

Junior World Orienteering Championship 2023- Romania Laura

After spending several days out in Romania to allow the team to adjust to the climate and get a few solid days out in the terrain it was time for the sprint. The sprint was held in the afternoon at the peak heat of the day (around 27 degrees), so many of us struggled to prepare both mental and physically as not only was it so hot, it was also at a bad time of day to plan to eat and fuel for the race. I went into the sprint with a really positive attitude, I was so excited to start my first JWOC, and I knew that the sprint wasn't my main discipline so there wasn't much pressure or expectation for me to perform well. I think this massively helped with my mindset. Ironically, the discipline that I expected to do worst in ended up being my best race, coming in 53rd. I was really happy with my race as I made no mistakes I was just slightly slower and more hesitant than I would have liked to be, but still a solid run to be pleased with and kick off my first JWOC with.



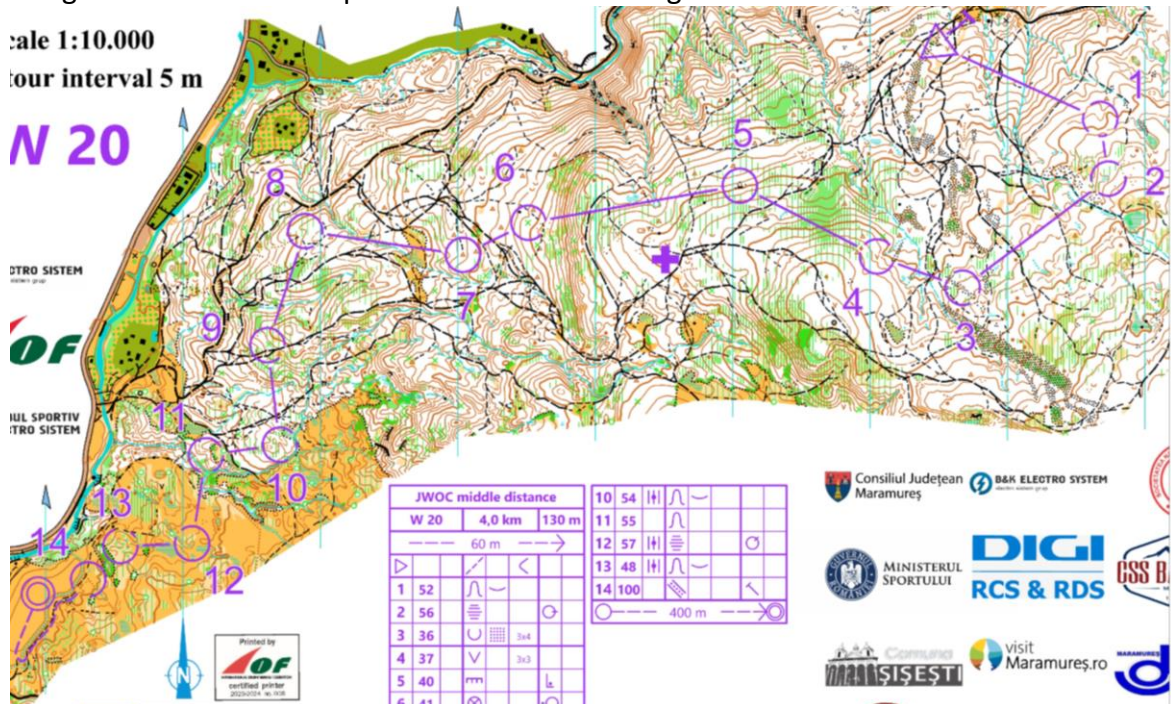
The next day was the mixed sprint relay with 2 team from each nation (2 girls on first and last leg and 2 boys on second and third leg). Due to my performance in the individual sprint I was put on the 1st GB team and was chosen to run the glory leg (4th leg). I was unbelievably nervous for this, I always get so nervous for team event and I was especially nervous this time as not only is it JWOC, it was my first ever mixed sprint relay and my first time ever running last leg in a relay!!! My team was doing amazingly, by third leg we were in 8th running in a pack of 4 other teams meaning we could potentially come in the top 6 and podium, it was all down to me to keep my cool and try and gain 2 places. Unfortunately I couldn't do that, after a slight mistake on my first control the pack started getting away from me and I was all flustered. The rest of the race was okay until I got to the dreaded maze (a maze in a sprint relay!!!- I was shocked when I saw 2 controls in it). I had lost around 3 places by this point so was sitting in around 12th place but I got to the first control

