

Sunny Nyon celebrates wrestling and Swiss diversity - weekend : 26.8.2001

Autor(en): **Probert, Roy**

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Here we see last years
 'Schwinger-king'
 Abderhalden
 wrestling with
 this years champion
 Forrer, both from
 Toggenburg, Can-
 ton St.Gall.

see also
 colour photo
 of Forrer Nr. 1
 and Grab Nr. 2
 on page 16

**Sunny Nyon celebrates
 wrestling and Swiss
 diversity - weekend
 26.8.2001**

The lakeside town of Nyon, bathed all weekend in glorious sunshine, became a melting pot of Swiss cultural diversity, as people from all over the country came to watch the Federal Wrestling and Alpine Games Festival - one of Switzerland's biggest traditional sporting events.

The final was won by 23-year-old St Gallen cheese-maker Arnold Forrer. In the tightest finish for more than 50 years, Forrer drew his final with former champion Jörg Abderhalden, but was crowned "Schwinger king" having won half a point more than his opponent in the preceding bouts.

Some 120,000 fans of Swiss-style wrestling, most of them from German-speaking cantons, descended on the Lake Geneva region for the festival, which is held only once every three years, and which has grown into one of the most important gatherings to celebrate Swiss alpine culture.

"Only once every three years do we get to see all of the best wrestlers together. It's really special to meet up with people from all over the country," one fan from Bern told swissinfo. "I'm from central Switzerland, and it's a fundamental part of our culture," said another, from canton Schwyz. "It's a great sporting event, but also a great social event." The organisers have made no secret

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f the fact that one of their chief aims is to bring Switzerland's diverse cultures together and build a bridge over what many believe is a growing divide between French- and German speaking Switzerland.

Great wrestling tradition

Those who had made the trip to the south-west corner of the country were almost all fans of wrestling, or schwingen as it is more popularly known in its heartland. Nyon itself has no great wrestling tradition, but the fine weather and free entrance ensured a large turnout by the local population. Some were drawn out of feelings of patriotism, but most out of curiosity.

"I had to come and see it. It's like being on another planet," said one woman, who admitted to feeling like a tourist, despite being in her own town.

"I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn about the culture of my fellow Swiss," another admitted.

"I came because I believe in the unity of this country. We have to renew our links with our German-speaking countrymen, so that we can find our purpose in the world again," one elderly gentleman from St Cergue, in the nearby Jura mountains explained as he looked at the Unspunnen stone, a potent symbol of Swiss alpine traditions, recently returned by Jura separatists who stole it 17 years ago.

Despite these language divisions, the Swiss president, Moritz Leuenberger, in his speech to the 30,000 people in the wrestling arena, said he was more concerned about the growing divide between rural and urban Switzerland.

Town and country

He said federal elections had increasingly revealed two opposing

parts of the country: "the Switzerland that wants to change and the Switzerland that would like things to remain the same". Leuenberger said town and country should "respect each other and meet each other". That was happening outside the arena, where farmers from Appenzell or the Emmental mingled – sometimes uneasily – with residents of Nyon, many of whom work in Geneva and Lausanne.

This meeting of the cultures was helped by a mixture of Swiss-German beer and Lake Geneva white wine, and non-stop music: alphorns from the Bernese Oberland, brass bands from nearby Gland, folk music from Graubünden and the fifes and drums typical of Geneva.

"There isn't just one Swiss culture. We are a federal country, and all the different cultures should be unified," said an alphorn craftsman from Aigle, in the mountains of canton Vaud.

"This kind of festival is important in bringing the people together," he told swissinfo.

by Roy Probert, SRI
26.08.2001

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Woman pastor aims to shake up Geneva church

For the first time, a woman has been appointed Moderator of the Company of Pastors in Geneva – one of the highest posts in the Protestant Church. Isabelle Graesslé says she intends to use her position to make the church more receptive to the needs of society.

Switzerland affirms commitment to fight poverty in India

Switzerland has underscored its commitment to fight poverty in India, at an annual conference organised by the Swiss Development Agency in Basel.

Tourists to peer into 220 million years of history

The Swiss Alps have a story to tell. New parks have started opening across Switzerland with the aim of revealing the country's geological past – from when it was a desert to its period as an icy wasteland.



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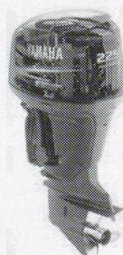
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