Beat: Miscellaneous

THE OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY RISES FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA TO THE CLIMAX

IN ALPES MARITIME & MONACO

Paris, Washington DC, 19.06.2024, 02:30 Time

USPA NEWS - The Olympic torch is back in metropolitan France following an Ocean Relay packed with emotions. To mark its return, the freediver Alice ModCV Golo symbolically brought it back from the depths of the sea in the harbour of Villefranche-sur-Mer, the cradle of global freediving. The relay then shined a light on the treasures of the Alpes-Maritimes department before taking an unprecedented detour through the heart of the Principality of Monaco. Among the numerous celebrities who joined as torchbearers were HSH Prince Albert II, HSH. Princess Charlene, the American actress Halle Berry, the Formula 1 driver Charles Leclerc and Stéphane Diagana, who lit the cauldron in Nice.

ITS BETTER DOWN WHERE IT'S WETTER
The Olympic torch continues its epic saga after filling with light five overseas territories during the Ocean Relay in French Guiana, Réunion, French Polynesia, Guadeloupe and Martinique, sparking enthusiasm, cries of joy and a festive ambiance that brought people together in its wake. On Tuesday, it received a warm welcome in the Alpes-Maritimes, a department blessed with contrasting landscapes between the mountains and the sea where culture and know-how are woven into every aspect of life.

To symbolise its return to metropolitan France, the Olympic torch made a memorable first relay in the harbour of Villefranche-sur-Mer. The freediver Alice Modolo retrieved it from around 20 metres beneath the surface in a symbolic gesture spotlighting her discipline. Freediving entered the public consciousness through Luc Besson's 1988 cult classic The Big Blue, with France now boasting elite global status in this sport. Villefranche-sur-Mer is widely seen as the world capital of freediving, a discipline in which France excels through athletes such as Arnaud Jerald and Guillaume Nery, who have set multiple records, much like the "mermaid" of the day, Alice Modolo, the first Frenchwoman to dive down to a mythical and symbolic depth of 100 meters in constant weight monofin, even though she had never dived so deep in competition before. Alice Modolo also holds the women's world record of 96 meters in constant weight bifins.

THE REGION OF SOUTHERN FRANCE FILLS THE AIR AROUND GRASSE, CANNES & MONACO
Back on land, the Olympic torch put the spotlight on the pristine nature, majestic landscapes and local heritage of the area. After blazing past the citadel of Villefranche-sur-Mer, it moved on to Grasse, the world capital of perfumes, whose know-how is listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. It received the cinema star treatment while running up the steps of the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès in Cannes. After that, it zipped down La Croisette from the Old Port to Moure Rouge Port before jaunting around Valberg, from Place Charles Ginesy to the Chalet Suisse.

The relay then took a regal turn through Monaco, paying homage to the Olympic commitment of HSH Prince Albert II and HSH Princess Charlene. As well as serving as the president of the Monégasque Olympic Committee and an IOC member since 1985, chairing the Sustainability and Legacy Commission, HSH Prince Albert II has competed in five Winter Olympics as a bobsleigher. HSH Princess Charlene also experienced the joy of the Olympic Games as a swimmer for South Africa in the 2000 Games. The Monégasque segment began in front of the Juan Manuel Fangio sculpture at Port Hercules before advancing to Place du Palais.

The Olympic torch then returned to the Alpes-Maritimes, visiting Antibes Juan-les-Pins, a town symbolically twinned with Olympia, and Valdeblore–La Colmiane, where it ziplined down from dizzying heights. Last but not least, it arrived in Nice along the famous Promenade des Anglais, parading from Place Masséna to Place Garibaldi, around the Port of Nice and, finally, Quai des États Unis, which hosted the cauldron lighting ceremony.

A STAR-STUDDED SEGMENT

Over the course of the day, 157 torchbearers from all walks of life carried the Olympic torch for 200 metres each. Lighting the cauldron at the celebration venue in Nice was Stéphane Diagana, who in 1997 became the first Frenchman to become a 400m hurdles world champion.

The roll call earlier featured the two-time Olympic swimming gold medallist Alain Bernard, as well as elite champions such as Alizé Cornet, a winner of nine WTA tournaments;

Pyeongchang 2018's youngest French medallist, Julia Pereira De Sousa (snowboard); the four-time Alpine skiing world champion and 2022 e-MTB world silver medallist Justine Tonso; and the eight-time French slalom champion Nastasia Noens.

Fans flanking the route were treated to an array of torchbearer talent, including France's most prolific Alpine skiing champion, Alexis Pinturault, who boasts records for wins and podiums along with two world combined titles; Jordan Minglis, a three-time swimming medallist at the 2019 Abu Dhabi Special Olympics; and Arthur Bauchet, who scooped a triple Paralympic gold in downhill, slalom& super-combined at Beijing 2022

The 2013 under-81kg judo world champion, Loic Pietri, was also among the torchbearers, as was Alexandre Farrugia, the chairman of the Le Cannet wheelchair basketball club. A former Paralympian, Farrugia is a driving force behind empowering the wheelchair basketball community.

True to the glamorous reputation of Cannes, many stars graced the relay. The American actress Halle Berry and the Cannes Film Festival's Executive Director, Thierry Frémaux, shared a symbolic "Torch Kiss." Further along, American sports legends paraded down La Croisette: the footballer Megan Rapinoe, the snowboarder Shaun White, the basketball player Sue Bird, the skier Mikaela Shiffrin and the Mexican-American footballer Diana Flores.

In Monaco, six torchbearers included the princely couple, HSH Prince Albert II and HSH Princess Charlene, along with the F1 driver Charles Leclerc.

The list featured the Michelin-starred chef Jacques Chibois from Grasse and the famous singer Ben Mazué. Alongside them were inspiring everyday heroes such as Lorene Rousseau, who aids the disabled through wheelchair basketball, Jean-Marc Rebuffel, a long-time mountain biking club director, and Julien Kamel, an avid multi-sport explorer.

GIVING BASKETBALL THE LOVE IT DESERVES

A basketball team relay took place in Nice, where the French Basketball Federation highlighted the two Olympic disciplines, 5x5 and 3x3. It was in Nice that the first French 3x3 Open was held, helping to promote this new urban sport. Led by the former French team captain Nathalie Lesdema, this intergenerational relay featured the iconic Aix-en-Provence player Magali Lacroix, the 1970-80s star Hervé Dubuisson, the referee Daniel Bes, the coach Jean-Louis Borg and the former international Daniel Ledent.

Tomorrow, the Olympic torch heads to the neighbouring Vaucluse department, another awe-inspiring corner of the world blessed with diverse natural landscapes and rich heritage. It will visit places such as Rustrel and the Colorado Provençal, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, which is dubbed the "Venice of Comtat," and the ancient Orange Theatre before calling it a day in Avignon. Source: Paris 2024

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Article online:

https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-24632/the-olympic-torch-relay-rises-from-the-bottom-of-the-sea-to-the-climax.html

Editorial office and responsibility:
V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Rahma Sophia RACHDI, Jedi Foster

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:
United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com