in the maze pretty smoothly but the second control in the maze was where it all went wrong, I came out of the first control and didn't have my map orientated so I ended up going back into the maze at the wrong point which lost me a lot of time so several teams caught me up. I managed to maintain 16th place until the finish but I was devastated. I felt absolutely awful for letting the team down, especially considering they all had amazing runs. Lots of tears that day and lots of apologies, luckily everyone was really nice and supportive about it.



It was quite hard for me to recover mentally from the mixed sprint relay to going straight into the middle race the next day. I didn't have any high hopes for the middle as middles are generally my weakest event, I just want to have a fun run and get a feel for the terrain ready for the long that was on the same/similar area. The area was absolutely beautiful with fast white forest with amazing visibility, to open fields for the latter end of the race. My first 4 controls went really well, I was really happy with this as I am quite prone to mistakes on the first or second control. However controls #5 and #6 didn't go so well. To control 5 I was overly ambitious and took a bearing through a patch of dense green, I didn't quite come out where I expected to and got slightly confused so lost a few minutes relocating, then to #6 again I was slightly over ambitious and decided to take a bearing down a very steep side of a hill which dragged me off line in the opposite direction of my control (whereas looking back now the fastest and easiest route was to go round the steep ledge and it would have been nicer entry into the control). After those 2 time costly mistakes my next few controls were okay, up until #10. This control was so frustrating as I was stood about 3 metres from the control and just couldn't see it as I didn't have a good enough picture of the control circle in

my head so I was stood on small hill next to the one I thought I was stood one. This was very annoying but the rest of the race was smooth after that. Overall I came 111th, which was a disappointing result but I had lots of good things to take away from the race and lots of things to learn from to improve and use on the long distance.

