

# Carles Lladó – a very influential veteran



By Joaquim Margarido

This interview begins with an announcement: Carles Lladó is “the most veteran of the Iberian Peninsula’s veterans”, but he is also “the most veteran of Southern Europe’s veterans.” He made a clear point of correcting me, putting things in the right place at the beginning of a cheerful interview where one of the strongest features of his character is always present: the truth. And it was with the truth that he answered the questions that now are presented to the readers of Inside Orienteering.

The morning opens in shades of pale. The sea breeze blows rough and there, in the Dunes of Mira along the Atlantic Coast, the month of February is keen to show that the Portuguese winter may not be as gentle as one might believe. The arena for the Portugal O’ Meeting was starting to fill up when I met him. Not encountered since 2012, I wondered if he had ceased his activities in orienteering. But no. There he was, prepared for another big event, a respectable aura under a beard of pure white, the look of a child peering at everything around him. After the emotional embrace, and the necessary correction made (see above), the question arises naturally. Where do you get, at 84 years

of age, the energy to keep up such activity and continue Orienteering? Carles doesn’t waste time and reveals the secret: “I believe this is due to the fact that I have practised physical activity throughout my life and have been able to maintain the neurons active.”

Carles Lladó y Badia was born in Igualada, Anoia, in 1931. Licensed in Architecture and as an Urban Planner, a graduate in Sports Equipment, he has always been a multi-faceted figure, sharing an occupation in the areas of sculpture, jewellery design and manu-

“ For me, Carles was and still is a benchmark in many aspects of my life. Practising Athletics from an early age, and travelling all over the world in a very humble way, he is a very demanding man and often critical. I can say that it was thanks to him that my life has changed since I discovered orienteering, which is right now one of the most important aspects of my life.”

**Biel Ràfols**

facturing with the practise and promotion of sport, especially Orienteering, and also with the separatist political movement. Starting his sporting activity at the Club Atlètic d’Igualada he was, as a Veteran, Champion of Spain in the 110 metre hurdles and triple jump. A strong supporter of the international recognition of Catalan sport, he was one of the drivers of the Association for the Olympic Delegation of Catalonia, an organisation that demanded the recognition of the Olympic Committee of Catalonia for the participation of Catalan athletes in the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992. In 2003 he was awarded the medal of the Generalitat, the autonomic government of Catalonia, for his contributions to Catalonia’s sporting history.

## Orienteer first at the age of 58

Orienteering comes in only at 58 years old. “I feel sorry for being so late and, moreover, I can only compete with people of my age in major international events, where my class is covered. At most of the races I have to run sometimes with people who take thirty years of advantage – or disadvantage! - from me ...”, he says with a hearty laugh. But this is precisely one of the reasons that brings him to Portugal year after year to participate in the Portugal O’ Meeting. But it’s not the only one. Let him explain himself: “I belong to a club, the Club Orientació Catalunya [COC], which is twinned with a Portuguese club, the Clube de Orientação do Centro [COC]. This is a club deserving my greatest sympathy and respect and exists in a region whose terrains are much in the style of this one, terrains that I love because they’re softer to run in”, he explains.

We must say that Carles Lladó is not “just” another member of the Club Orientació Catalunya. He is the founder, having also founded, in 1988, the Orienteering Federation of Catalonia. He was also a member of the Directing Council of the Union of the Catalan Sports Federations between 1992 and 1996. In 2000, the Orienteering Federation of Catalonia established an annual Orienteering trophy with

his name, the Carles Lladó Trophy. In 2012 he was silver medallist in Sprint in the M80 class at the World Masters Orienteering Championships in Bad Harzburg, Germany.

### “It was worth the effort”

– How do you feel in the midst of these youngsters?

“It was about 27 years ago that we started with Orienteering in Catalonia, and we made it from zero. Today it’s a real pleasure to go to the races and see how things have evolved. To see the huge bunch of children aged 12 or 14 actively and regularly practising this sport gives me a great pleasure and makes me sure that it was worth the effort.”

