

Sloth Nielsen and Mairhofer Masterful at Stop #4 of 2024 XTERRA World Cup

NAMUR, BELGIUM, June 9, 2024
/EINPresswire.com/ -- Key Points

- Due to high water levels, Stop #4 of the XTERRA World Cup shifted to a duathlon.
- Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen (DNK) claimed his first 2024 World Cup victory, while Sandra Mairhofer (ITA) secured her second consecutive win.
- With only three World Cup events left, athletes are pushing to solidify their standings before Stop #7 at the World Championship in Italy.



Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen (DNK)

The fourth stop of the 2024 XTERRA World Cup took place on June 8, 2024 with Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen (DNK) and Sandra Mairhofer (ITA) clinching victories.

“

It was in the stars today for me to get this chance to get my first World Cup win,”

Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen (DNK)

Due to elevated water levels in the Meuse River, the traditional swim segment was substituted with an additional trail run, turning the triathlon into a duathlon.

Sloth Nielsen's triumph elevated him to second place in the overall [World Cup standings](#). Mairhofer's back-to-back Full Distance race victories at Oak Mountain, USA and Belgium propel her to fourth overall, despite her absence from the first stop in Taiwan. With three more events remaining, the race for the World Cup has become increasingly competitive.

XTERRA Belgium was notable for its challenging course and also for its festival atmosphere it hosted within the ancient fortress walls. Athletes navigated cobblestone paths that ascend to the iconic Citadel and traversed the dense forest trails that surround it, making it one of the most scenic and strenuous events in the series. A prize purse of €15,000 for elite participants and 58

age grouper qualifying slots for the XTERRA World Championship in Trentino, Italy, were at stake, drawing a global array of competitors eager to test their limits on this highly acclaimed European landscape.

Course Highlights:

First Run (5K): A fast paced 5K trail run to start the race included broader, flatter sections of the latter 10K run portion, omitting the steeper climbs and descents that athletes would face later in the competition.

Bike (35K): Following the run, competitors mounted their bikes for an ascent on the cobblestone streets within the historical precincts of the Citadel. Comprising two loops, the bike course featured steep inclines and quick descents, stretching beyond the city into the forest where adept handling was essential. Favorable dry conditions likely made for a quicker course, culminating in a descent down the Citadel steps back into the transition area.

Final Run (10K): The duathlon concluded with a demanding 10K run, starting with a steep climb and weaving through both historical and natural landscapes. As competitors neared the finish, the rising cheers of the crowd catapulted them toward the finale in the center of Namur.

Men's Race Recap

An intensely competitive 5K run was a mad dash for positioning as Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen (DNK) set a brisk pace from the outset,



The Citadel of Namur



Sandra Mairhofer (ITA)



Felix Forissier (FRA)

leading a select group that included Felix Forissier (FRA), Arthur Serrières (FRA), Sebastian Neef (DEU), and Arthur Forissier (FRA). This fast start created a significant gap, with other contenders like Sébastien Carabin (BEL), Quinten Dewaele (BEL), Michele Bonacina (ITA), and Théo Dupras (FRA) working hard to keep up. Maxim Chané (FRA) faced additional challenges, recovering from a stumble at the start that left him trailing the pack.



Solenne Billouin (FRA)

Bike Segment Dynamics

As the competitors left the historic Citadel, a leading group quickly formed aggressively pursuing Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen, who was setting a relentless pace without seeking any drafting help. This was a rare instance of Sloth Nielsen leading so early in a race, which he seemed to relish. The toughest hill on the course was where Sloth Nielsen truly intensified the competition, dramatically increasing the pace and consequently fragmenting the group. Sébastien Carabin, Théo Dupras, Michele Bonacina, and Sébastien Carabin struggled to keep up, and even the 2023 XTERRA World Cup Champion Arthur Serrières was dropped on the following descent. Only Felix Forissier and Arthur Forissier managed to stay with Sloth Nielsen, and the trio established a significant lead by the end of the second lap, a full minute ahead of the fourth-place Sébastien Carabin, and three minutes ahead of Maxim Chané and Arthur Serrières, who were in fifth and sixth places respectively.

The Final Run

Exiting Transition 2, Felix Forissier surged forward with remarkable speed, while Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen experienced some delays, putting him momentarily behind. However, Sloth Nielsen quickly caught up to Forissier, who appeared to be pushing his limits for the first time this season. Seizing the opportunity, Sloth Nielsen decisively increased the pace on the steep switchbacks, establishing a lead over Forissier by the end of the second lap. By the race's conclusion, Sloth Nielsen had extended his lead to 1 minute and 19 seconds, clinching his first 2024 XTERRA World Cup victory.