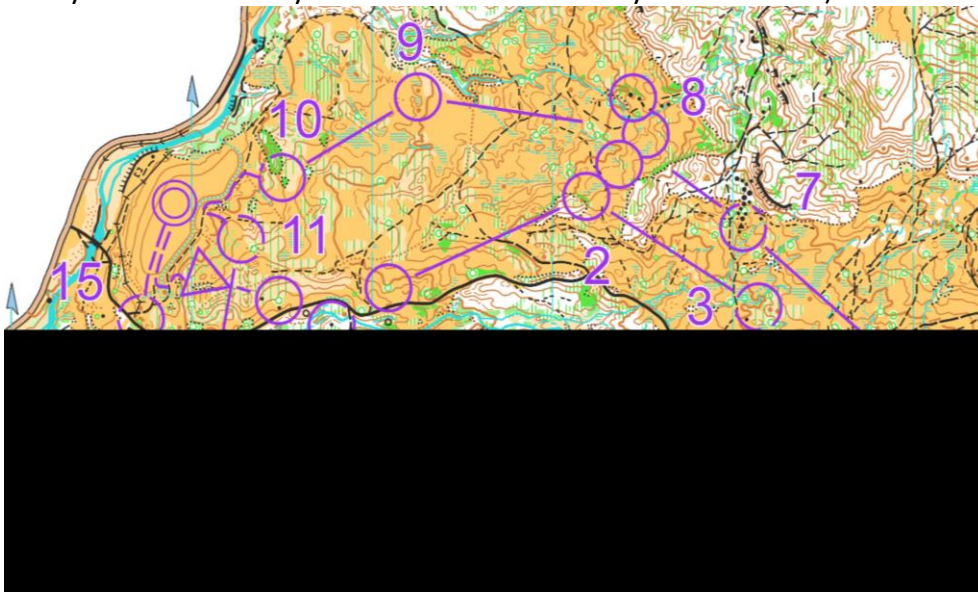


Next we had a rest day to recover from the 3 races, we had a later get up then as a team we all went to a nearby lake we called 'snake lake' - I am sure you can guess why! At the lake we met up with several other teams from Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Hungary and Ireland and ended up playing a huge game of catch in the water as well as game to get to know each other. It was a fun filled day that successfully took our mind of the stress of races and allowed us to make friends with other teams.

Now it was time for the long distance race, the race I was most excited for. This race was tough, my first 2 controls where nice and short, then came the first of the long legs. This leg went really well for me up until the last 50m of the leg where I didn't trust my bearing and veered too far north, luckily it was a quick mistake to fix. Then came my disaster leg, I ended up exiting #4 at a 90 degree error and again went too far north, it took me several minutes to realise I was in the wrong re-entrant as it was very easy to make anything fit in this forest. This mistake cost me around 6 minutes so I had a lot of ground to make up. The next few controls went smoothly again until #9 when again I veered of my bearing and didn't curve back round the side if the hill (I went straight off the side of it), this lost me around another 4 minutes. However after this, the next 2 legs made me truly fall in love with orienteering even more. I had the best 2 legs of my life on the hardest section of the course, this is when I caught up a train of 3 other girls and we battled it out for the rest of the course, I had so much fun as I have never really been in a train before and me and a Latvian girl were head-to-head leading the pack the whole way. After that came the other long leg with 3 route choices, it was interesting to look back at during analysis who took which route and which one was the best. After that the course was plain sailing and it was all about staying concentrated and composed just as you are getting tired. On the long I came 85th, which I was slightly disappointed with but considering my 2 major mistakes that cost me around 12 minuets I was very surprised to have been that high up in the results.



Finally came the relay, I was on the second GB girls team which was quite nice as it took the pressure off slightly and I was still feeling pretty apprehensive about relays after the mixed sprint relay disaster. I was running last leg again which was slightly nerve wracking. After a great start from the first 2 girls on my team (Rachel Duckworth and Iris MacMillan) we were sitting in around 19th, I had an amazing first half of the course running in a pack with a Latvian, Spanish and New Zealand girl and I was gaining lots of places and got us into 13th place at one point, however due my gaffe, my controls #7,#8 and #9 were in a perfectly straight line across the map so I ended up running straight past my #8 without realising and got half way to #9 before I even saw #8 on the map. Luckily I realised but it was very frustrating as I was having a great race up until that point. This mistake meant I ended up losing the pack I was in and subsequently lost several places and managed to come in in 21st overall. The other girls team managed to get an amazing result and come in, in 7th (Imogen Pieters, Rachel Brown and Isobel Howard), and the first boys team also almost made the podium with another 7th (Jim Bailey, James Hammond and Euan Tryner). Lots of proud tears shared by the team that day for such amazing performances not only in the relay but across the whole week of races (notably 8th for Jim Bailey and 16th for Rachel Brown in the sprint, 19th for Jim Bailey and 25th for Charlie Rennie and 26th for Rachel Brown in the middle, and finally 20th for Euan Tryner and 27th for Jim Bailey in the middle).



After a set of mixed results from me personally, after looking back at and analysing my races, I am really pleased with sections of all my races with lots of positive things to take away from certain legs to build my confidence and skill set, whilst also looking at my mistakes to find my weaknesses in the hopes to really focus on them and improve them in the future. JWOC has been an incredible experience with so much to learn from in the hopes to grow and prepare for other international races in the future.

After such an incredible week, surrounded by the best team, coaches and support I can happily say that it was an amazing experience that I am so glad to have been a part of. I have learnt so much and gained so much experience having achieved my goal which was to ignore all the cameras and GPS tracking and only focus on myself and the map. I am so thankful for all your support in making this dream possible.