

Juniors: An update

In less than two weeks Europe will witness a Renaissance. A return to racing for our new generation of Olympians and what better venue could you possibly have than the stunning Adriatic resort of Caorle.

Over 2,000 years of history have seen this city grow into a favourite tourist destination and 2021 will see Caorle once again enter the record books with the biggest start list for a junior race on Continental Europe.

After a year of disruption; a year that has been so very dark for so many people around the world; at last, a glimpse of light at the end of the Tunnel and for the 78 junior women from 17 nations and 103 junior men also from 17 nations, the long wait is almost over.

Having obtained exceptional permission from World Triathlon to increase the start lists and by offering an eliminator-style format of racing over two days, the organisers at Caorle, SilcaUltralite, the chance to race once again for these competition-hungry juniors has become a reality.

With some changes to the start lists (it is inevitable that names are removed and added in the build-up to the race) we are now able to see the lists some ten days away from the event. Of course, the final list will only be known once all athletes have checked into the Athletes' lounge on race day (Saturday 15th May) and that news will come from the Head Referee. We are not sure just yet who will be appointed Head Referee but with Italy's most experienced Technical Officials all ready to deliver, we are confident that Laura Patti and Aldo Basola will be playing key roles in making sure the race is fair and safe.

We have already heard about the exciting race format; a super-sprint eliminator over two days. You can read all about it here:

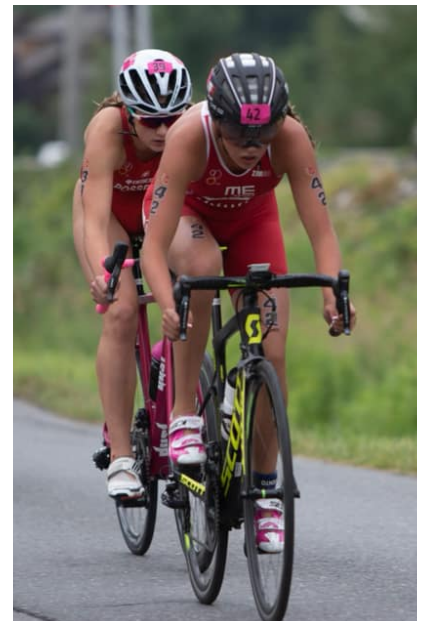
<https://www.silcaultralite.it/resource/blob/1204632/f34495a76d8e82eebd1cd474929d4810/dwn-09-2021-et-cup-caorle-pr4-data.pdf>

The Junior Women

With athletes born between 2002 – 2005 coming from 16 European nations and with a guest appearance from a Spanish-based Peruvian athlete, we are guaranteed some exciting racing.

Austria is sending its reigning National Junior champion and runner-up. **Larissa Burtscher** and **Sarah Hämmerle** will lead the attack of the red uniforms. Burtscher's win was achieved on the bike. She was some way behind Hämmerle in the swim but then exploded on the bike to establish a lead that could not be beaten on the run.

We can expect some stiff competition here between the pair, with Hämmerle all fired up after a late April strong performance in a swim-run race where she clocked the second-fastest swim split. „Ich bin mehr als motiviert und freue mich, schon bald in Caorle/Italien mein Bestes zu geben!“ I'm more than motivated and am really looking forwards to Caorle in Italy where I'll do my best! “



📷 Larissa Burtscher

For many athletes, Caorle will be their international racing debut. It will also be a great opportunity for some of the emerging nations to test the strengths and weaknesses of their new generations of athletes alongside the more established triathlon federation. Caorle offers them the safety along with the technical challenges that will lead them further along the pathway of international triathlon racing.

