

GETTING THE WAX RIGHT

The men's Mass Start in Antholz was one of the most exciting races of the 2023/2024 season. It also provided a great demonstration of getting the ski wax right, or wrong, and how impactful this difference can be for the athletes and the race.

Please join me going through the race once more and look at the chronological moments of the final lap, using narration, pictures, a chart and a map!

We pick up this Mass Start race in the fifth lap, just after the final shooting (■ on the map below). We have Vettle Sjaastad Christiansen (VSC) leading for Norway, 10 seconds ahead of Quentin Fillon Maillet (QFM) from France, who has a margin of 20 seconds on Vebojern Soerum (SOE) and 32 on Johannes Dale-Skjevdal (DAL), both from Norway. The Boe brothers are only 4 seconds behind him.

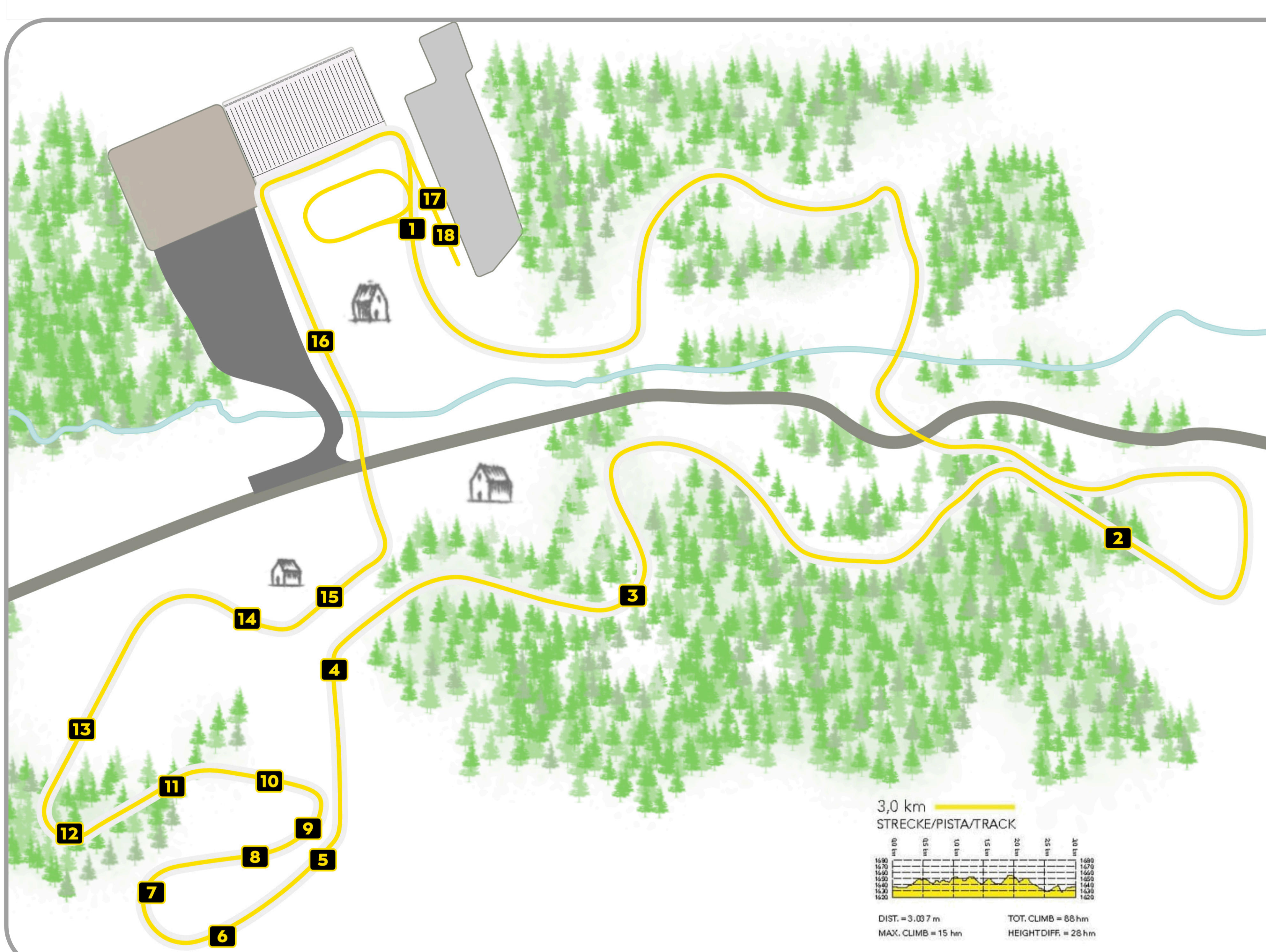
They dive into the wooded area, where we pick them up again at the Bauhaus sign (■), and the 13.3km split (■). VSC is still leading, QFM is now trailing by 18 seconds and SOE and DAL are 15 seconds behind the Frenchman. SOE is getting closer, and DAL already made up half the time he was behind QFM when they left the stadium.

When they come out of the woods they have a bit of a downhill after which they turn left onto an upward slope. After the turn, the Norwegians have the Frenchman in clear sight, and are now only 13 seconds behind! (■)

All of a sudden QFM's lead seems to melt away! Turning right at the top of the slope they enter a flat section (■), followed by a long downward right turn around a big tree (■), where we can clearly see that both Norwegians have faster skis than QFM (■/■) as the track levels off and starts upward a bit to a sharp U-turn left (■).

By this point the Frenchman is still leading but by the slightest margin; 2 seconds on DAL and 3 on SOE. As hard as he tries, it is now unthinkable that he will be able to hold them off (■).

Gliding down into a left turn, QFM is watching over his shoulder (■) to find DAL right behind him! With his faster skis, the Norwegian passes the Frenchman on the inside of a sharp right turn (■) that is followed by a gradual downhill.



As QFM tries to stay with DAL, SOE shows he is also having better skis than QFM as he closes the 2 second gap on the tucked gliding section (■) zooming by the big red blowup toolkit. Coming out of the tuck for a short climb, SOE is already beside him, and passes the frustrated Frenchman just before the 14.7km split (■/■).

With VSC too far ahead to be threatened by DAL, and with too much space between DAL, SOE and QFM to see any more challenges, the remainder of the race is almost a cruise to the finish (■/■). Although JTB got pretty close to the Frenchman, it wasn't close enough to challenge him, especially with QFM shooting clean and the world's number one having skied 600 meters in the penalty loop (■). QFM can't wait to get his skis off and knows this is a race he will soon want to forget. But that's being part of a team; you win some together and you lose some together.

