when I tried to keep my cool and just tested out the ankle on terrain to see how it would hold up.

Once in the start boxes, I knew I couldn't dwell on the past any longer and that my goal now was to make it round the course. Unfortunately, after catching the Danish man in front of me on the way to control four, we both led each other in the wrong direction, losing a lot of time allowing for a couple of runners to catch us up. Both of us annoyed at this fact we charged round the next few controls gaining time as we went. We then caught back up to the back of them forming a small train into a couple controls. This train then quickly fell apart as me and the Danish man decided to take the long route around the hill on the start of the long leg whereas the Australian and the Turkish went straight over the top. This didn't seem to have much of an effect as we all bunched up together again mid-way through the leg at the river crossing. I was slightly breaking away from the group and would have put some time into

them after the water station; however, I made a second major mistake near the control circle of number eleven and was overtaken by the group. After that leg I put my head down and focused on navigation, spiking the next control and helping the Danish man into it as he spotted me from up the hill (he contoured too high). Both of us back together in our two-man train we tackled the next couple of legs together, until we chose different routes around a house. He chose to go down the hill out of the control to the road and I chose to contour round the re-entrant. His way turned out to be slightly faster despite the added distance. But only by a couple of metres as I came up the side of the hill onto the path he was following. We then proceeded to fight through the small patches of green on the hill side for the next few controls catching back up with the two from earlier and once again was in a train for the last few controls. Which we proceeded to fly through. And although pushing it down the hill and I could feel the ankle pain coming back, there was no way in hell I was going to lose the sprint in between us. And on the penultimate control I took one last look at the map and the final push was on. Surprisingly only me and the Danish man went for it. The fast turns before the river crossing I kept clean and was just ahead by that point and as soon as I got across the other side just went for it, punching the last control first out of us two and made sure I kept pushing all the way to the line holding him off. Although not nearly as good as I could have done, it was an enjoyable race and I was happy to experience a racing atmosphere with the Danish man.

Closing out the day was the friendship party which got very lively after the Kiwi's got the party going. And for the next few hours a lot of chaos on the dance floor ensued.

### Sun 25th - Relay Race



Because of my condition I knew I was not going to be on the GB relay team so a huge deal of pressure was lifted. I was put into one of the mixed relay teams, my teammates for the race were a Swiss man and a French man. Watching the race unfold was very exciting as the spectator control was right next to quarantine. With everyone gathered around to see the runners come through. My teammates put in really strong performances and we were even up there with the main teams. However, whilst in the starting block I noticed we were not

the first mixed team. A Belgian had set off around thirty seconds before me and I knew we were in second. Even though the mixed teams don't count and are we don't earn a reward from the event. I still wanted to win the mixed relay. I set out after this goal. I kept it clean and by the seventh control I was in striking range. I hung back and made sure my route on the long leg from eight to nine was good and was catching up to the train in front of me. Controls nine and ten were gaffled. And I had the two northernmost controls. Luckily for me the Belgian had a different gaffle and messed up when following a couple of us into these controls. The rest of the race went smoothly as well and I finished the race winning the mixed relay for my team.



I then spent the rest of the time socialising with competitors and cheering on runners. I traded a couple of tops and then watched the closing ceremony. Rounding out EYOC.

Overall my experience wasn't the best and I don't really want to talk further on the topic. But I can leave the event with new lessons learnt. And for now, the focus is going on a recovery program to heal my ankle by the end of the summer.



*Photos - Judy Bell*