

## **Translated from an article by Mårten Lång published in "Skogssport"**

**From the 20<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> March medals will be snowing down over the Lindbäcks ski stadium in Piteå where the senior, junior and veteran ski-orienteeing World Championships as well as the youth European Championships are to be held in a parallel arrangement.**

*"These will be very intensive days but we are full of confidence about what awaits", says Anders Bennitz, the event General Secretary.*

Access to snow at the Lindbäck ski stadium a few kilometers west of Piteå can be said to be good all year round. However, in the summer months it is only indoors where there is a good supply of the white stuff.

In 2016 a tyre test facility, Arctic Falls, was opened where the larger companies in this area of business can test their tyre designs ahead of the coming winter. Directly next door to this facility is the Kalla Tunnel ski-tunnel, named after the Swedish cross-country skier Charlotte Kalla who has competed for the local Piteå Elit club since the season 2012-13.

A hundred metres from there, on the day when Skogssport är visiting, there is as yet to snow on the final straight at Lindbäcks ski stadium but it can be felt in the air that winter is on its way. It's also here, under five highly intensive days of competition at the end of March, that an avalanche of medals will be awarded.

The ski-orienteeing elite will gather in Piteå to determine who will take home the medals in WSOC, JWSOC, EYSOC and WMSOC.

A few years ago I was contacted by the International Orienteering Federation. The question they initially asked was if Sweden was interested in arranging the ski-orienteeing World Championships. They knew that I was just crazy enough to take on such a task, explains Sture Norén with a smile.

He then contacted Piteå district council as well as the local clubs who all immediately responded positively to the suggestion.

### **How was the decision reached to host the events here at Lindbäcks ski stadium in Piteå?**

*"It was the obvious choice. Everything is already in place. That's why we're here. All we need to do is bring in a few additional toilets, a tent for the food stall and maybe some more tents for baggage", says Norén.*

The permanent buildings at the arena house waxing facilities as well as the rooms to be used for the quarantine area where the elite athletes will wait before their starts.

Roland Jansson is the Event Organiser:

*"Being in an arena where all the logistical requirements are already in place is extremely valuable to us. The surrounding terrain is also well suited for ski-orienteeing. However, it's challenging to arrange four different championships in parallel. At the moment we're putting together a detailed competition program, to set a timetable that will give us good quality and fair competitions as possible."*

Arranging four championships in parallel places extra demands on both the terrain and the arena. The last time four championships were put on at the same time was two years ago in Finland (with the same program as in Piteå except for senior European rather than World Championships). A certain amount of criticism was voiced on one of the competition days about there being too many people in the forest in certain places when the timings of several classes overlapped.

The principal reason for overcrowding in Imatra was the lack of snow cover combined with the fact that the events were held in early February when the available daylight hours are fewer than will be the case in Piteå at the end of March.

*"We have taken a careful look at the set up in Finland when planning our competition program. We also have a clear advantage here as it is possible to enter and leave the ski-stadium in two different directions. We have use for this, not least on the days when different classes compete on different distances on the same day. This also offers greater possibilities for variation in course planning, says the General Secretary for the events", Anders Bennitz.*

And as usual for any orienteering competition, irrespective of whether the competitors are on skis or on foot, the course planning is carried out under strict levels of secrecy.

*"Last winter I set out the entire base track system but unfortunately it all melted away, haha,"* laughs Sture Norén who is responsible for course planning and the track system for the World Championship events.

And planning for preparation of the tracks ahead of the World Championship winter is already at an advanced stage.

*"We have access to all of the extremely well maintained track system that exists around the arena and out in the terrain. However, we will also add further narrow tracks. I would guess that maybe 60-70 per cent of the competition tracks will narrow tracks although it looks a bit different in different parts of the competition area. Our idea is to have two separate track systems. It's difficult to combine a track system for a sprint with one for a long distance race. The system for each distance should have its own character."*

### **Would it be possible to create new narrow tracks during the competition week to provide new challenges for the athletes?**

*"Things are obviously a little different in ski-orienteering compared to foot orienteering. The maps for ski-orienteering do not need to be offset printed so we can print them out in the arena. This is to allow for last minute changes to be made, for example if someone has driven a snow-mobile through the competition area just before the race starts. I would say that we will get to the World Championships with a "fresh" map printed just a few hours before the first start",* says Norén.

Lindbäcks ski stadium was used as recently as 2016 when the Swedish Championship week was hosted in Piteå when cross-country skiing and ski-orienteering, along with a wide range of other sports, were on the program. There is now an official ambition from Piteå district council to host cross-country skiing World Cup races.

The route from an international ski-orienteering championship to the cross-country skiing World Cup was taken a couple of years ago by Tyumen in Russia.

*“There are high ambitions within the council to put on high quality events here. They want to show off Piteå and the arena in the best possible way. This means that there will be an international profile within the competition arena during the World Championships. Amongst other things, we will have a large screen on the finishing strait so the crowd get an arena experience. Winter sport is something that is highly appreciated among the residents of Piteå so we are hoping that a lot of folk come along to watch our events at the end of March”,* says Roland Jansson.

In total there are nine local clubs working with the organization of the events: Piteå IF; Piteå Skidallians; Älvsby IF OK; Arvidsjaur OK (Prästberget in Arvidsjaur is the reserve facility for the events); I19 IF; Bodens BK OS; OK Renen; Gammelstads IF and Bergnäsets AIK.

By Mårten Lång