

# DEBRIEFING



DEFI WIND. 29/30/31 MAY and 1st JUNE. Gruissan. France. Plage des chalets. THURSDAY 29th MAY



*Record-breaking participation for the 14th edition of DEFI WIND in Gruissan. 1,000 competitors or "challengers" from 27 different countries, all here to defy the notorious Tramontane wind from the Languedoc-Roussillon region. Adding to the records, DEFI WIND is definitely the largest gathering of windsurfers in the WORLD. An incredible success story, all thanks to a handful of enthusiastic organizers.*

## 1,000 CHALLENGERS A RECORD!



Blond, grey, just 13 years old or born in 1941. Some with thousands of miles under their belt, others with just a few. All are here for the promise of the Tramontane and the Defi Wind, kilometres of sea to cross and an internationally unique race. There are over one thousand competitors – this is a record and entries for the event are sold out. 27 nations are represented. There are world champions, sporting legends, amateurs, women and men, all with something in common: their passion for windsurfing. They are all present on Gruissan's "plage des chalets", immortalised by the film Betty Blue, for four days of competition, sharing and celebration. The stage and the numerous groups and DJs present will turn this event into something like a festival. DEFI WIND is like the WOODSTOCK of board sports. Everyone will be proud to say "I was there".

The Tramontane that everyone is here to experience is well and truly present. From early this morning it has been blowing at 30 knots. For this first day of races, contestants are still arriving at the spot. In the rider park the atmosphere is very friendly, even though most contestants are concentrated on preparing their gear. The right choice of sail size will be decisive. While each contestant is here to ride their own personal race, with no particular pressure, they do all want to get the best possible ranking. This race is not easy and lives up to its name – it is a real challenge – mental and physical. Windsurfers are sailors in direct contact with the elements, holding the wind at arm's length. When the Tramontane blows at force 7 or 8: it is a genuine ordeal. For many this year, the race is a rite of initiation: close to four hundred contestants will be taking part for the first time ever, proof that the event is constantly renewing and regenerating. Not everyone is used to violent wind – they know that they will experience something incredibly strong.



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## The pack is let loose...



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At 3.00 pm the first and only race of the day is launched, with a wind at between 22 and 27 knots, or force 6 on the Beaufort scale. This is already a strong wind for the average person, but quite moderate for those who have previously experienced the anger of the Tramontane. It can be seen as the perfect way to start the day. The pacemaker boat that marks the starting line launches the thousand contestants for a 40 kilometre race between Gruissan and Port-la-Nouvelle. The light is magnificent, the sight is spectacular. In just a few seconds, despite rather delicate wind conditions due to irregularity, the sails are trimmed, bodies tensed, each contestant springs forward like a jack-in-the-box. This is not a time for strategy, as while the Defi Wind is a long race, it is mainly a matter of speed: you have to give it all you've got. Front-runners are made up of old hands and the best of today's competitors – speed will soon make all the difference: Nicolas Warembourg, a big fellow from Grande-Synthe in the North and multiple French champion, Pascal Boulanger, an emblematic figure from the South, Patrice Belbéoch, last year's winner, Valentin Brault from La Rochelle and Sébastien Bonhomme. Despite being on the most elementary kind of sail engine, likely the cheapest too, windsurfers are among the fastest on the water. They race towards Port La Nouvelle at over 30 knots, speeds that only extremely expensive racing yachts can reach. Behind them, another reality is taking shape. The pack rapidly thins out. In the wake of the super-specialists, each competitor is doing his or her own race. On the

course, some competitors have sails that have come from another age, but what of it? This is the very principal of Defi Wind: an extremely democratic event where everybody has their place and final ranking is not an end in itself. Pascal Boulanger is overtaken by Patrice Belbéoch at the first buoy; the others are not far behind. Tactical choices are what make the difference. This first day is marked by the great round win performed by Nicolas Warembourg ahead of Valentin Brault and Sébastien Bonhomme, and also Marion Mortefon's superiority in the women's category. For many of the contestants, this first, relatively easy round was a good way to get into shape. However, as Cécile who has been participating in the Defi since 2006 explains, "the wind turned a lot and was quite irregular, and we had to do a lot of upwind sailing, so it was more technical and less fun" Edouard, 13, managed to finish one return trip, before abandoning because the wind was too strong. Given his size, this is already amazing. Antoine, an athletic thirty year-old, down from Paris with about twenty windsurfing friends, finished the round without any problems. At the finish, he had no idea of his ranking, but by the sight of his happy face, this didn't really matter: he'd worry about it later!

Two rounds are scheduled for tomorrow and two supplementary rounds should also be launched on Saturday in extremely strong winds. To get a chance to navigate in such conditions is both a secret dream and dread of many competitors – who will conquer their demons?

## SHORT HISTORY OF BOARD SPORT

In 1968, surfer Hoyle Schweitzer and aeronautical engineer Jim Drake search for new sensations and a way to catch more waves. They finally find the perfect way to attach a small sail onto a Malibu – a large surf board in fashion on the Californian coast at the time.

They use the gimbal from the automobile industry for inspiration to articulate the mast onto the

float and create the wishbone, the arch that gives the sail its tautness and makes it possible to handle. Schweitzer and Drake apply for a patent.

The windsurf became incredibly successful as a beach leisure activity at the end of the 1970's, especially in France where it could be seen on every coast. It becomes a real sport, again under

the influence of surfers. As they want to attack the waves in Hawaii, they shorten the boards, add straps to block their feet and invent a harness to handle the rigging without getting tired. Right from the beginning WIND magazine, part of the creation of DEFI WIND, showed a keen interest that has never waned since.

