

Euro Sup 2016

Delpero and Moreno become the first stand up paddle champions of Europe, French dominate race events at Euro SUP 2016, Lacanau.

European surfing returned to Lacanau Ocean for the first edition of the European Sup Championships held 18-24th June in surf ranging from 1-2ft and playful to solid 4ft typical thumping French beachbreak. The town of Lacanau in south west France has long been a major part of European surfing, the surf club here was established almost 50 years ago in 1968, and has remained an important presence on the European scene every decade since. So naturally there could be no better place for the European Surf Federation to present it's first Stand Up Paddle championships. The wealth of knowledge and experience of the hosts was invaluable, not to mention the depth of tradition and potentially perfect surf that would greet the eleven national federations taking part from all over the continent.

From the offset Euro Sup 2016 provided a much more unique environment than all the previous ESF competitions before it, the inclusion of long distance and technical racing potentially saw a new challenge to the traditional European surfing powerhouses from the continental and Scandinavian nations who, whilst not having to rely on consistent surf conditions in their home countries, could launch a truly competitive campaign in these divisions. Names like Casper Steinfath from Denmark are already familiar on the racing scene, yet now had a new platform to show case their skills alongside the usual suspects from the surf scene. Girls like Iballa Moreno; a fantastically gifted stand up paddle surfer from Spain, and guys like Antoine Delpero, a previous World Longboard Champion, multiple European Champion, and current leader of the LQS in Europe. In fact Antoine would arrive at the competition having won the second LQS of the season at Porto only a week prior.

Day 1 would kick off the competition in perfect weather and less than perfect surfing conditions. So it would be decided to run the technical racing and put the surfing divisions on hold until the forecasted swell arrival later in the week. And it was the perfect decision. Technical racing involved the completion of three laps of a course approximately 1km in length. With the course spanning Lacanau's spectacular beachfront, a natural amphitheater provided the perfect environment for competitors to kick off the competition. Conditions were a little tricky however; a moderate southerly wind had kicked up surface chop that created unwelcome bumps and moguls to keep the paddlers on their toes....literally.

The womens division was dominated by Olivia Piana from France, she completed the course in a hair under 42 minutes, 3 minutes ahead of nearest competitor Susak Molinero of Spain. Marie Buchanan from England was third coming in 30 seconds thereafter. The men followed and again the French dominated, although only a minute encompassed the times of the top three. Event favourite Casper Steinfath was pushed into third by the French duet of Titouan Puyo and Arthur Arukins, who finished first and second respectively, the winner finishing with a time of 34;25 minutes.

Day 2 saw the swell arrive and conditions were more than challenging. Many competitors had found themselves thinking they should be careful for that they wish for....yes the swell

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had picked up, but the 4ft surf pounding the French shoreline would certainly provide a great challenge. Many heats were settled by minimal scores, often surfers progressing with one solid score. The seasoned competitors would prevail, whilst the greenhorn surfers competing at this level would gain an invaluable lesson in the nuances of surfing a 20 minute heat in such conditions. There were no surprises....in a marathon day of surfing the standouts were the French of Antoine Delpero and Ben Carpentier, Oscar Ruiz of Spain also impressed. Iballa Moreno from Spain announced herself as favourite of the women's class, totally dominating her heats with powerful technical surfing and heat strategy up there with the very best, giving most of the men a lesson in how to win effectively. The stage had been set for an epic final day in close to perfect surf.

Day 3 didn't disappoint. From the outset it was clear it would be a great day. 30 degree sunshine and 3-4ft offshore surf greeted competitors and officials alike. The marathon day of heats prior would allow contest officials to run longer heats and pick the best conditions with which to run the final divisions. Surfers at this point didn't waste the opportunity provided to them. Mauritz Mauch of Germany shone in the conditions, reaching the grand final against Ruiz and the French duo of Delpero and Carpentier. Carpentier had shocked favourite Delpero in the prior round, edging his compatriot by .2 of a point. However the final saw normality resumed. Delpero, using his wealth of knowledge and surfing prowess was outstanding. Powerful, stylish and aggressive, he deserved to become the first sup champion of Europe, winning the final over Carpentier in second. Ruiz could be proud of his performance to place third, and Mauch of Germany finished fourth, an outstanding position from a country not associated with the surfing side of the sport. Performance of the day however belonged to Moreno in the womens. Starting the heat with a 9 point ride she immediately backed it up and had the field in a combination situation within five minutes. Her surfing was nothing short of exceptional. Caroline Angibaud fought back but fell short. Sofie Simonsson from Sweden and Abi Barker Smith of Wales rounded out the final positions. Both having battled enormously hard to reach the final they can be truly proud of their performances.

In the ever increasing temperatures the long distance racing events would finish off the day. It was all time, baking sunshine and glassy surface conditions greeted competitors at the start line. If anything the heat would make the 14km race more of a challenge than it already was. The course ran parallel to the coast south towards Cap Ferret for 7km then returned to the Finish line at Lacanau Surf Club.

Piana again triumphed in the womens over Molinero, finishing with a time of 1:56:08. Angela Fernandes of Portugal rounded out the podium finishing a close 2 minutes behind. Buchanan of England again performed well to finish fourth.

The men were once again dominated by the French and finished as they did in the Technical race with a French 1-2. Casper Steinfath again finishing in third place. Arutkin and Puyo were exceptional throughout. The race divisions were clearly very competitive and with competitors not relying on surf conditions to train the field was probably more even than in any other Euro surf event before it, which just goes to show the level of achievement of the French athletes.

Under the tutelage of trainer Pitou Gaillard, the French competitors have raised the bar to a whole new level and their complete domination of the event from a national team point of view was totally deserved, no one came close. The performances of Ruiz and Moreno in the surf divisions propelled Spain into second place with the national team of Portugal closely following them in third place.

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As the event drew to a close, Thursday was largely unused for competition. Officials calling competition on in only the best conditions available. The surf had become sideshore and unruly. A tag team event was put on between Portugal and France. Unsurprisingly the French continued to dominate, and became the inaugural winners of the Lacanau cup.

With that, the curtain fell on Euro Sup 2016. It would hopefully be remembered as it should be, the legacy for future Sup events created. Future events will no doubt not enjoy the perfect conditions that Lacanau bestowed for 2016, but the stage has been set. The event will no doubt grow to include further countries in the future and from a competitive point of view will no doubt showcase the exceptional athletic prowess of each and every one of the riders. *Merci* Lacanau, the bar has been set.....