Hesse Fleerackers BEL, is part of the “Athletes for Hope” squad that saw Marten van Riel grow into the world-class multiple national champion, with a top ten finish in the 2016 Rio Olympics. Inspirational leadership provided by Marc Herremans has expanded the original team of top elite names to include younger athletes. (Photo: www.athletesforhope.be)

Marc spoke earlier this year to **3athlon**, the leading online triathlon and duathlon magazine for Belgium. “Marc sees that the future lies in today’s youth. ‘With Preben, Celine and Hasse, we’re trying to guide and deliver the younger athletes to the very top level. That’s what we did in 2009 with guys like Marten Van Riel and Stenn Goetstouwers and it’s really nice to see now just how far they have come along.” / “Marc ziet toekomst in de plaatselijke jeugd. ‘Met Preben, Celine en Hasse proberen we de jongeren naar het hoogste niveau te begeleiden. Dat hebben we in 2009 ook gedaan met jongens als Marten Van Riel en Stenn Goetstouwers en het is mooi om te zien waar zij nu staan.”

Read the full article here:

<https://www.3athlon.be/2021/01/03/marc-herremans-trekt-voluit-kaart-van-de-jeugd-bij-het-athletes-for-hope-triatlon-team-in-2021/>

The Czech Republic is sending a large team. Amongst them are two athletes who had the chance to race last year in Olsztyn. Caorle will be interesting, as **Heidi Juránková** was just one place ahead of teammate, **Kateřina Mičková**. Close enough in the swim, it was the older Juránková who edged ahead on the bike to ultimately claim the 10th place at the Junior European Cup in Poland last August but with a strong winter training programme, Mičková could well be a threat.



Only one female athlete from Spain is on the start list but **Carla Domínguez Torner** comes to Caorle just over a year after she comfortably took the European Junior Duathlon title in Punta Umbría. Her power and control on the run decided her victory over some of the stronger cyclists and, if she can stay with the leaders on the swim, she will no doubt use her running skills to accelerate away to the blue carpet and the finish line.

Hungary is sending a strong team too. Leading them will be a name that many will recognise, **Márti Kropkó**. The family name is steeped in history. A triathlon dynasty no less. Her mother Andrea and her father Péter were former triathletes. Péter is considered to be a triathlon-pioneer in Hungary, with five Ironman titles to his name. Andrea is currently Márty's coach and to continue the family tradition, Márty's younger siblings Márton, Jazmin and Abel are also training hard to become successful triathletes in the future. Kropkó has shown power across all three segments and will be the one to challenge Domínguez all the way.



With podium finishes in 7 of her 16 international races and some swim training with none other than the great Nicola Spirig in December last year, she is fired up and ready to go.

Israel is sending a large team of juniors to Italy. As a nation, Israel was able to resume training and racing ahead of the rest of Europe and already this year there have been a series of successful events that have given athletes a chance to test their readiness for international competition.

At the recent European Cup in Melilla, which was raced over the Sprint Distance, **Aviv Levi** came out of the water well-placed amongst the older and more experienced athletes. She used the long run up to T1 to improve her position and then, once out on the bike, set about an attack that put her alongside athletes who usually race the World Triathlon Series. Whilst her run time was not able to match that of the older athletes, her tactics in the early stages of the race showed great promise.



In Belgrade late last year, her swim and bike combo once more put her in a good position and gave her a strong 5th place finish.

Barbara De Koning will lead out the small team from the Netherlands. As reigning Dutch Junior National Champion and with 3 podium finishes in 4 international races, she comes to Caorle in great form.

A bronze in Tábor in August 2019 came from her powerful swim that took her into the lead. As the race unfolded, she was joined by stronger cyclists and was able, with her final run split, to hold on to

bronze by a comfortable margin. A couple of months later, she took gold at the Alanya Junior European Cup and did so in style. Her silver in Olsztyn last year was again a strong message to the other juniors. Watch out for de Koning.

Slovenian athletes have only a short journey to get to Caorle. **Monika Bartol**, their Junior Duathlon Champion, will lead the team and will come to this race with great determination after missing the podium in Zagreb and Belgrade in late 2019. Her power on the final run is impressive and over the short, explosive "super-sprint" format, she is a force to be reckoned with.





Serbia is sending only a small team. **Lana Gavrilović** will be coming to Caorle with a solid period of intense training behind her. Whilst some of us have been suffering the cold snowy winds of Northern Europe, she has been with her teammates and training partners in the idyllic setting of Alanya, “the city where the sun smiles”. She narrowly missed the podium at the Belgrade Junior European Cup last year, beaten on the run by a dominant trio from Spain but her swim and bike splits showed promise.