Arthur Forissier, meanwhile, grappled with fatigue and a persistent challenge from Sébastien Carabin, who was gaining time on all competitors except Sloth Nielsen. Despite losing time, Arthur Forissier managed to hold onto the third podium spot, just ahead of Carabin who finished fourth. Maxim Chané completed an impressive comeback, finishing strong despite an early fall at the start line.

Echoes from the Citadel: Quotes from the Top 3 Men

Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen of Denmark reflected on a landmark victory at the XTERRA World Cup in Belgium. "It was in the stars today for me to get this chance to get my first World Cup win," he stated, highlighting a sense of destiny in his triumph. Nielsen elaborated on his strategy, "I had a plan to just keep myself under control and not do anything stupid." The challenging course tested his resolve, where he aimed to "take control from the lead."

His recount of the race day dynamics with Felix Forissier painted a vivid picture of their competition. "Felix and I were right next to each other on the climbs and the downhills," he shared, underlining the close contest. Despite the fatigue setting in during the second bike loop, a moment of realization pushed him forward. "I was so tired on the second loop of the bike, but I looked back and saw that I had 10 meters on him," Nielsen recounted. This small gap reinvigorated him, "So that made me feel fresh again even though I had cramps in my legs. It gave me some wings to get it done."

Felix Forissier, who finished second, provided insight into his race day challenges. "First run was fine, but on the bike, I had to push really hard. I was with Jens Emil on the first loop of the bike, but on the second loop, he pushed too hard for me to keep up, and I saw him getting further and further away." Despite the tough race, Felix remained positive about his performance and its implications for the season. "I'm happy with my second-place result, and it's also good for my World Cup standings."

Arthur Forissier, securing the third spot, recounted his experience starting from a solid run. "The first run was quite okay for me. I didn't have to push so hard to follow the leaders," he noted. However, the bike segment proved more demanding. "Immediately on the bike, it was very hard. We were quite slow in the flat section and not as aggressive on the downhill. On every uphill, it was all out. It was really hard to follow Jens Emil and Felix. Their pace was too quick, but I really wanted to stay with them. It was really exhausting, but I was glad to get back with them into the second transition," he shared. The final run brought its own difficulties. "On the run, I had some cramps in the beginning. But I managed my pace and finished with the energy that I had." He also acknowledged the strong performance of local favorite Sébastien Carabin in his home race. "Sébastien Carabin is a really strong guy, especially in a duathlon format, and he was pushing really hard behind me."

Top 10 Men's Full Distance Results

Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen, DNK: 2:21:02

Felix Forissier, FRA: 2:22:21

Arthur Forissier, FRA: 2:23:23

Sébastien Carabin, BEL: 2:23:35

Maxim Chané, FRA: 2:26:11

Arthur Serrières, FRA: 2:26:47

Sebastian Neef, DEU: 2:27:35

Théo Dupras, FRA: 2:29:34

Xavier Dafflon, CHE: 2:30:03

Jens Roth, DEU: 2:31:04

[Additional results, standings and information available here.](#)

Women's Race Recap

The women's Full Distance race at XTERRA Belgium saw an intense start, with athletes quickly establishing positions. A select group emerged early on, setting a fast pace during the first run. Sandra Mairhofer of Italy took charge on a steep climb, decisively breaking away from the pack. This move allowed her to create a notable gap from fellow competitors Noemi Bogiatto (ITA), Aneta Grabmüller (CZE), and Anna Zehnder (CHE), who themselves managed to pull ahead of Solenne Billouin (FRA), Alizée Paties (FRA), and Marta Menditto (ITA).

Bike Segment Spectacle

Sandra Mairhofer dominated the bike segment in a fashion reminiscent of her performance at Oak Mountain, decisively setting the pace. With aggressive attacks on the uphill and skillful handling on the downhill, Mairhofer was unmatched across both laps, solidifying her lead with no contender close enough to challenge her dominance.

Solenne Billouin made significant moves, advancing past Aneta Grabmüller to secure the second position by the end of the first lap. Meanwhile, Alizée Paties intensified her efforts, catching up to Grabmüller and bringing a struggling Noemi Bogiatto along, creating a competitive chase pack vying for third, fourth, and fifth places.

By the time Mairhofer entered Transition 2, she had built a substantial lead of over three minutes. Billouin also managed to increase her lead over Paties, who had managed to distance herself from Bogiatto (now in fourth) and a recovering Marta Menditto (fifth).