– Do you consider yourself a reference, a model for the younger?

“Not a model but a ‘ground-breaker’ – along with my wife and other companions – in the construction process of Orienteering in Catalonia. From a personal point of view, this is what truly matters.”

### Good things and bad things

Covering almost three decades of Orienteering and many experiences, one must be selected above all others and this has to do with the perception that Orienteering in Catalonia is under way. “Without wishing to be pretentious in my words, this is something that makes me particularly proud because it is my work. Today, there are people I do not know and there are people who do not know me and this is very good.” But not everything is rosy and there are also bad experiences, one of which has been very recent, in that he was forced to stop all physical activity due to a stroke in February last year. “I was eight days in a coma and I ended up recovering, taking pills after pills”, he recalls. And he adds: “Today I feel a little better, but it is difficult to bear with such a long break, especially because I feel that before the episode I was just above standard ability for my age from the physical and mental point of view, and now I feel I am below.”

Last year on the website WorldofO a 96-year-old orienteer, Rune Haraldsson, was awarded “The Orienteering

Achievement of 2014”. Carles Lladó sees this distinction as “a prize to all Veterans and an example for the entire orienteering community. I can’t forget having seen, in Murcia in the 1996 World Masters Orienteering Championships, an athlete running through the forest, jumping over logs and down huge re-entrants. He was 95 years old and left me in deep admiration. I think this award is entirely fair. I don’t know if I can get to 96 years old (laughs).”

### Orienteering and the Olympics

Living and feeling Orienteering intensely, Carles believes that our sport is moving in the right direction, but notes: “What I recommend is that the IOF continues to make all efforts to assure that Orienteering will be an Olympic sport. Maybe there still aren’t all the conditions in order to be accepted, but it would be fabulous if this could be a reality in the future.” Carles recalls the conversation held with Juan Antonio Samaranch, where the former President of the International Olympic Committee agreed that Orienteering, from the media point of view, with a good television production, has a potential superior to many other sports. “And this is the way we have to take,” he concludes.

Our interviewee warns all the “young boys” at the age of 57, that is all those who have the same age as Carles when he started orienteering, not to stay at home watching television. Orienteering may be a great alternative to a sedentary lifestyle: “Many of those who are now 57 years old have 57 years of advantage over me when I started, because at that time I knew nothing

“ For many years we travelled with our parents in a small van across Europe, participating in orienteering events that took place during the summer. Carles and his wife Tere also had a van, and we joined them to many of these competitions. In one of these summers, when I still ran in the M12 class, I remember that Carles taught me, on the beach, how to read the contour lines. We built “mountains” with the beach sand and he charted the contour lines with his finger. And so, looking down, I could see the same shapes that were so difficult to see



Photo: Ona Ràfols

“ For some time Carles was insisting that we had to try this thing called orienteering. Until one day, my parents found enough courage and took us to a small place near Barcelona. I went with Tere and she gave me a map which I was looking at, putting my little finger on it and following the route. When we had finished, Carles told me: ‘You did that very well!’ And so the story began.”

**Ona Ràfols**

about orienteering and today, fortunately, people know our sport. But my advice is to be more active, to leave the sofa and not only to go to the park to watch the others play boules. They can be more active and try orienteering. I do it, my wife is almost 80 years old and she also does it, and I think that we can all do it. It is a wonderful sport, very formative, suitable for all ages and where the fellowship among everyone is great, something that is not readily seen in other sports”, he says. As for himself as a competitor, the Catalan has no doubts: “While the body and the mind can stand it, I’ll be here!”

from the map.

I still remember, along with other friends, that many of us started to practise orienteering thanks to the races that he organised. Young people were a constant presence! Earlier, in Catalonia, we were the only children, but thanks to his efforts more and more children and young people were joining us. There was even a year in which Carles organised an Orienteering summer holiday. For me it was the greatest joy, being able to go orienteering with so many other children!”

**Pol Ràfols**