

Franklin and Dickson win kayak cross

Ivrea Slalom

Czechia's Jakub Krejci pipped two Olympic champions to the top spot in the men's kayak heats on the opening day of the World Cup in Ivrea.

The biggest roar of the day came when home hero Giovanni De Gennaro was introduced to the Italian crowd in his first slalom since winning the K1 at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

De Gennaro pushed for first place, only to finish just 0.15 behind Krejci, who qualified fastest to the semi finals in 76.78.

Krejci, who claimed bronze at this year's World Cups in Prague and Kraków, headed a top three that also included fellow Czech and Tokyo 2020 Olympic champion Jiri Prskavec, who was 0.53 behind the leader in third.

'When I crossed the finish line I was surprised the time was that good because I just tried to flow on the water and have fun,' said Krejci.

'This is just the next step to qualifying for the final so tomorrow is a new race.

'I had never raced good here but it's the last two World Cups of the season and everyone is over the Olympics and they are just chilling and having fun together.

'I will try to do my best tomorrow and fight for the best position and hope to get on the podium.'

De Gennaro was on a high after capturing the Olympic crown and was delighted to be back competing in front of his fans.

'Being here is like being home so I am just excited that I have the chance to race one more time here in Ivrea in front of all my family and friends and team mates,' said De Gennaro.

'It is a great moment for the Italian community of kayakers.

'Life has been crazy since (I won Olympic gold) and I am happy that I was able to share this moment with everyone who supported me over the years.

'I dreamed about it but when I realized it was even better than I was hoping for. I am just happy to be back here kayaking with all the people that have helped me through the years.

'I am still hungry and I hope to have a good week and put on a good show.'

France's Anatole Delassus ranked fourth in the heats with Switzerland's Martin Dougoud coming fifth and Slovenia's Peter Kauzer sixth.

The women's K1 heats saw Slovenia's Ajda Novak top the standings with a time of 87.42.

Italy's Agata Spagnol thrilled the home fans when she produced a brilliant run to seal second, 0.45 behind Novak.

French duo Emma Vuitton and Coline Charel placed third and fourth respectively while Tokyo 2020 Olympic champion Ricarda Funk of Germany came fifth.

Slovakia's Emanuela Luknarova and France's Jules Bernardet navigated difficult conditions to top the canoe heats as strong winds brought surprises on the water and disrupted competition in Ivrea.

Unpredictable gusts made life hard for paddlers on the Italian course



and resulted in the kayak semi finals and finals being moved to Saturday.

While some paddlers, including Olympic medallists, came unstuck in the tricky weather, others adapted brilliantly to the ever changing wind.

The start of the canoe heats was also delayed owing to the conditions before Luknarova and Bernardet finished first in the respective women's and men's heats.

Luknarova showed great skill in avoiding gate touches as she qualified fastest to the semi finals with a time of 97.61.

'I didn't mind that the start was postponed as that gave me more time to go around the course and take some time to think how I will do the combinations,' said Luknarova.

'I know it was windy but it's quite often like this where I am from so I didn't mind some wind.

'I was trying to keep my focus.

'I was looking at how the gates were moving and I tried to adjust to it but I think it went okay.'

Luknarova was back competing on the World Cup stage after missing the events in Augsburg, Prague and Kraków due to having her appendix removed.

'I am really happy and satisfied that I managed to do a good run from top to bottom,' said the 22 year old.

'I felt I was in good form at the start of the season but I had surgery so I could not compete in the first half of the World Cups.

'I raced at the junior world championships and junior European championships where I went okay so I knew I could race well here and I am happy that it went so well in the qualifications.'

Austria's Viktoria Wolffhardt produced a superb run to rank second, 1.34 behind Luknarova, while Italy's Marta Bertonecelli impressed on home waters to place third, a further 1.84 back.

The top six also included Great Britain's Mallory Franklin, Spain's Nuria Vilarrubla and Switzerland's Alena Marx.

The conditions threw up plenty of surprises as Germany's Elena Lilik and United States' Evy Leibfarth, who claimed silver and bronze respectively at the Paris 2024 Olympics, failed to make it through to the semi finals.

Top ranked Andrea Herzog of Germany and Poland's Klaudia Zwolinska, who achieved Olympic silver in kayak, also did not advance to the next stage.

Bernardet continued his fine World Cup form to top the standings in the men's heats in 83.13, 1.68 faster than second placed Vaclav Chaloupka of Czechia.

The Frenchman was looking to win his second successive World Cup title after triumphing in Kraków in June.

'I had a good feeling and felt in good form,' said Bernardet.

'Yes, the conditions were not easy but I just tried to make my best run.

'I did my training in Vaires-sur-Marne during the winter where it was very windy. That was a little advantage for me.'

France's Yohann Senechault pulled off a terrific run to seal third spot ahead of Jiri Prskavec and Italy's Raffaello Ivaldi.

Tokyo 2020 Olympic champion Benjamin Savsek of Slovenia was also in the top six, finishing almost three seconds behind Bernardet.

Italy's Stefanie Horn delighted the home crowd with a stunning victory.

The Italian fans roared Horn to the women's kayak title as she edged Ricarda Funk in a thrilling final.

There was to be no home men's K1 gold for returning Olympic hero Giovanni De Gennaro as Poland's Mateusz Polaczyk secured his first World Cup win at the age of 36.

Czechia's Gabriela Satkova and Benjamin Savsek bounced back from their Olympic disappointments to capture the respective women's and men's canoe titles on an action packed day.

Funk, the Tokyo 2020 gold medallist, had set the time to beat in the women's K1 after crossing in 97.54.

Horn was the last to go in the final and was



Jakub Krejci.