

2024 XTERRA World Cup Premiers Live: Titans of Off-Road Triathlon Clash in Taiwan

KENTING, TAIWAN, March 19, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the ascending sun breaks the horizon over Little Bay Beach, the heart-pounding pulsations of indigenous drummers signal the return of the XTERRA World Cup streaming live on March 23, 2024.

Taiwan's Kenting National Park, hosts the opener of the 2nd annual XTERRA World Cup, gathering the world's top off-road triathletes—from legends, emerging talents, returning champions and local favorites competing for a shot at the \$340,000 total prize purse throughout the 7-stop global pro series conceived by the pioneers of off-road triathlon.

The Kenting Youth Activity Center, a characterful classic Hokkien-style villa, is alive with activity as elite athletes converge, preparing for a pivotal chance to earn crucial points in the first of 11 races that will culminate with the crowning of the 2024 XTERRA World Cup Champion.

Course Description

The Full Distance Race is a meticulously designed triathlon battleground that spans 42.5 kilometers across three disciplines:



Swim (1.5K): The race initiates with a 1.5-kilometer swim in the Pacific Ocean's warm waters at Little Bay Beach. Athletes face two 750-meter laps with a short run on the sand between, testing their ability to quickly transition and maintain pace in open water.

Bike (29K): Following the swim, competitors mount their bikes for a challenging 29K MTB course. This segment is a test of stamina and skill, with a relentless mix of climbing and descents along single tracks. Athletes will navigate through tough climbs and technical sections filled with rock gardens and lengthy descents, requiring both power and precision.

Run (12K): The final leg is a 12-kilometer trail run that tests athletes' endurance and agility to the fullest. The course features a mix of grassy areas, loose rocks, and more technical terrain, including roots and riverbeds. This year's run has been updated to a two-loop format, eliminating an initial steep climb in favor of a layout that promises a faster overall pace.

Nature's X-Factor

The environmental conditions in Taiwan add a significant layer of complexity. The tropical heat and humidity present a stark contrast to the cooler climates many athletes train in, demanding acclimatization and strategic hydration.

The natural terrain of Kenting's southern mountains offers unpredictable challenges, from the untamed trails to the risk of equipment failure, such as flat tires on the rugged bike course that plagued French stars Felix Forrissier and Maxim Chané in 2023 at the same spot, from the same rock, about 22K into the MTB segment.

Also notably, in 2023, strategy and pace on the run course was crucial for Alizée Paties to secure a victory over Solenne Billouin, highlighting the importance of tactical planning in this sun-drenched race with nowhere to hide. This year, with the modified run course, athletes might need to adapt their strategies to maintain a competitive edge.



Elite Men's and Women's Start List available [here](#).

□Elite Focus: Who To Watch Out For

All eyes will be at the top of the field in both the men's and women's races. Live commentary throughout the livestreamed event will keep global spectators glued on these notable competitors.

The Men's Race:

Felix Forissier, FRA

Felix Forissier has already made a significant mark in the XTERRA community of triathletes. Along with being the 2023 XTERRA World Championship runner-up and the winner of the 2023 World Cup Stop #4 in XTERRA Czech, he's also the 2023 XTERRA European Champion.

Known as "The Silent Assassin," Forissier attributes his success to tailored training, saying, "If I want to be stronger at the World Cup, I have to train more specifically." This dedication to refining his approach, along with changes in his coach and training methods is capped off by strong sentiments from his older brother Arthur who states, "There are other very strong guys, but most of the time they have a weakness. In my mind, Felix is strong in all three sports."

Felix's competitive spirit is also fueled by the unique bond of racing with Arthur, though he humorously notes, "I'm better," highlighting both his competitive edge and the familial rivalry that pushes him to excel, marking him the possible pace setter and overall favorite in World Stop #1 this Saturday in Taiwan.

Arthur Forissier, FRA

Arthur Forissier claimed the win in Taiwan in 2023 only to have his World Cup campaign cut short with a broken collarbone in Stop #4 at XTERRA Czech. A seasoned competitor in XTERRA, Arthur holds titles including the 2022 XTERRA Worlds Runner-Up and the 2019 ITU Cross Tri World Champion, among seven major XTERRA victories since 2015.