Her trip to the sunshine of Alanya was no holiday. Her father and coach, Aleksandar Gavrilović kept meticulous records of her training: Swim - pool 37 km - open water 8km, Bike 1027 km, Run 134 km. Since her return from Alanya, Gavrilović has been adding some MTB training to the mix to add further strength and Caorle will see her trained, toned and ready to race.

She will be joined by **Iva Pavlović** who also benefitted from the intense training in Alanya.

A big shout out to the organisers of this training camp; a great opportunity in the winter months for our athletes to gain valuable experience, especially in this bleak period of C-19.

The mix of athletes from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Hungary, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and of course Turkey, has done wonders for breaking down barriers and building strong links between national federations as well as creating a solid base of fitness for the 2021 racing season.

These athletes will be competing against each other in the coming years and when they look back on the city where the sun smiles, they will remember that the extra session in the pool, that additional push up to the top of the hill and acceleration over the crest and powering away on the downhill section and that final set of 400m timed runs did all have meaning and that the medal around their neck is the result of those hard months of training.



Finally, of course, it is the Italian team. As hosts, they are fielding the greatest number of athletes.

As reigning national junior champion, **Angelica Prestia** will be hoping that a home crowd will give her the support and encouragement needed to secure a podium finish. With her teammates there will no doubt be a lot of competitive racing; not just for the podium but also for individual positions in the race.

Giada Stegani, runner-up in the 2020 National Championships, will be looking to use her swim, bike power to build up a lead over Prestia, whose running is much stronger at the moment.

Junior Men

Having started with Austria in the Junior Women, it is only fair that we reverse the order when we look at what is in store for us in the Junior Men's race.



The ten-strong Slovenian team will deliver to the athlete line-up two brothers. Not just brothers, but in fact twins. **Žiga and Nejc Podgoršek** will have the chance after the 2020 lockdown to race once again. Žiga summed it up at the end of last year, "Letošnje leto je bilo nenavadno in nam bo vsem ostalo še dolgo v spominu. Od odpovedi priprav, tekem do same karantene in stanja negotovosti. / This year has been unusual and we will all have a long time in memory. From cancellation of preparations, matches to quarantine itself and a state of uncertainty."

For him, Caorle will be his third international race but for Nejc, this will be his debut. The Slovenian team has a good mix of athletes making their international debut and those who are familiar with the intensity of the "heartbeat start".

A venue such as Caorle, so close to home is a golden opportunity to assess the benefit of all the training they have done over the past 12 months.

Romania's **Albert Stratulat** will lead a trio of athletes to the swim start. With finishes in Loutraki, Kitzbühel, Târgu Mureș, Tulcea and Belgrade, he has the experience behind him and will, with his two teammates, be hoping to improve his ranking.

The Dutch team is bringing a former Youth National champion with them.

Gjalt Panjer took that title in 2018. "Mijn eerste triathlon deed ik toen ik 5 jaar was bij de triathlon in Apeldoorn. Daarna begon het met wedstrijdswemmen bij Aquapoldro en vanaf mijn 7e op atletiek bij AV '34 en wielrennen bij de Adelaar. Vanaf toen heb ik vooral het wedstrijdswemmen de meeste aandacht gegeven, om vanaf 2017 de keuze te maken om echt voor de triathlon te gaan. Ik train nu 15 uur in de week en hierin word ik door de FSG Academy goed begeleid. Afgelopen jaar won ik alle wedstrijden in het nationale jeugd circuit en werd ik tevens 1e op het NK triathlon en NK duathlon. / I raced my first triathlon was when I was 5 years old. It was in Apeldoorn. From then onwards I started competitive swimming with Aquapoldro and when I was 7, I started with athletics with AV '34 and cycling with de Adelaar. It was from that point that I focussed on competitive swimming in order to make the choice to focus on triathlon. I'm now training 15 hrs a week and am well-guided by the FSG Academy. Last year, I won every race I entered on the national youth circuit and came first in the National Junior Triathlon



and Duathlon Championships.” As runner-up in the national Junior Championships in September last year, he will be looking to use his run pace to edge to a top ten finish.

