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Iulia Stupu, Romania: "I like to win"

Posted on | March 23, 2016 | Category: [Newsletter](#)



- Just take a pancake
- You've got a pancake? asks Emil Olteanu and smiles. As usual he has a lot of roles, and is in charge of the Sanatatea Cup.

It is ten degrees Celsius. Not a snow flake to be seen at all, but just as usual an open orienteering event is taking place in late winter close to Ploiesti, just north of capital Bucuresti in Romania.

– The winter edition of Sanatatea Cup is a traditional event held in February and initially it was organised as a good chance for testing the preparation level for competitors participating in Skiing National Championships, says head organiser Emil Olteanu.

The first editions were skiing events, but due to the lack of snow in the last years it has been organised as an orienteering event. It is one of the first events of the year and welcomed by runners after the winter period.

All ages

- I like to win, Iulia Stupu smiles.
- The ten-year-old girl is born into orienteering and has come from Brasov with her family to take part in the race. It's about 100 kilometre drive each way.
- That's not so far, mother Anca Stupu says.
- Iulia had a grown up at Sanatatea Cup.
- During this season we hope she can do the races alone, mother says.



Diplomas

About 130 competitors took part in the race on the second last day of February. After finishing everyone got pancakes. Emil, who is in charge of the event, likes to do something extra for the athletes taking part.

- With reference to my birthday (February 1st) I like to offer different surprises to the runners. This year we offered them pancakes, tea and warm wine.
- The three best in every class were honoured with a personal diploma at the prize giving after the end of the race. Popular and nice.

The same challenge

The main group at the race is the veterans, as well as some youngsters, and some juniors and seniors.

- Our strategy for the moment is to attract more parents to the sport. If parents are enjoying orienteering they will bring their kids, and they will bring their friends, Emil says.
- The sport is struggling financially, and it looks like computers and mobiles are becoming more popular activities among youngsters, but we did also have some new young runners without orienteering parents at the race.

– It's a challenge with the lack of money. It is difficult to obtain sponsorships and because Orienteering is not an Olympic sport, money allocated from Government is close to zero. It seems also that kids are not interested in participating in sports, preferring to play on tablets or smart phones. Others prefer to participate more in other running events like marathons, mountain running and cross country, but we're not giving up at all!



Orienteering not running

At the race, Emil Olteanu does a lot of different jobs, like managing the start, organising the prize giving and being everywhere all the time. He is also president of Sport Club Association "Sanatatea" Ploiesti. Sanatatea means health in Romanian. He has been in charge since the start. The club was founded in 2003, but the real roots are from around 1980.

– I've got a very good and talented team working close to me during the years, Emil tells.

The club is one of the most active clubs in Romania in organising the events. Usually they have three traditional events – winter, spring and fall Sanatatea Cups – and one or two national events, by rotation, Semi-Marathon National Championships or National Orienteering Championships or Romanian Cup or Master National Champ.

– We're also very interested in organising events in "unusual" spaces such as parks, cities, villages or even in a skating rink. The most interesting one so far took place in 2014 in the biggest Salt Mine in Eastern Europe – Slanic, Prahova. The competition was held 240 meters underground. We intend to organise another event there. We are also doing our best to support and develop sport in general and orienteering in particular in Romania through the vision: "Health through physical activities and Orienteering" and our motto: "Orienteering, not running!"

Emil Olteanu was welcoming and head of start, prizes and a lot more. The three best in every class got a personal diploma. Some of the youngsters at Sanatatea Cup: Iulia Stupu (left), Sonia Stupu and Mihai Lungu. He was at his first orienteering. Anca Stupu and Irina Maioreescu also enjoyed taking part. Andrei Bacs is eager both in taking part and doing voluntary work for orienteering. He runs an orienteering page www.orientare.org with a lot of information.

Pancakes are prepared for the athletes taking part as a part of the fee for taking part. Neagu George was in charge of time keeping.

Text and photo: Erik Borg

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