

Interview with Canadian Nick Duca from the 2008 World Masters Orienteering Championships (Portugal) website



Nick Duca, M40, CAN

[Nick Duca leading the pack in the beginning of the Snowshoe Raid, last winter in Canada. The photo was taken from his club website: <http://stars.kw.net/>]

You have competed in the last 11 WOC for the last 17 years (1991-2007). It is an impressive list: Czechoslovakia, USA, Germany, Norway, Great Britain (Scotland), Finland, Switzerland, Sweden, Japan, Denmark and Ukraine. Try to choose your 3 best events.

Switzerland (2003) - my best result at WOC at age 37 - running during the noon hours at about +36°C - in the shadow was a great experience.

Czechoslovakia (1991) - my first WOC, where I had a great first leg in relay, with a photo on the finish chute that made it to 1991(fall) -Swedish Skogsport front page.

Sweden (2004) - another best - 40 on the sprint final.

I should add Norway (1997) for weather and sightseeing, and USA (1993) for terrain and sightseeing.

And which events were the worst?

Scotland - just not... there

Ukraine (2007) the worst result - due to a 10 minute error at first control, where I

end it my chances for WOC. I did not missed near control, but went totally OFF (running extra 1.5 km and 80 m of climb going about 90 ° wrong direction - can you imagine that after almost 30 years of orienteering?!?)

WOC 2008 will be held in Czech Republic, where you have attended your first WOC (1991). Is there a place in Canadian team for your 12th WOC?

Selection races will be held in mid May near Ottawa - and, if I have good spring training, I will try my best. That way maybe I can end WOC participation in the same country I started. [This interview was made in March, but, in the beginning of June, the Canadian Federation has announced that, in fact, Nick Duca will be in Olomouc. Congratulations!]

You have run your first WOC events (1991-1999) in Romanian team with the name Ovidiu Duca. When did you discover orienteering? How was the beginning of your Elite career in Romania? How did you get Canadian nationality?

As a Romanian we were only possible to go outside the country (99 % of cases) just after 1989. Discovered orienteering in 1978 and got hooked. Start running elite at age 18 and have quite a success at national level. Between May 91 and Sept 93, I lost very few races in Romania - true at the time when orienteering got in decline there (including elites). In 1998 I emigrated to Canada with my family and wanted to continue elite orienteering here. Two weeks prior to 2001 WOC I obtained my citizenship. Since I won the second stage of trials that year, I was glad to compete for Canada.

In 2007 you ran 4 WRE races in Romania. Are you still in touch with orienteering in your birth country? Did you meet old mates? How is the competitive level of Romanian orienteering at the moment? Do you know Ionut Zinca who is now competing in Portugal and Spain Championships?

In 2007 was the first time since I moved to Canada when I was able to get time off work for almost 4 weeks. I was glad to spend so much time orienteering in Romania after a decade and very pleased to win the National relay. Orienteering level in Romania is highly competitive but unfortunately the number of high ranked athletes is low. Ionut Zinca is a great orienteer and I wish him best of luck and chances to improve his technique with some Scandinavian experience. With some more appearances in World Cup and other major events- training camps in Europe, Ionut could be in top 20 at WOC probably any given day.

Backing to Canada, in the last 7 or 8 years you have won every kind of races. You are Canadian and North American champion. Can you remember the races where you got these titles?

I won Canadian Champs (middle 1999, middle 2003), I was second at North American champs in 2000, but won in 2004 near Cleveland. I was really close to a very good performance near my hometown in 2006 (but end up in 5th place), still happy.

Among dozens of victories, there is a special Trophy you never miss: Thomass Series. You won, at least, in 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2007. What kind of event is this? Why are you so "faithful" to this competition?

I am so glad you mentioned this. Thomass series is one of the best type of events which is held every winter (late November to late March) in SW Ontario. Competitors here all run the same event (male, female, older ,younger people) but the trick is for course setter. Based on age and gender people have some "handicap" in shortening the course. (Except being in top 10 in Canada one cannot benefit of this.) That's why this winter I have a tough time. I can end up (March 30 is last day for this year Thomass) anywhere between 1st and 3rd place - currently I am ranked second. Looking back through history - every year when I won the winter series I had great results at national or international level, and when I did not... my results were not so great. Anyone who might be in SW Ontario in winter should run one race. Even Holger Hott (WOC middle dist. Champ in 2004) competed one winter in one event. [On March 30th, Nick finished 7th, "good enough to be 3rd overall at the Thomass Series".]

In your diary you maybe have 2 lines for a race with a curious name: Niagara Wine-O, which you won in 2003. Why this name? Did you have an easy victory there?

Wine-O is a nice fall event near Niagara region (one of the best wines in the world). Indeed was a easy victory since it is a B-meet (local or regional I would say) but a nice way to end the season.

You also have run some hard raids. I noticed the Hammer 2006, where your team Foreigners missed the victory to Supplierpipeline. Have you been to other raids?

