

Franklin and Clarke take three wins

Lee Valley Slalom

The lure of Olympic qualification pitted team mates against each other on the opening day of the slalom World Cup in the Lee Valley, London, with several of the biggest names in the sport having to work harder than expected to make their way through to weekend action.

Several countries were using the opening World Cup as part of their selection process for Tokyo 2020, forcing many to keep a closer eye on their own team mates than their opponents.

Underlining the pressure, three British paddlers finished in the top four qualifying in the men's K1 with Rio 2016 gold medallist Joe Clarke edging out team mate Bradley Forbes-Cryans for the top spot.

Double world champion Jessica Fox provided some anxious moments when she smashed into a bollard during K1 qualifying but then returned with her ankle strapped in the afternoon to stroll into the semi finals of the C1.

France's Martin Thomas, Great Britain's Kimberley Woods, Australia's Fox and Clarke were all in teams that were using the weekend as part of their Tokyo 2020 qualifiers and they responded in style on the 2012 Olympic course.

Fox picked up from where she left off after her record breaking 2018 season, whizzing down the course where she took Olympic silver as a teenager in 2012 in 102.09 to qualify fastest in the C1.

Fox was more than five seconds quicker than Brazil's Ana Satila with France's Lucie Baudu third fastest in 109.69.

'It felt really nice and flowy and along the lines I was looking for and I think when that happens you find effortless speed and that's really nice,' she said.

'It's always nice to come back here. It's always so busy now; it's amazing to see what this venue has become since the 2012 Olympics and how many kids have got involved in the sport. Great memories coming back here and nice to see the podium and see my name on it.'

Fox had her left ankle bandaged after smashing into a bollard near the end of her K1 heat in the morning, where she still managed to qualify as 14th fastest.

Kimberley Woods thrilled a home crowd who braved the wintry conditions by posting the fastest qualifying time of 98.30, putting her almost a full second ahead of Germany's Ricarda Funk on 99.22 with Italy's Stefanie Horn third fastest on 100.60.

'I didn't expect to win the heats at all but having a home advantage really does pay off when you have a course like this,' Woods said.

'I think I'll be thinking more about the Olympic qualifiers when I get into the semis and hopefully the finals.'

Clarke was forced to dig deep in the men's K1 after team mate Forbes-Cryans recorded a time of 84.22. Clarke responded with 83.55.

'I did have a few butterflies, especially after the British boys were going so fast as this is one of our Tokyo trials,' Clarke said, 'But it brings out the best in me; performing under pressure is obviously so important in this sport and I was able to do that today so I'm very happy with my performance.'

The British duo were more than four seconds quicker than the next best, France's Quentin Burgi in 88.02 with the third Brit, Chris Bowers, fourth.

Martin Thomas was fastest in the men's C1, posting a time of 90.89 to pip local favourite and 2008 Olympic silver medallist David Florence, in 91.46, with Slovakia's 2016 Rio silver medallist, Matej Benus, qualifying third in 91.79.

'I like this course. I like the feeling of the water,' Thomas said.

'I started my season with a medal at the European championship and I am French champion so it's been a good start to the season.'

'This is the first Olympic qualification event for the French team so it's pretty important.'

Germany's Sideris Tasiadis and Great Britain's Mallory Franklin



struck important blows in their quest for Tokyo 2020 Olympic selection with impressive wins on Saturday.

For Tasiadis it is the third year in succession he has won C1 at the opening World Cup while it was Franklin's first World

Cup gold.

Both competitors were in tight battles for Olympic selection for their countries with Tasiadis up against current world champion Franz Anton while Franklin was in a three way tussle with two time Olympian Fiona Pennie and 21 year old Kimberley Woods.

'I didn't feel so much pressure in the final. I just said to myself to keep my line and make my own race and see what happens,' Tasiadis said.

'I knew that I had to go fast to beat the British guys and if I did that Franz would have to go faster.'

Tasiadis finished ahead of British duo Adam Burgess and Ryan Westley, with Anton, who qualified fastest for the final, finishing 8th.

Franklin bounced back from a disappointing qualifying performance to deliver an almost perfect run in the women's K1 final, posting the only time under 100 seconds and finishing more than two seconds ahead of Ricarda Funk.

'Yesterday I struggled quite a bit mentally with my racing, not quite putting down the runs that I liked, but I had two good runs today and I'm really happy to have shown that form, especially in a home World Cup,' Franklin said.

'I don't have many World Cup gold medals. I keep coming 2nd behind Jess [Fox]. I was quite nervous; there's kind of the appreciation for me that I've never been an athlete focused on the Games.'

Three time world champion Jessica Fox once again ran into difficulties on the challenging course but the Australian was still good enough to finish 3rd.

Mallory Franklin completed a golden double and team mate Joe Clarke won the men's K1 final on a triumphant day for British canoe slalom in front of an enthusiastic home crowd on Sunday.

Franklin added the C1 title to her K1 win from 24 hours earlier while Clarke overcame some mid course difficulties to win the men's K1.

The wins were also important for both athletes in their pursuit of British Olympic selection for Tokyo 2020. Franklin had to dig deep in her final after team mate Kimberley Woods posted a fault free 107.45.

Franklin also competed without penalties to record a time of 106.82.

'It's not my ideal, going off last in the final,' Franklin said.

'It's hard for me to put to bed all the different results and you see the kind of run that Kim put down. I've put quite a bit of work into trying to quieten that and focus on my own results.'

'At the end of the day I paddle because I enjoy it so that's what I try and focus on.'

World champion Jessica Fox had a rare defeat, picking up two gate touches to finish 3rd in 113.62.

Olympic champion Clarke was one step closer to defending his gold in Tokyo next year with another strong result.

The 26 year old Clarke was the last paddler on the course and, despite running into slight trouble in the middle of his run, was still quick enough to win in 90.35. He has now won two of the British Olympic selection races to give him one foot on the plane to Tokyo.

'It's the elephant in the room, the Olympic selection races, but I've got the win. I've also got the World Cup win, which is huge, and in front of a home crowd, which is even bigger,' Clarke said.

'Last time I raced here was the 2015 worlds and I left here disappointed so to have a home win puts that behind me.'

'If I'm honest I've had a bit of a shoulder injury and I haven't really gotten over it. I had a bit of pain coming into the race so I've got a few days off and then I'll head to Tacen and try and get a result there.'

Czech Jiri Prskavec finished 2nd in 91.21 with Germany's reigning world champion, Hannes Aigner, 3rd in 92.04.

ICF

K1W: 1 M Franklin, GB, 99.42. 2 R Funk, Deutschland, 101.86. 3 J Fox, Australia, 105.39. 4 K Woods, GB, 105.87.

K1M: 1 J Clarke, GB, 90.35. 2 J Prskavec, Ceska, 91.21. 3 H Aigner, Deutschland, 92.04. 4 C Bowers, GB, 92.65. 17 B Forbes-Cryans, GB.

C1W: 1 M Franklin, GB, 106.82. 2 K Woods, GB, 107.45. 3 J Fox, Australia, 113.62. 10 S Oglivie, GB, 137.91.

C1M: 1 S Tasiadis, Deutschland, 94.63. 2 A Burgess, GB, 94.70. 3 R Westley, GB, 95.07. 6 D Florence, GB, 96.79.



Woods, 4th kayak.



Winner Clarke.