

FIS Marathon Cup

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Seeing the declining interest in the Worldloppet Cup, Paddy Field, the Chairman of the FIS Sub-Committee for Popular Cross-Country Skiing, proposed to the Worldloppet AGM in Mora in 1996 that a new Cup, the FIS Marathon Cup, should be introduced. This would combine the ability of FIS to attract elite athletes with the proven record of Worldloppet to bring in large numbers of popular racers. The proposal was rejected by the AGM, who wanted to give the Worldloppet Cup a further impetus. This was not successful and when Paddy Field repeated his proposal to the WL AGM at Pontresina the following year, it was agreed that he could start negotiations with the Worldloppet Executive Committee. This started a long and fruitful cooperation between FIS and Madis Lepajõe, Secretary General of WL, which resulted in the introduction of the FIS Marathon Cup in 1999-2000.

Prior to this, almost the only connection with FIS was via Technical Delegates who were appointed by FIS to the WL marathons. They observed the fulfillment of race rules and gave the feedback which had only an advisory meaning for organisers.

M. Lepajõe's approach was – FIS is the organization that has the biggest influence on world's cross country skiing and Worldloppet racing series cannot exist without the co-operation between these two organizations. M.Lepajõe: „FIS, with its power and image is the best partner in this project. I hope the co-operation with FIS means the beginning of the new age for Worldloppet in the top skiing.“ For many years FIS had discussed organising championships of the cross country skiing marathons and as Worldloppet unites the world's best skimarathons, discussions for uniting these two aims began.

In 1998, the working group co-ordinated by P. Field elaborated the following plans for the future:

- 1) A Marathon of at least 60km should be included annually in the World Cup. In 2000 a historic moment arrived when La Transjurassienne was the first marathon to be included in the World Cup. (Later on Birkebeinerrennet in 2002, Marcialonga in 2004 and Vasaloppet in 2006 have also been World Cup races);
- 2) A World Championship in long distance cross country skiing should take place every second year.
- 3) Every year – a Marathon Cup should take place with following rules:
 - a) Eight races should be included, with as wide as possible a geographic distribution;
 - b) At least six of the races should belong to Worldloppet;
 - c) The minimal length of distance is 42km;
 - d) Six distances out of eight should be longer than 60km;
 - e) Separate ranking for men and women;
 - f) FIS would have the supervisory role.

This looked like a possibility to increase the attractivity for the media and also the level of organisation. Paddy Field became a voice for Worldloppet in FIS and being himself a FIS technical delegate, he attended several WL races in every season. In the negotiations with FIS it was decided that Worldloppet races would have first claim to take part in the FIS Marathon Cup.

In 2000 the new series – FIS Marathon Cup (FMC), that at first was planned to have 8 races, began with 5 races (three of them were cancelled due to



Lara Peyrot, Svetlana Frizen, Monica Lazarut and Madis Lepajõe in 2003

the bad snow conditions - Dolomitenlauf, American Birkebeiner and Tartu Maraton). Everyone who was involved in the first season was satisfied with this experience.

Points were given according to the system similar to the Worldloppet Cup. For skiers the only prerequisites were to own a FIS licence and a Worldloppet passport. Right now neither of them is compulsory. As in the first years points were given to skiers with very different results a change in the ranking system was made from third edition: the first 30 skiers get points, but only if their percentage time difference behind the winner is not more than 10%.

The financing of the prize fund is effected by Worldloppet and the races in FMC. Each race must guarantee also a local prize fund of 21 000 EUR. Although in the first season FIS financed the final awards (in gold bars), in the following years FIS provides the crystal trophy and delivers the leader bibs.

The influence of FMC on the elite skiers was noticeable already from the first season: many elite skiers began to specialise in long distance skiing (Stanislav Rezac, Raul Olle, Staffan Larsson). In Italy, Sweden and Norway special teams for marathon skiers were established.

Some WL marathons have been in FMC every year (Marcialonga, Engadin Ski Marathon) and there are some that have not organised any FMC races