Post-injury, Arthur confidently asserts his recovery, stating, "Yes, I have fully recovered, it's already behind me," showcasing his readiness and resilience. Arthur highlights, "Winning again would certainly be a good thing, but I believe it's not enough for the overall standings. It's being at the forefront throughout all the races that will matter!"

Arthur Forissier enters the racing season poised for success, leveraging his recovery, strategic planning, and equipment choices such as transitioning to the Cervelo ZFS-5, appreciating its stability and performance on challenging terrains, likening it to "a tractor" for its reliability.

His comments on competitors combine respect with light-hearted competitiveness. Arthur's playful banter extends to Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen (DEN) with a friendly "Happy hunting ;-)," while he commends Michele Bonacina (ITA) for his sportsmanship, acknowledging him as the "Fair-play award, and the only one to have already won a race this season!"

Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen, DEN

Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen, with his impressive XTERRA results including winning the 2023 XTERRA World Cup Short Track at Stop #7 in Trentino and securing top 5 finishes in 12 out of 13 races last season, zeroes in on the upcoming challenges with confidence and strategy. Reflecting on this course in Taiwan, he finds it uniquely suited to his strengths: "I definitely feel it's one of the most exciting courses on the World Cup circuit. This year I will try to take advantage and hopefully be able to run it home."

Sloth Nielsen acknowledges his approach to swimming with a humbling view, "I haven't progressed much on swimming but mainly focused on MTB and trail running." He is mindful of the competition, particularly highlighting Felix Forissier as a strong contender, "Felix is tough and probably the favorite - will he work together with his brother to take the win?"

Known as "The Overtaker " he continues to add, "It's a greatly stacked field [and] my favorite course which favors the MTB rider the best. If I can't make the gap on this course I should stop promoting myself as a "super" biker. I can't wait to really push it on the bike and go faaaast!"

Michele Bonacina, ITA

Michele "The Shark" Bonacina, an emerging talent from Italy, has quickly made a name for himself with the first victory of the 2024 XTERRA World Tour in South Africa, alongside a third-place finish in the 2023 World Cup Stop #2 USA (Short Track).

Bonacina is considered the fastest swimmer in the XTERRA World Cup series. Despite his rapid ascent, he views his journey with humility and a learner's mindset: "I'm [still] new in the XTERRA world because I started just 3 years ago so I have to discover a lot."

Bonacina's approach to competition is introspective and strategic, "I have to refresh the sensation of the race and I'll use this as a test to check [my] preparation."

The Women's Race:

Alizée Paties, FRA

Alizée Paties, the inaugural 2023 XTERRA World Cup Champion from France, has demonstrated exceptional consistency with top five finishes in 25 of her last 26 races, accumulating 13 career wins. Heading into the new season, Paties is refining her approach: "This year is totally different

and also the strategy. I'm more focused on the end of the season, not the start."

Paties has spent the off-season balancing intense training with mental wellness and leisure, "I'm focusing on the mental. I try to do all the things that I can't do during the season. I like to forget that I'm an athlete during this period, I need it."

Despite facing training challenges, such as a nerve issue in her foot, Paties remains optimistic about her readiness and performance, "February was not the best month for my training, but I'm confident." Her love for the race in Taiwan shines through, praising the atmosphere, the landscape, and the cultural experiences it offers.

"I don't have expectations, I just want to restart the machine." Paties is ready to tackle the challenges of the World Cup with resilience and a focus on the long game ahead.

Solenne Billouin, FRA

Solenne Billouin, hailing from France, enters the season as the 2023 World Cup Runner Up and the reigning two-time XTERRA World Champion, with top 5 finishes in 23 of her last 25 races, including nine victories.

As she gears up for the race in Taiwan, Billouin is enthusiastic about returning to competition, "I'm just very happy to race again, having the experience from last year will help me a lot, especially with nutrition and heat as the weather is very different coming from Europe."

She acknowledges the intensity of competition but emphasizes her primary goal is to gauge her current level rather than solely aiming for victory against her peers, "I have my eyes on other athletes, but I just want to see the level I'm at now."

Billouin considers the Taiwan course especially challenging, with the bike and run segments crucial for success, "Taiwan is a brutal course, but the focus of this winter has been to just be a better triathlete. To be a faster swimmer, biker, and runner. It's what I'm looking for."

Billouin's reflections reveal a champion's mindset—balancing the pride of past achievements with the drive for continuous improvement and a readiness to face the challenge of topping her field in a competitive landscape for this 2024 XTERRA World Cup series.

