

Orienteering Fashion – another oxymoron

Two rants by Adrian Zissos (6.6.2003)

Rant #1. Tone – attempted humor, vaguely offensive

We all have concerns and opinions about our sports low retention of young people but most of us are at a loss about what we personally can do to help improve the situation. Well, lend me an ear for just a moment - I've got a suggestion ... ;-)

What can you do to help attract younger people to orienteering?

Throw away your nylon orienteering suits!

Orienteering suits are so incredibly uncool that no self-respecting youngster would voluntarily wear one (or be associated with people wearing them :-). These suits create an awful image for the sport. The material is outdated, the colors are ugly, the designs are hopeless, and the style is non-existent. Hey, I'm no fashion expert but even I can recognize the completely uncool when I see it.

You can do your bit to "cool" the sport by getting yourself a modern technical shirt - something like a dry-fit top from Nike. These shirts can survive orienteering through tough bush, they wick away sweat, they're comfortable, they're readily available (in a variety of styles and at reasonable prices). And most of all, they look cool. Unfortunately you'll still need a pair of nylon pants (plain colors please, black preferable).

So do yourself - and the sport - a favor: burn those nylon pyjamas. It'll be just one small step for an orienteer, but a giant leap for orienteering.

Of course, that's just my opinion, I might be wrong

Rant #2. Tone – conciliatory, repeating main points with better manners

My previous rant was published to a few orienteering email lists and it generated a great deal of comment: over 15 email responses and easily twice as many verbal replies. Well over 75% of the responses were in agreement with the main argument that modern styling and materials (such as dry-fit) have many advantages over the traditional nylon O-suit, including creating a better image for the sport.

It is interesting to summarize the responses into two simple categorizations of the responses:

Category	Percent of category that agree
Under 30 years old	100%
Over 30 years old	50%
New to orienteering	100%
Three years or more experience	50%

From these categorizations one can jump to the conclusion that younger people and those new to the sport are most strongly of the opinion that the traditional suits are well, not cool. The strength of this feeling might surprise some long time orienteers. Here for example are excerpts from emails...

"i hope you're being serious, adrian, because these are my sentiments exactly."

"clown suit"

"whenever I bring a friend to an event they always raise their eyebrows at the clothing. I understand how practical it is but, hey, I've never worn anything but my leggings and dry-fit and I come back relatively in one piece."

"It's hard to see how O-suits have evolved [at all] over the last 30 years, and not everyone wants to look like a European sports aficionado from the 1970s... Note that none of the adventure racing crowd would be caught dead in an O-suit!"

I don't really believe that if every one of us wears a Nike drifit shirt that we'll be swamped by an influx of new members; but I do think that gradually updating our clothing habits will play a role in attracting and keeping younger people in the sport. And for whatever social reason, I think this will be a surprisingly powerful change. For us old-timers the new clothes are better anyway, being more comfortable, more durable, more stylish, more readily available, usable for non-orienteeing activities, and cheaper.

adrian

Some auxiliary points that were made:

1. It was pointed out, sometimes with photo examples, that some people (specific examples were given) do in fact look very good in their nylon O suits.
2. Wearing tights or leggings is 'cool' (but males, beware - not too tight tights please)
3. Gaitors should be worn inside the pants if possible (?!)
4. Drifit-like material is available in many varieties from many companies. Some may be more durable than others.
5. In a non-scientific durability survey of shirts used in competition, we found drifit tops to be extremely durable. While many had small snags, only one had any tears. The shirt with tears was mine. It has two small 1/2" tears after more than three years of wear. In contrast a nylon O shirt I bought last year ripped the second day I wore it - with a new opening 4" long. " *&^#\$%@!! " How perfect is that?

Fashion Corner

(Send your contributions to adrian@barebones.ca)



Spotted at the Donut control at Barebones 2001. The Orienteer on the left is Cool, sporting modern colors and styling, though a slightly oversized outfit. The Orienteer on the right is Not Cool. Notice the torn sleeves, gaiters worn outside the pants, duct tape holding pants together, and sickly old faded red, white, and blue outfit.



The orienteer on the left is not cool: note the Tilley hat, torn tights, gaiters on the outside, geometric pattern, and heaven help us, is that a pair of shorts over top of the tights?? The orienteer on the right would be cool if not for the pink hat. Notice that cool orienteers feel really good about themselves.



Orienteers on the left and centre are cool, but is the orienteer on the right wearing yellow pants?

Can you imagine kids stampeding to sign up so they can be just like this orienteer?