The Rundown

Throughout the final run segment, Sandra Mairhofer remained unchallenged, expertly navigating the varied terrain around the Citadel. She used the out-and-back sections to gauge her lead, ensuring she maintained enough of a gap to secure her victory. Meanwhile, Solenne Billouin, contending with recent health challenges, managed her pace conservatively, hoping to reach the finish line without losing her position. Marta Menditto, on the other hand, was making significant strides, overtaking Alizée Paties and rapidly closing the gap on Billouin. Despite her valiant effort, Menditto ran out of distance, finishing just over a minute behind Billouin.

Women's Words: Reflections from the Race

Sandra Mairhofer shared her adaptability and strategy, stating, "Doing a duathlon today, I didn't know if my legs would respond well. It's been a long time since I did a duathlon. I was feeling really comfortable on the first run." She capitalized on observing her competitors' weaknesses: "I saw that the other women behind me didn't have so much power on the uphill, so I tried to push harder on the final uphill to get further away from them." Her efforts paid off, giving her a substantial lead into the bike segment and a comfortable final run. "I had a really good lead after the bike. In the last run, I really got to enjoy the atmosphere," Mairhofer concluded, reflecting on her dominant performance and the positive race environment.

Solenne Billouin exceeded her own expectations, sharing, "I didn't expect to really enjoy my race today because I've been sick for the last three weeks. I knew that it wouldn't be a really great race for me, but I did what I could and I still managed to finish second." Billouin reflected on her resilience, "It wasn't my goal to push too hard on my lungs. I was coming here to get some precious points for the World Cup but not to do my best race. I think it shows that my level is really high at the moment, even with two weeks without training and being sick, and still making it on the podium."

Marta Menditto expressed surprise at her own performance, especially during the transitions and later stages of the race. "The first run was really fast, and the women were pushing really hard. I was somewhere near the end of the group, but I think I did a good transition because when I exited, I was near the front." Menditto found her rhythm as the race progressed, "After the first lap on the bike, I had to let Alizée [Paties] go because it was too much for me. I found my pace on the second lap, especially on the uphill. I think it's because of that that at the end I was able to do the run segment much faster." Her final thoughts highlighted her unexpected success: "I felt really good on the first lap of the run, especially on the downhill. I didn't expect to reach the podium."

Top 10 Women's Full Distance Results

Sandra Mairhofer, ITA: 2:43:57

Solenne Billouin, FRA: 2:48:57

Marta Menditto, ITA: 2:50:10

Alizée Paties, FRA: 2:51:29

Noemi Bogiatto, ITA: 2:52:37

Anna Zehnder, CHE: 2:53:20

Morgane Riou, FRA: 2:58:04

Isla Hedley, GBR: 3:00:16

Romy Spoelder, NLD: 3:05:37

Dieske Kruisselbrink, NLD: 3:06:04

Implications Impacting Québec for Stop #5

Men's Outlook:

Jens Emil Sloth Nielsen secures his first World Cup Full Distance victory, boosting his confidence and points tally. Felix Forissier, although not at his best, still holds a lead in the World Cup standings but sees his margin reduced, signaling a more open competition ahead. Arthur Forissier's consistent performance despite not being at his peak suggests promising prospects for when he reaches optimal form. Arthur Serrières faces dwindling chances for defending his title, intensifying the series for the top three spots.

Women's Developments:

Sandra Mairhofer's victory propels her to fourth in the rankings with impressive back-to-back Full Distance race wins. Solenne Billouin, despite recent illness, secures crucial points to maintain a commanding lead. Marta Menditto's significant podium result in Belgium boosts her to third in the standings, positioning her as a strong contender for the series' top spot. The upcoming event in Québec, offering double points in the Full Distance and Short Track formats, presents a crucial opportunity for Mairhofer and Billouin to solidify their standings or dramatically alter the leaderboard dynamics, potentially allowing Aneta Grabmüller and Menditto to regain ground.

As the countdown to the final three races begins, athletes are focused on solidifying their standings, aiming to approach Stop #7 at the XTERRA World Championship in Italy with strong performances rather than catch-up strategies.

Next Stops on the 2024 XTERRA World Cup Series

Stop #5: Québec

Jul 12: Short Track

Jul 14: Full Distance

□ Stop #6: Czech

Aug 10: Full Distance

Aug 11: Short Track [□ LIVE]

Livestream start: 13:00 GMT +1

□

Stop #7: Trentino

Sep 26: Short Track [□ LIVE]

Livestream start: 14:00 GMT +2

Sep 28: Full Distance [□ LIVE]

Livestream start: 09:45 GMT +2

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XTERRA Communications

XTERRA

press@xterraplanet.com

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