

Coffs Harbour student Sam Woolford to represent Australia in orienteering

Orienteering is a unique sport that combines trail running with careful map navigation. A young Coffs athlete is heading to Portugal after being selected in the Australian orienteering squad. See why he loves the challenging game.

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Orienteering is a sport that combines body and mind – through running and map-reading.

Although old-school navigation has lost its necessity due to the rise of GPS and digital maps, Sam Woolford, 18 possesses the art of reading maps in spades.

Woolford said orienteering is a great sport to stimulate the mind, while staying fit.

“It’s like [trail running](#) on steroids,” he said

Contestants race against each other with the added challenge of needing to navigate through a variety of terrain using detailed maps.

Woolford has been orienteering for eight years and was recently selected in the Australian Youth Orienteering team to compete in Portugal later this year.

“I’m very excited for it,” Mr Woolford said.

Orienteering pushes runners to think about their movement in a way that requires precise understanding of maps and terrain.

Sam Woolford is a Coffs Harbour orienteering player who will be representing Australia in Portugal later in 2022.

“There’s not always a trail so you need a map to find the route,” Woolford said.

He said the satisfaction and joy of finding the way is what makes the sport rewarding and unforgiving.

“That’s the fun part. It’s not just running,” he said.

Combining the physical and the mental side – checkpoints, which must be passed in the right order – are marked on the map.



An electronic timing stick is used to register control points to measure speed and to ensure the course has been completed.

Finding the perfect route to each checkpoint - without getting lost - in the shortest time possible is the aim of the game.

Woolford said Portugal will test his training, offering complex urban areas to navigate such as university campuses, as well as bush.



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Woolford will be competing in Aguiar da Beira - a small town in the centre of Portugal surrounded by lush forests, historical monuments and incredible vistas.

The events span anywhere from 3km to 15km and can take up to two hours.

Woolford said Coffs Harbour's dense bush make orienteering a particular inaccessible sport here.

"We don't have many events here as the bush is thick and steep," he said.

Woolford trains mainly in Armidale - and his coach lives all the way in Victoria - making the sport an even more difficult pursuit to master.

"He send me training plans but I don't see him often," Woolford said.

Although Woolford reinforced that orienteering is "not something you can make a career out of", he hopes to move to Europe and pursue it.

"It's definitely a hobby. I spend quite a bit of time training," he said.

His dedication and talent landed him a second-place finish in the three day junior men Australian National League tournament.

Woolford said he would like to see more exposure given to the sport and said he's forged many close friends through it.

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"I have social contacts and from orienteering all across the region," he said.

The skills needed to master orienteering make it a great sport for parents to undertake with their kids or partners, working together to find the best route.