

European Athletics President's Welcome Message Zermatt 2019

I am very pleased to welcome everyone to the European Mountain Running Championships here in Zermatt, in the shadow of the famous Matterhorn and that natural landmark will certainly provide an impressive and picturesque backdrop to this event.

This is the 18th edition of these Championships since they became part of the European Athletics competition portfolio in 2002 and it's the silver anniversary – 25 years – since they first took place in 1996.

It came as quite a surprise to me as I prepared to write this welcome message when I found out that the European Mountain Running Championships had never been staged in Switzerland before, despite the country's fine tradition in this discipline.

However, that anomaly has now been corrected and I am sure we will have a wonderfully organised event because I know that the local organisers have staged 2015 World Mountain Running Long Distance Championships as well as several WMRA (World Mountain Running Association) World Cup races in the recent past.

The spectacular scenery, I am sure, will enthuse and thrill spectators and runners alike at this year's Championships but the uphill course will certainly test the competitors to their limits.

At the time of writing, before the final entries have been declared, we don't know exactly the full list of competitors in the four championship races, but I am hopeful that Switzerland's two-time defending women's champion Maude Mathys will be able to take her place on the start line and defend her title.

Mathys follows in the footsteps of impressive previous European mountain running champions such as Erioca Spiess, Martina Strahl and Monika Furholz. However, only Austria's near-legendary Andrea Mayr has won the European crown on three consecutive occasions, so Maude has a chance of equalling what is currently a unique feat.

Maude was short-listed for the Swiss Athlete of the Year and so she clearly has many local fans. I am sure she, and all the athletes, will be cheered all the way up to the finish line which will make for a great atmosphere; and it is well known that Switzerland has some of the most enthusiastic and knowledgeable fans of our sport in the world, as anyone who has ever been to the famous Weltklasse meeting in Zurich – which in recent years has been an IAAF Diamond League final – can attest to.

European Athletics would like to give a big thank you to Swiss Athletics, the town of Zermatt, as well as all the officials and volunteers with the Local Organising Committee for all their hard work and commitment in staging this year's championship.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Svein Arne Hansen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Svein Arne Hansen
European Athletics President