

the belgian open

Antwerp



From little acorns.....

Four years ago, in a forest on the edge of a small village in Belgium, a weekend of talks, demonstrations, and climbing competitions took place. There was a lecture on LOLER, Best Practice and staying Safe. A tree was set up for the small band of climbers who worked in the tree care industry, to test their skills on, and three separate Associations all climbed together in the cold and wet of a Flemish Autumn, but the enthusiasm and warmth from the group made it special.

The following year, another competition; some of the European Operations Committee helping out; same location; more climbers. Talks between the different Arborist Associations began, and by the following year concluded in their working together as an ISA Associate, and BAAS was born. They stepped in to host the European Competition in Bruxelles in 2007, and this year, the acorn matured, at Antwerp, the location for the 2008 Belgian Open.

The Belgian Open was held in the centre of Antwerp in a beautifully maintained public park, with stunning views from the canopy of the huge plane trees, (for those with the skill to get there, a 70 metre rope would be a help!) This competition had been organised by BAAS, and was fully booked well in advance, with Belgian, French, German and Dutch climbers all keen to test themselves against these huge trees.



In the throwline, a 50 metre target tempted the competitors for a top score, Wolf Kutz from Germany taking the honours with 18 in 4.25 mins, from Jean-Batiste Barre also with 18 points but in a time of 5.49 mins. The footlock saw Guy Herremans take 2nd place in a time of 19.69 and Yannick Scali from France take top spot in a time of 17.89. In the Speedclimb, Guy just edged out Wim Mertens by 1.52 seconds gaining more valuable points towards a masters appearance. The Aerial Rescue had 0.66 of a point separating Jelte Buddingh from Holland, and Guy, who had top marks of 41 pts, well within the allowed time. The Workclimb, with a time allowance of 15 mins was won by Erwin Vermuyten, his time of 6.52 mins creating a huge time gap, with only four competitors coming close enough to score time points. Guy Herremans Technical score however, brought him a very close 2nd place to Erwin, with only 4 overall points between them.

Sunday morning, and the Head to Head Footlock with the top 8 competitors invited to race against each other in front of a good crowd of spectators in beautiful sunshine, all enjoying this exciting competition. Peter Vergote, popular Belgian climber took first place in a time of 21.48 with 1/100th of a second separating 2nd and 3rd places, Yannick Scali, 21.81 and Jean-Batiste Barre, 21.82

The Monster Plane tree that had served for the Workclimb, was stripped out and reset to test the Masters Competitors. 5 took part, 3 from Belgium, 1 from France and Jelte Buddingh from Holland. This giant tree had a time of 40 minutes to complete the course. Guy Herremans, overall winner of the Preliminary rounds, went first, but struggled to move around the course in the time allowed and Jelte Buddingh ended his Masters with a disqualification for unsafe practice. Ghyoot's climb netted him 165.50 points and France's Yannick Scali achieved a very creditable 228.50, but Belgian Erwin Vermuyten was a clear winner with points of 256.50 taking the Crown for the 2008 Open.



The 3 Belgium Masters competitors now go on to represent their country at the European Finals being held in Turin in June, but the real winners of this competition must be the Belgian Arborist Associations who put their differences aside to create BAAS and join the ISA, very proudly wearing their status on the competition T Shirts, devoid of any sponsorship advertisements, simply the ISA Family Logo. 4 years later - a really well organised competition and a real success story.

Details and information for the European Championships can be found on the ISA Site, The EuroTCC site and the ETCC 2008 (Italian) Site.

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