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LASER RUN SPOTLIGHT: PORTUGAL

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In 2016, the capital city of Portugal hosted the 2nd UIPM Laser Run World Championships. Drone footage captured the incredible scene of a mass gathering of athletes participating in a UIPM Sport for the first time.

Since then, the country at the south-west corner of Europe – once thought by adventurers to be the end of the world – has become one of the global epicentres for UIPM's fastest-growing development sport.

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Multiple editions of the UIPM Global Laser Run City Tour have been held in a variety of cities, enabling new urban communities an entry point to UIPM's sporting pyramid and cultivating the development of Laser Run specialists who now attend the World Championships each year with medal ambitions.

Manuel Barroso, President of the Portuguese Modern Pentathlon Federation (FPPM), explains that it all started not in Lisbon (POR) in 2016 but in Perpignan (FRA), 12 months earlier.

"The 2016 Laser Run World Championships came after Maria Migueis had conquered the world title at the inaugural 2015 edition in France," says Manuel.

"We managed to have Lisbon as host city and it was located at one of the most iconic places of the Portuguese capital, the riverside and tourism centre.

"It was such a huge success from an organization and sport point of view and for sure it showed the potential of Laser Run as a competitive and dynamic activity for all ages and social groups."

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Since then, Portugal has eagerly embraced the GLRCT, which was launched in 2017.

“We have been developing the Laser Run activity with two strategies that come together: the Laser Run Sports for All Project and the Laser Run Elite Project,” says Manuel.

“We have created a National Laser Run League, which in 2019 reached 10 stages including a National Championship from the north to the south of Portugal in a partnership with City Halls.

“We share resources and promote the project with them, while the Portuguese federation takes the opportunity to equip local clubs and schools or informal groups and invite them to join the National League. We have now over 1,000 athletes associated only for Laser Run purposes, and 400 of these compete in the National League representing 30 clubs.

“In 2020 we started the Madeira Laser Run Regional League following the 2019 European Biathlon & Triathlon Championships held in Madeira.

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“Laser Run is all about sport entertainment through competition and we try to bring local culture, music and festive activities to our Laser Run schedules.”

As Portugal has demonstrated, Laser Run is a concept with exponential growth potential. But there are also challenges to overcome, as Manuel admits.

“So far we have only attracted small and local sponsors,” he says. “The next step is to involve TV and try to reach other sponsors.

“Each year the number of participants is increasing exponentially, but the limitations are always equipment and a small team in my federation to promote and manage the development programme.”

Manuel also acknowledges the challenge of developing a Pentathlon infrastructure in Portugal to enable Laser Run athletes to aim towards Olympic sport. But Laser Run is now firmly embedded in the nation’s sporting DNA – so much so that Manuel has a number of recommendations about how UIPM can further develop the GLRCT.

The 2020 season may be on hold but UIPM will keep working closely with organisers – both established and new – in all countries of the world to build on the brilliant groundwork that was done in cities like Lisbon at the start of this journey.

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