Adventure racing got big recently in this side of the country. Together with another 2 friends (Foreigners - all borne somewhere else, but not in Canada) we have a great success. I was 5 times in the winning team -lost couple of raids due to one of member was injured and tired in 2004, or I believe the course was too easy technically in 2006 - or we could not compete last fall since myself and another member were down with the flu) - but looking ahead for April 12 event- we won in 2006 and 2005 the spring event. Competition is different and difficult - winning time is around 3 hours - and with teams mates and other aspects is hard to predict the outcome. I am glad that we have a strong team - even though now all members are over 40 years old. [On April 12th, in Giant's Rib Raid, Foreigners finished 3rd in 3h29m14s, 8 min after the winner Salomon XT Wings.]

I read about your 7th place in US Ski-O Champs. 2000. Are you still practicing ski-O? Of course you include skiing in your winter training, isn't it?

I am still doing ski-o - when I have the opportunity. In fact my training includes lots of cross-country skiing in the winter months. I am glad to be able to ski during the winter and I love winter sports. My best results in Ski-O were couple of silver medals while in Romania. I was not a strong skier but I worked hard every

year and in combination with my summer O-skills.... Now I hope to have some members from my club (Stars Orienteering <http://stars.kw.net/>) maybe getting to Junior Ski-o Champs in few years. I organized some small ski-o races in the region and hopefully the winter section of orienteering will become more popular here.

I noticed your participation in a previous WMOC, Austria 2006, and maybe the result (23rd) was not good enough for you. What happened there? Have you been in other WMOC events?

Austria was a great experience. After 2 pretty good days in semi-finals (3rd and 4th) I wanted a good result in the final. One organizational issue, made me loose focus before start, and after a 2 min mistake at second control I start running faster then I could control my map reading. That's not good in orienteering!!! In 2005 at WMOC in Canada I end up 10th or so and another excuse... but I will not post it here.

Some people remember Canada 2005 because of the bears... Do you have any story about it?

Yeah a friend of mine saw the bear but we had fun when talking about. Poor bear.

What do you expect from Portuguese WMOC? Where do you have more possibilities: Sprint or Long Distance? Are you in a shape to fight for podium?

I just have to train hard from now till July. Thanks for reminding me that. And then we'll see. It will be my first visit to Portugal and I heard only good things about Orienteering in Portugal. I am glad I choose this event.

You are coming to Portugal with Val Duca, W40. Can you tell us a little about her sporting career?

Yes, Val is planning to join me in Portugal. For her nowadays events are more a chance to visit and meet friends. Her competitive days are gone (late 80's early 90's). But she always enjoys a nice forest.

With you and Val, also come from Canada the couple Ilona and Peter Dobos (W60, M70). Beside competitors, they develop a good work too as organizers, mainly Ilona, if I read correctly on the Internet. Do you know them? Can you, in a few lines, give us a quick portrait of them?

Ilona and Peter are very keen orienteers. Even if they started orienteering later in life (Ilona in late 90's, Peter just over a year ago) they really enjoy the sport. And both are proud members of Stars orienteering club. I am very happy to have them as members of our club. Ilona will be the meet director for Stars Spring WRE event. She does a great job in dealing with organizational issues, and she also trains very good and always wanted to improve.

Ted de St. Croix didn't enter next WMOC and we can imagine why. He is the

Canadian national coach and the WOC will start one week after WMOC. But his name and his parents' names (Pat and Dick) were mentioned here in an interview to Finn Arildsen. Do you personally know Ted? Is he doing a good job for Canadian orienteering?

Yes, I personally know Ted. I competed against him in the 90's and couple of years back. He is an impressive guy. Too bad he cannot dedicate more time to orienteering nowadays. He is well respected amongst orienteers in Canada. We are lucky to have him around.

Canadian Federation is working with volunteers to develop an "Orienteering Week", said the site of COF. Do you know something else about it?

Sure, as a president of Stars orienteering club I have to keep in touch with everything that is important for orienteering. There has been a change in the leading crew of orienteering in Canada, and the new president and other volunteers are very eager to develop the sport here. But it's a tough competition against the big sports (hockey, basketball, American football and baseball).

Finally, can you give us a quick portrait of Canadian orienteering? In a so big country, with many orienteering associations, probably you have different championships. Yours is Ontario, isn't it? How strong is it? How many people do you usually have in a regional and in a national race? Who are the main Elite runners? Do you have any juniors who can be Elite stars in following years?

In a such a big country it's hard to know everyone, but there are several good centers for orienteering (Southern Ontario, Ottawa, Calgary, Vancouver, Yukon, and even in the maritimes. People like to travel and meet friends at event in Canada and USA. Ontario normally has a strong championship (with more then a 100 competitors usually), but out west I heard rumors that they have sometimes 50-70 people at an evening training (Edmonton, Calgary). The Smith brothers are amongst the best elites (Mike and Wil), plus Sandy Hott, wife of Holger Hott, Kata Smith (a formerly Swedish elite runner married to Wil), plus they have the "twin sisters" already participants at WOC. One might be surprised by the Canadian team this year. We'll know after selection races, but it might be more then a handful of Smith's. Another strong elite is Patrick Goeres, from Manitoba. At age of 22 he is already a North American Champion, so our future we believe is in good hands. And I cannot finish without mentioning Emily Kemp. She's only 16 but already qualified for a WOC selection - she denied the participation because she thought it was still too young - two years ago!!! This year or maybe next, she'll be probably one of the youngest participants.

(Interview by Manuel Dias. Questions and answers by e-mail. Received on 2008 Mar 17th.)