Beat: Sports

THE OLYMPIC TORCH ARRIVED IN VIENNE CARRIED BY EMILIE LE PENNEC FRENCH GYMNAST

1ST GOLD MEDALLIST CHAMPION

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USPA NEWS - Today, on Sunday, 26 May, the Olympic torch arrived in Vienne, (Poitiers, city of Futuroscope) just in time for stage 16 of the relay. A whole constellation of medieval secrets awaited it on the age-old thoroughfares of the Vienne department. The Olympic Torch was carried by Emilie Le Pennec, the only French gymnast to have won an Olympic gold medal to date. Flanking her were other famous athletes such as Eva Serrano, a two-time bronze medallist at the Rhythmic Gymnastics World Championships, and Henry Boerio, who became the first French artistic gymnast to win a medal on the horizontal bar at the Montreal Games in 1976, as well as volunteers, coaches and athletes who keep the flame of amateur gymnastics burning bright. Among them were Benoît Bouline, who contributed to the development of gymnastics in the department, and Aurore Chauprade, who went back to school to train and work at the club where her two daughters practise.

It set out from the 11th-century Tour Carrée in Loudun and wrapped up the stage in front of the Arena Futuroscope. Poitiers hosted the gymnastics team relay, with the Olympic gold medallist Émilie Le Pennec at the forefront. Earvin Ngapeth, an Olympic gold medallist with the French national volleyball team, was one of the nearly a hundred torchbearers who hit the road today. He lit the celebration cauldron at the end of the day.

VIENNE REVEALS ITS SECRETS WITH A MIX OF CULTURE & ADRENALINE

Vienne radiates diversity with its rich landscapes, blending a striking historical heritage with lush nature. A popular family-friendly tourist destination, it embraces the Olympic values, exemplified by the Olympic Day organized last June. The Arena Futuroscope, a real magnet, has been designated a Games Preparation Centre, while the Greater Poitiers area boasts top-notch facilities and iconic local clubs in sports such as volleyball and basketball —the disciplines that have put this department on the map.

The castles and abbeys that dot the department stand as mementoes of its feudal past. A medieval fair lights up the streets of Château-Larcher every year, vibrantly reviving that bygone age. This morning, the Olympic torch set out from the Tour Carrée in Loudun and advanced to Neuville-de-Poitou, renowned for its medieval remains, among which stands out the Château de Furigny, classified as a historic monument.

The relay then trotted down the quays of the Vienne river in Châtellerault, whose industrial heritage has evolved into cultural and leisure spaces. In Montmorillon, the Olympic torch honoured the City of Writing and Book Trades, which is celebrated for its typewriter collection and macarons and home to booksellers, traders and artisans, with a stopover that was a feast for the senses.

The Olympic torch later called at the charming former medieval capital of Charroux —once an important stop on the Way of St James— and shone a light on the arched Abbey of the Holy Savior before reaching Poitiers. With its rich historical past, Romanesque churches and medieval streets, the largest town in Vienne holds its own among the other stops on the journey.

Among other places, the torch strolled past Saint Peter's Cathedral in Poitiers, Saint John's Baptistry — the oldest Christian monument in Europe—, City Hall, the prefecture and the Palace of the Dukes of Aquitaine, one of the most striking examples of civil architecture in France. Last but not least, the stage came to an end at the only logical choice, Futuroscope, the famous park set up in the region, which rolls out the red carpet for about 2 million visitors every year.

TEAM RELAY SHINES A SPOTLIGHT ON GYMNASTICS IN THE DEPARTEMENT

Much like the Olympic Torch, the French Gymnastics Federation is building bonds across the nation, bringing together 325,000 passionate licence-holders from 1,400 clubs in metropolitan and overseas France. This Saturday, the team relay organised by the French Gymnastics Federation took place in Place de la Mairie, with the majestic Second Empire-style City Hall as a backdrop. Spectators were treated to a variety of displays spotlighting Olympic gymnastics disciplines as part of the celebrations.

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Other unsung heroes illuminated this journey with their inspiring stories, including Marie-Claire Guillot, a dedicated doctor who embodies the essential role of medicine in sports to ensure athletes' well-being. Juliana Blaise wrapped up the Châtellerault segment at noon. She volunteers with Global Heart Watch, a charity that educates the general public and athletes on life-saving techniques. Agathe Marcellaud, who has been a volunteer rescue worker for 5 years and serves as the local emergency response chief, carried the torch in Poitiers.

The symbiotic relationship between sport and media was on full display during stage 16 of the Torch Relay. Among the torchbearers was the former professional tennis player Tatiana Golovin, now working as a sports pundit. The sports journalist and commentator Benoît Durand passed the torch to Earvin Ngapeth in front of the Arena Futuroscope, erected on the edge of the park. It was only natural for this volleyball enthusiast, who first dabbled in this sport in Vienne, to ignite the cauldron at the celebration venue. Ngapeth, who honed his skills in Poitiers, is gearing up to defend his Olympic gold.
On Monday, the Torch Relay will visit Indre, an authentic, unspoiled spot in the heart of France where life is good. It will get the show on the road in Le Blanc, head on to Cuzion and Baraize and call at La Châtre, Buzançais, Issoudun and Valençay before calling it a day in Chateauroux.

NEARLY A HUNDRED OLYMPIC TORCHBEARERS POUND THE TRARMAC IN VIENNE
Alexis Brothier, the regional silver medallist in full-contact karate, was the first to light the Olympic Torch in Loudun, marking the start of the segment. A host of other athletes and amateurs joined in along the route. This morning, it was the former national-level basketball player Catherine Guillot's turn to celebrate her club, Stade Poitevin. Geoffrey Wersy also carried the torch on the Pont Saint-Cyprien, which straddles the Clain river in Poitiers. Born with hemiplegia affecting his upper and lower limbs, he competes in paratriathlon and paraduathlon as a member of the French national team, demonstrating that disability is no barrier to sports participation. Source: Paris 2024 Olympic Paralympic games

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