

# 3 British medals in team events



## World Championships

Few if any surprises marked the opening day results at the ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships.

In men's C2, Slovakia's seemingly untouchable Hochschorner brothers, Peter and Pavel, continued their domination of the class and, as predicted, their fellow countrymen, cousins Ladislav and Peter Skantar, gave spirited chase. What wasn't expected was the finish by the Polish duo of Piotr Szczepanski and Marcin Pochwala. They slipped into second place with a huge comeback from 15th place after the first run.

In all, the 20 men's crews advancing to the semis represented 11 countries with perennial powerhouse Slovakia as well as Great Britain, Germany and France with three boats each.

In women's K1 prelims, hometown girl Maialen Chourraut lit up the crowd with a sizzling run in the first run that withstood decidedly better finishes for many of the top seeds in their second run.

France's Emilie Fer, who comes to these championships ranked second in this year's European Championships and finished 7th in Beijing, said she didn't think there were any big surprises in the K1 women's results. She said she fully expected Fer to finish well because this is her home course, even though she was only seeded 16th.

Fer also didn't seem terribly worried about the order of finish since, for the next round, the clocks would start at zero again.

Spain took advantage of its home field advantage and basked in some unlikely success under the Catalonian sun in the second.

As well as the Spanish did, the Germans had the opposite experience, failing to qualify any of its K1 paddlers for semis including, most notably, reigning 2008 Olympic gold medalist Alexander Grimm. They fared better in C1, advancing Jan Benzien and Sideris Tasiadis.

Jon Erguin showed no signs of the shoulder injury that dashed his Olympic dreams the previous summer as he vaulted from 20th to 1st place between his first and second runs in C1 this day. The 29 year old ten year slalom veteran, whose best world championship finish to date was 10th in 2003, said he was nervous during both runs but, after watching tape of his first run, made all the right corrective moves to take over first place heading into Sunday's semi final. In second place, 0.81 second behind Erguin, was Alexander Slafkovsky (SVK), Benjamin Savsek (SLO) and Benzien. Top seed Michal Martikán (SVK) found himself in rare 5th place.

Spanish Coach Xabi Taberna said Spain was really hoping to get its first medal at these championships and noted Spanish team trials and this year's Spanish championships were held here in La Seu to find the very best paddlers to achieve that goal.

Just such a paddler was 21 year old Joan Crespo. Ranked 78th, Crespo took the field by surprise, posting an 86.85 first run time that held all the way through the next round until the top four seeds took their second runs. Smiling broadly, Crespo said his personal goal was to win a medal in the world championships and, to that end, three years ago he moved here to La Seu to train on this course, designed for the 1992 Olympics.

Only European champion Daniele Molmenti (ITA) and reigning World Cup champion Peter Kauzer (SLO) bettered Crespo's time. Kauzer's sizzling 84.74 second run time was a daunting 1.99 seconds ahead of Molmenti in 2nd place. Rounding out the top five were Carlos Juanmarti (ESP) and Fabien LeFevre (FRA). Other standouts advancing to semis were 47th ranked Brit Huw Swetnam, who finished in 16th place, and Olympic bronze medallist Benjamin Boukpeti of Togo, who came into these championships with a deceptive world ranking of 42.

Schooling the women's C1 division, a demonstration event, was 16 year old Chinese phenomenon Qianqian Teng. Yaping Shao of the Chinese National Canoe Federation was understandably proud of Teng's performance even though she felt the young paddler was capable

of a top three finish here in her first world competition. Other top 5 finishers included Aussies Leanne Guinea and Rosalyn Lawrence, Meritxell Rodriguez (ESP) and Caroline Loir (FRA).

While Slovakia won two of the four team events on the third day, perhaps the happier news was Spain winning its first ever medals in a slalom world championship.

Gold medallists in the day's team competitions were Slovakia in C2 and C1 men, Great Britain in K1 women and the Czech Republic in K1 men.

Spanish fans erupted in cheers, applause and even tears as Team Spain's first bronze medallists realized they had earned Spain's first ever medal in slalom world championships. The C1 team, comprised of Jordi Domenjo, Jon Erguin and Ander Elosegi, were mobbed by fans as they took their boats out at the finish line. A similar scene erupted when, in K1 team action, top seeded France incurred a 50 point penalty, moving that country into 9th place and Spain up to 3rd. The K1 team comprised Joan Crespo, Guillermo Diez Canedo and Carles Juanmarti.

Even Slovakian C1 team gold medallist Michal Martikán said, during his media interview, that it was great that Spain had a medal. Martikán was joined at the top of the podium by team mates Alexander Slafkovsky and Matej Benus. While Martikán is used to wearing gold medals, this day was Benus' first gold as a senior. When asked how it felt, Benus' one word reply was 'Awesome.' Smiling and joking, 21 year old Benus added 'I just won a world championships so I must be awesome.'

The other Slovakian gold medallists were the C2 team comprising the ever imposing Hochschorner brothers, Peter and Pavel, as well as Peter and Ladislav Skantar and Tomas Kucera and Jan Batik. The C2 team win was dramatic as the Slovaks shaved eight full seconds off the semi final time to deny top seeded Czech Republic the gold. The Czechs settled for second and Great Britain took 3rd.

In men's K1 the Czech Republic won gold by choosing the middle way, a way focused on a little more room between the boats to avoid incurring penalties in the three way weaves around the gates. All three of the top seeds in finals, France, Italy and Slovenia, suffered heavy penalties, helping the fourth seeded Czechs hold onto 1st.

The Czech team comprised Ivan Psivejc, Vavrinec Hradilek and Michal Buchtel.

In women's K1 action, the conscious decision to commit to winning K1 and training as a team to do so paid off for the team from Great Britain. Though just her first trip to a world championships, Louise Donington said that winning the European championships, gave her and teammates, Elizabeth Neave and Laura Blakeman, confidence that they'd win a medal here, just not sure which colour. Veteran paddler Blakeman, 30, said it was pretty special to finally win her first gold in five world championship outings.

The third day resulted in a slate of new faces emerging amid some familiar champions.

Among the familiar old guard, the newest chapter of the ongoing drama between C1 slalom stars Tony Estanguet (FRA) and Slovakian Michal Martikán closed with a happy ending for Estanguet. The Frenchman bested his long time rival and the most decorated man in the history of the sport by 2.55 seconds, to take home the gold.

Estanguet said he wasn't sure he could top his first place semi final run time of 99.59 but, in fact, he smoked it by three seconds, crossing the finish line in 96.21. Martikán, who found himself in the unusual position of 8th after semis, had to wait all the way until Estanguet's final run to see his 98.76 topped on the leaderboard take silver.

'Today, Tony was unbeatable,' Martikán conceded, adding the silver would have sat better with him if he felt like he'd paddled his best which was not the case in the semi final, where he uncharacteristically touched the last two gates, and the final, where he felt he didn't get into the groove until the end of the run.

The future may be quite different for both champions. Estanguet said he'll take some time off now to decide whether or not he will set his sights on London in 2012, when he'll be 34 years old. For his part, 30 year old Martikán said he still has visions of more gold medals. 'I love performing at this level,' Martikán said.

Nowhere were there more fresh faces on the podium than in women's K1, where veteran Slovaks and Czechs had their stranglehold on the podium broken by a German, a Spaniard and a Brit. Though she led at the end of qualifications and semis, one 2 point gate touch in her final run cost Maialen Chourraut the gold medal.

Though Chourraut's time on the water was 0.79 faster than Jasmin