Watch out for North Macedonia’s **Dimitar Jovanoski**. A top ten finish at the Junior European Duathlon Championships last year.



A big welcome to our Mexican athlete, **Nicolás Probert Vargas**. His first international race was in March last year at the 2020 Playa Hermosa Sprint Triathlon Central American & Caribbean Championships.

One of the youngest athletes in the race, he stunned everyone by leading the swim out in an impressive 9:36. Holding it all together on the bike, he worked hard to T2 but against the vastly more experienced elite athletes, had to accept that his run pace could not match that of the older athletes.

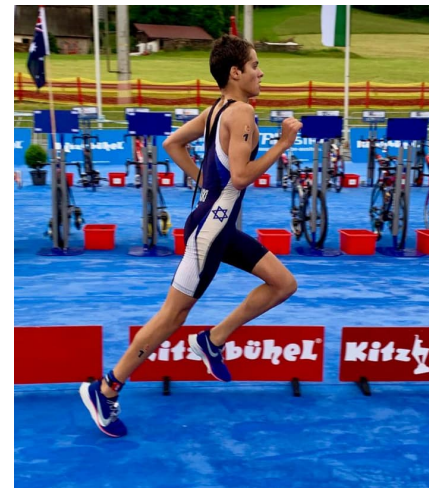
A recent bronze in Campeche at the Isla de Tris, a medal he won when racing against much older athletes, ensures that when he comes to Caorle, he will be ready for battle

with the best of our European athletes. 📷 Federación Mexicana de Triatlón AC

With some athletes spending the winter months in Alanya, others headed to the warmth of the Canary Islands. Fuerteventura was the chosen destination of **Lucas Cambresy** and the Luxembourg team. The national trainer, Thomas Andreos, located a suitable venue, Playitas Resort, with an outdoor pool and good cycle-training opportunities. His choice was a good one, as Vincent Luis and Dorian Coninx were already building up their winter training base there.

Cambresy’s swim pace is impressive for a young athlete and so, with Elite teammate, Bob Haller, they set off in November to the islands. Holding both French and Luxembourg passports, Cambresy’s focus for 2021 will be the European and World Junior Championships.

As with the Junior Women, there will be a sizeable team from Israel. For many of them, this will be their first international event. A big step up from racing on their domestic circuit but they will have **Elai Izhak Chaski** there to share his experiences of racing in Tiszaújváros, Dnipro (where as the youngest of the Israeli team, he came 4th behind three of his teammates in a nail-biting finish that saw him miss out on the podium in the closing stages of the race), Banyoles, Riga, Loutraki, Quarteira, Weert (with a top ten finish in the European Junior Triathlon Championships), Kitzbühel, Riga again, Lausanne (for the World Championships), Belgrade, Olsztyn and Melilla.





Amongst the Hungarian team, is one athlete who has had to juggle his commitments to study and sport just that little bit more than others. **Botond Lengyel** has to sit an examination but also has to collect his race package, undergo his C-19 test at the venue and attend the Race Briefing. The three things simply cannot happen at the same time but Europe Triathlon is a family that solves such problems. The examination takes place on Friday morning and after discussion with Sander Verheuel, the Europe Triathlon appointed Technical Delegate, it has been agreed with the LOC that another person could pick up his number.

For his Covid test procedures, an arrangement has been made for this to be done outside the official schedule. So, with absolutely "no pressure at all", this athlete will travel with two friends, who will help him with driving and after exam they will "fly" to Caorle.

When they arrive in Caorle, they will be met by Technical Officials, a doctor, nurses and staff. He will be looking to teammates, **Péter Molnár**, **Zoltán Vágási** and **Gyula Kovács** for advice and support to make sure his first ever international triathlon is a success.

Finland's 2019 Junior Champion and runner-up will both be racing. **Veikka Sarén** took the title and next raced against **Ville-Valtteri Salonen** in Riga a couple of months later when the tables were turned and Salonen got the better result with a stronger run.

That was all in late 2019. A long time ago and many hours of training ago. For the guys from Finland, the sunshine of the Caorle coast will be welcome. They had their first run wearing shorts in April after a long and cold winter.

