

# 2008 Finn Open and Junior European Championship

Club Nautico Scarlino, Italy

May 2-10

## Flag parade opens Finn Europeans

For countless years, Scarlino Castle in the Grosseto region of Tuscany acted as a stronghold against enemies and pirates landing at nearby cities. On Sunday night, the ancient fortress played host to the magnificent opening ceremony of the 2008 Finn Open and Junior European Championships.

Following a welcome by local dignitaries and event organisers, a parade of flags ensued with local and visiting children - each one waving the flag of a competing nation - being announced onto the stage accompanied by Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy'. After all 30 flags representing the 30 countries competing had arrived on stage, the championship was officially declared open and guests and competitors were treated to a lavish buffet dinner in the castle's hilltop grounds, offering stunning sunset views over the surrounding Tuscany hillside, the coast and the shadowy shape of Elba sitting on the horizon.

The opening ceremony followed on from the practice race, in which 50 of the 84 official entries to date took part. In winds of 6-8 knots from the south-south-west, the Chairman of the Race committee Carlo Tosi laid a windward/leeward course. Ben Ainslie (GBR) led round the first loop followed by Zach Railey (USA) and Jonas Høgh Christensen (DEN). Ainslie extended his lead on the first downwind and then as usual on the second upwind, most of the fleet started to head back to the marina, leaving fifth placed Italian Finn Class Secretary Marco Buglielli (ITA) to take the race win.

On Saturday night, the International Finn Association held its AGM, which was very well attended and a number of significant proposals were discussed and agreed. The class President Balazs Hajdu reported on the excellent health of the class with increasing nations taking part, increasing junior numbers and the success of numerous development and marketing initiatives over the past year. He said, "Finn sailors are true heroes, sailing one of the most tactical and at the same time athletic sailing boats of the present time. There is a huge amount of fraternity, sportsmanship and fun involved in the life of our class. These are values that all contribute to the growing media interest and that is why we have focussed on the sailors' voice because personalities and our own stories are those things that really appeal to the public."

Dr Hajdu specifically drew attention to the first all colour and the first online FINNFARE (see <http://viewer.zmags.com/showmag.php?mid=fwqddq>), video footage on the website, the ongoing success of the FIDeS initiative, new production of Finns in Brazil and the ever expanding Masters fleet which has attracted 280 pre-entries to its World Championship, to be held next week in Medemblik.

He summed up by saying, "The Finn class has always managed in the past to successfully combine tradition with state-of-the-art technology. This is one of the key reasons we are still on the Olympic programme. New issues will be dealt with in the same way."

For the future, one of the key decisions was finalising venues for European championships over the next few years. First, the popular location of Split in Croatia beat three other excellent bids to run the 2010 Europeans and then the 2011 event was assigned to Helsinki in Finland.

Following its unsuccessful bid for the 2011 ISAF Sailing World Championships, Helsinki put together a new package to attract all Olympic classes to Finland for an Open European Championships in July 2011. The Finn class is one of the first classes to official confirm its inclusion in this major initiative, which is fully backed by the City of Helsinki as part of its “150 years of Organised Sailboat Racing in Helsinki” celebration.

The only major rule change proposed – apart from administrative or editorial amendments - was to allow the introduction of limited function digital compasses from next year. The assembled national representatives also sent a strong signal that they wanted the removal from the required equipment of the bailer and the paddle, a traditional rule harking back to the start of the class in Sweden in 1949 when safety cover was not at the level it is today. Other main decisions included changing the major championship course requirement to remove the final upwind leg and to have an offwind finish.

On the water here, the Finn sailors couldn't ask for more. The picturesque setting of the Club Nautico Scarlino has over the past week also brought perfect weather with blue skies, normally steady 10-15 knot winds and temperatures into the mid-20s. Today however, on Monday morning, that has all changed. As this goes out it is raining, cloudy, very little wind and colder with little prospects of much change this morning.

However, the preparations are over and everyone is ready and waiting for the first race of the 2008 Finn Open and Junior Championship here in Scarlino. At 12.00, with a bit of luck, the first start gun of the regatta will be fired. The racing will commence.

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Event website: [www.eurofinn2008.it](http://www.eurofinn2008.it)

Class website: [www.finnclass.org](http://www.finnclass.org)

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