

The Austrian Way: Principles Behind an Elite National Team Training Camp

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In elite orienteering, training camps are not holidays with maps. They are compressed environments for growth – technically, physically, mentally, and culturally. For the Austrian national team, a training camp is not only about accumulating sessions. It is about creating conditions where athletes can consistently move closer to world-class performance.

Every camp has different terrain, different goals, and different athletes. But the underlying principles remain the same.

The highlight of the 2026 season is undoubtedly the World Orienteering Champs in Genoa in the 2nd week of July. The steps towards that have taken the team so far via Klagenfurt to Graz, Barbate, La Spezia, Veszprém, Locarno, Genoa Nervi and Skara. During these camps & World Cups we have followed these principles in order to nurture the potential of the athletes.

Quality Before Quantity

The best camps are not necessarily the hardest camps.

Elite athletes already train a lot at home – more sessions than during training camps. The purpose of a national team camp is therefore not simply to increase volume, but to maximize *quality adaptation*. Every key session has intention, published in the training bulletin, behind it:

- Why are we doing this session?
- What specific skill are we targeting?
- How will it improve championship performance?

At certain times of the year the most valuable decision is reducing training load to preserve technical sharpness and learning quality.

A tired athlete can survive a session. A focused athlete can develop from it. Especially during sprint focused camps it requires good imagination to create an uncongested schedule where the fast sessions have priority while all sessions have a clear technical goal.

During the winter athletes should challenge their physical ability and one way is to push the border of their endurance. Increasing the training load to much higher at a camp than during weeks at home takes the athletes temporarily out of balance so recovery between the camps is crucial to allow supercompensation.

Technical Excellence Is Built Through Repetition Under Pressure

Sprint orienteering at the international level is increasingly unforgiving. Small hesitations become decisive mistakes. Success comes from automating high-level decisions.

That means training camps must repeatedly expose athletes to:

- complex route-choice situations
- high-speed map reading
- pressure simulations
- uncertainty
- and rapid recovery after mistakes

The goal is not perfect training. The goal is to become comfortable operating inside chaos.

Elite athletes learn to trust systems rather than emotions:

- simplify (map)
- commit (to route-choice)
- execute (route-choice efficiently)
- move on (after mistake)

The Team Environment Matters

A national team is stronger when athletes improve each other daily.

One of the greatest advantages of a training camp is not the terrain — it is the environment:

- discussions after sessions
- shared analysis
- seeing how others prepare
- learning different approaches
- and building trust within the team

High performance cultures are rarely loud. They are usually built on professionalism in small moments:

- being on time
- preparing properly
- respecting recovery (bedtime 22)
- helping teammates (also in cooking etc.)
- and maintaining focus throughout the camp

Young athletes especially improve faster when surrounded by athletes who already behave like professionals. Being a role model also forces the experienced athletes to perfect their own behaviour.

Recovery Is Part of Training

Elite camps often fail not because training quality is poor, but because recovery quality is insufficient.

Performance adaptation happens between sessions:

- sleep
- nutrition
- hydration
- mobility (independently & as team)
- physio
- mental recovery

The Austrian philosophy emphasizes sustainability. A successful camp should leave athletes stronger at the end — not simply exhausted.

That requires discipline:

- eating a nutritious snack immediately after sessions
- reducing unnecessary stress
- limiting distractions
- and respecting recovery routines as seriously as interval training

Honest Reflection Creates Progress

Training camps provide rare opportunities for concentrated learning. But learning only happens when athletes reflect honestly.

After sessions, the important questions are not:

- “Was I fast?”
- “Did I beat others?”

Instead:

- What decisions worked?
- Where did I lose clarity?
- What patterns repeat? (good or bad)
- What would work under world cup or championship pressure?

The athletes who improve the most are often the athletes most willing to analyze weaknesses without ego.

Mistakes are not failures during camps. Hidden mistakes are.

Adaptability Wins Championships

No championship week unfolds perfectly.

Weather changes. Embargo terrain surprises athletes. Travel becomes difficult. Expectations rise. Mistakes happen early in races.

Training camps should therefore not create dependence on ideal conditions. They should build adaptable athletes.

The Austrian national team philosophy should value athletes who can:

- adjust quickly
- stay calm under uncertainty
- solve problems independently
- maintain execution despite imperfect circumstances

At the elite level, resilience becomes a competitive advantage.

Camps Are About Long-Term Development

Not every map session needs to produce immediate results.

Some training only reveals its value months later. Some technical habits require hundreds of repetitions before they become instinctive. Some breakthroughs happen after periods where progress is invisible.

A successful national team thinks beyond the next race.

The purpose of a camp is not only to prepare athletes for this weekend. It is to prepare them for the level required at World Championships and beyond.

That perspective changes everything:

- training decisions
- recovery choices
- communication
- daily habitual standards

Final Thoughts

The best training camps create more than fitness. They create clarity.

Clarity about:

- identity
- standards
- execution
- what world-class preparation truly looks like

For the Austrian national team, training camps are opportunities to reinforce a simple idea:

Excellence is not built in isolated heroic moments.

It is built through consistent, intelligent work — session after session, camp after camp, year after year.