Marta Menditto, ITA

Marta Menditto, from Italy, emerges into 2024 with a clear vision, having secured a commendable 5th overall in the 2023 XTERRA World Cup and already clinching a victory this year at XTERRA South Africa.

Menditto is focused on maintaining consistency throughout the year, a goal she views as

ambitious yet attainable through her "best ever winter preparation."

Expressing cautious optimism about her form for the Taiwan race, Menditto commits to giving her all, stating, "I don't know if I will be in my best shape for Taiwan, but I'll give my 100% like always. I really struggled last year with the big climb [in the run segment] so I want to change my memories about the race this year."

The adjustment to a two-loop run course in Taiwan intrigues Menditto, hinting at potential strategic advantages, "Having two loops can change a bit of the cards on the table and I hope to be able to move the right cards."

She acknowledges the unpredictability of the season's start, where athletes' winter training and focus levels remain variables saying, "The season is long and for sure we will see a lot of change on the leaderboard, it's the fun part of the game."

Carina Wasle, AUT

Carina Wasle, hailing from Austria, enters her 19th year with the reputation of XTERRA's most traveled athlete. Her victory at XTERRA Lake Scanno in 2023 and a 2nd place finish at XTERRA South Africa this year, has Wasle's nearly two decades of evolving competition showing no signs of slowing down.

She reflects on the intensified demands of the sport, noting, "A lot has changed, but I think now you need all three disciplines at a high level to have a chance to be in the top five. This year, if I wanted to have a chance, I had to change a lot."

Looking ahead to the XTERRA season opener in Taiwan, Wasle feels better prepared than ever, partly thanks to her recent competition with Marta Menditto in South Africa, which served as a valuable benchmark, "I think Marta gave me some good competition. I wasn't too far behind so I think the training was quite good. I invested quite a lot to get stronger and I worked hard on my weaknesses."

Wasle expresses a preference for warmer climates, which suits her well for races like Taiwan, "Normally, I'm good at hot races because I'm small so it doesn't bother me. I love hot conditions."

Key Matchups and Predictions:

Sibling Rivalry Heats Up: The Forissier brothers, Felix and Arthur, bring a compelling narrative to the 2024 XTERRA World Cup series. With both athletes demonstrating exceptional skills in all three triathlon disciplines, their rivalry adds an extra layer of excitement. Arthur's victory in Taiwan last year and Felix's narrow miss at the World Cup title set the stage for a fierce competition. Can Felix leverage his strength across all three disciplines for redemption, or will

Arthur repeat his success?

The Shark vs. The Overtaker: The matchup between Michele “The Shark” Bonancina and Jens Emil “The Overtaker” Sloth Nielsen could be a defining one for the series opener. Sloth Nielsen, known for his exceptional biking skills, might find a strong competitor in Bonancina, who has shown he can challenge the best in off-road triathlon, especially if he’s first out the water this weekend: “There are strong bikers a little behind like Jens and he’s also a good runner. I’ll do my best to stay with him and then let’s see.”

Paties vs. Billouin: The matchup with Alizée Paties and Solenne Billouin is set to captivate audiences once more this year. As World Cup Champion and World Champion clash, their performances have pushed each other to new heights. With both athletes sharing top honors in past races, their showdown in Taiwan is eagerly anticipated, promising a showcase of talent and strategy.

Menditto vs. Wasle: Marta Menditto, coming off a strong win in South Africa with Carina Wasle right behind her, face-off once again in a quick turnaround rematch in Taiwan. The most traveled XTERRA athlete with years of experience pitted against the rising talent of Menditto's consistent performances set the scene for a fascinating contest.

The 2024 XTERRA World Cup series, with its blend of seasoned champions and emerging talents, is poised to deliver unparalleled competitive intensity. Many anticipate a showdown with one of the Forissier brothers taking the top spot, with Felix's intensive off-season training giving him a slight edge. Meanwhile, the late-season surge of Solenne Billouin, following Alizée Paties' explosive start in 2023, adds to the speculation. However, in the world of XTERRA, outcomes are never certain, leaving the door wide open for surprises.

Watch The Action Live

As the 2024 World Cup series kicks off, the evolution of strategies and rivalries that define XTERRA will be at the forefront. All the action will be livestreamed for free on the [XTERRA Live page](#) at xterraplanet.com.

High-res images available for use here.

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