From the Czech Republic we will see some new faces on the start line but also athletes who last raced together in Olsztyn in August 2020. Best placed was **Lukáš Juránek**. It was **Matej Marek** who had the fastest swim and **Filip Tlamka** who had only just the fastest bike but it was the faster T2 and run that took Juránek ahead.



Belgium is sending a strong team of athletes to Caorle. Amongst them we see **Wout Van Nuffelen BEL**, who has an impressive set of results behind him. (Photo: Van Nuffelen family - Facebook)

Van Nuffelen was Belgian national youth champion in Duathlon and Triathlon in 2017, Duathlon Champion in 2019 and runner-up in X-Duathlon, we can see that he has pace on the bike and run.

He came to the sport in 2011, with his first event being a swim/run. 2019 was easily his most successful, with 8 outright victories. 2020 of course was not the best year for anyone to race and so his focus will be truly set on Caorle for a good result.

An end of season 9:19 for 3k suggests that his run pace is on target and the early season bike fitting at Zelem with “**Bike Power Dejonghe**” has put him in a strong position for a podium finish.



Caorle will be his first big international test and he will be joined by **Balte Thijs**, who was crowned national junior champion in September last year.

At the 2019 Youth Festival in Kitzbühel, Thijs put in an outstanding run in the first semi-final but was unable to reproduce that form in the final.

Having worked hard on all aspects of the sport, his 2020 national title gives him the psychological edge over teammate, Van Nuffelen and no doubt the pair will be seeking to work hard together to ensure that the Belgian flag is flown at the Awards Ceremony.

Austria’s team is sending its top flight juniors to Caorle. The reigning Junior Champion, **Jan Bader**, will be joined by runner-up **Niklas Keller** as well as 4th-placed **Thomas Windischbauer** and 5th-placed **Matthias Freisinger**. We can expect to see some incredibly competitive racing here amongst the Austrian juniors over this fast and exciting course.

Of them all, Bader is the strongest on paper. Narrowly beaten into silver in Kitzbühel in 2019, he went on to win a second silver that year in Tulcea.

We are saving the biggest team to the last once again as the host nation will be presenting over 25 junior male athletes.

It will be not only a great chance for them to race but also for the Italian selectors to make some more informed decisions on where the future of triathlon in Italy lies.

With Tokyo on the programme this year and with plans already being made for Paris 2024, this new injection of talent is critical not only for Italy but indeed for every nation.



Back to the Italian Junior Men and who amongst them might make it to the podium?

For the majority of the young Azzurri, this race will be their first taste of international competition but, with the home crowds cheering them on, with the live commentary urging the athletes on in Italian and in English, with all the sights and sounds that are familiar, these athletes will feel quite at home. Who knows, hidden amongst these new arrivals might be the Olympic hope for the future.

Francesco Gazzina's 5th place in September at the Junior National Championships when he raced against older athletes but he will have to find some real closing pace for the run if he is to be in with a chance for the podium. One of the younger athletes, **Kiril Polikarpenko**, comes from a great triathlon dynasty. His father and older brother have all shown great results and the desire to win runs in his blood.



Fiorenzo Angelini's trip to Kitzbühel in 2019 gave him a bronze in the mixed relay and some good results in the individual races. Along with Gazzina, Prestia and Greco, the team fought hard and beat the French team in a nail-biting sprint finish to claim bronze.

With so many athletes racing over the two days, the Italian coaches will be able to collect vast amounts of data that will help with the development programme that is currently underway in Italy.

Caorle will be a celebration. It will, as we mentioned at the start of this article, be a renaissance. For so long now, our younger athletes have struggled under the pressures created by the pandemic. For sure, some of our athletes will have found other interests but for those who have been innovative and who have focussed on their studies and their training, this event will be the chance for them to

show us all how good they are and how strong their potential is.

The LOC is determined to deliver to these athletes the very best opportunity for them to show the world just how good they are.

For the full start lists for the Caorle European Triathlon Junior Cup, please click this link:

https://www.triathlon.org/events/start_lists/2021_europe_triathlon_junior_cup_caorle