

# Tough course puts new names on top

## Bratislava Slalom

A tough course made the going hard for some of the world's best paddlers on the opening day of the second World Cup in Bratislava, Slovakia, but there were few big name casualties after a full day.

The Bratislava slalom course is already considered one of the most challenging in the world and it was made even more difficult on Friday with several tough gate placements.

Germany's Ricarda Funk qualified quickest in the women's K1.

'I was a little bit afraid of gates 4, 5 and 6; they are really tricky but I was really happy with my run,' she said.

'It was really challenging and I was really unsure about this. I didn't know how it would go and what the water would be like so I was happy that it went well.'

Funk recorded 96.51 to finish just ahead of Slovenia's Eva Tercej in 96.72 with world champion Jessica Fox third in 98.26. Olympic silver medallist Luuka Jones of New Zealand was one of the high profile competitors who needed a second run to progress to weekend action.

Slovakia's Alexander Slafkovsky showed he had put his early season health problems behind him to post the fastest time in the men's C1 qualifiers.

'For this season, that was my best,' he said.

'I wanted to feel good about this run and I managed to win. Of course it doesn't matter but I needed this run to feel good about myself because from the start of the season I didn't have good runs.'

'Those first eight gates are tough. I was on the start line and didn't really know what to expect. I was prepared to react as fast as I can and I did it.'

Slafkovsky's time of 93.61 was 0.36 second quicker than Poland's Kacper Sztuba with Spain's Miquel Trave third in 95.22.

Several big names needed second runs to get through to the semi finals of the men's C1, including five time Olympian Michal Martikan in front of his home crowd and French duo Cedric Joly and Martin Thomas.

Brazil's Ana Satila capped off a good day by qualifying fastest in the women's C1 after earlier also qualifying for the K1.

'It was a good day in the office and I feel really happy. The first job is done but now I have to start thinking about the semi finals,' Satila said.

'It's a really hard course, especially the first part. I wasn't confident doing that at all so I'm really happy to have made the semis in both the C1 and the K1.'

Satila posted a time of 104.76, ahead of Czech Tereza Fiserova on 104.98 and Australia's Jessica Fox on 105.65.

France's Quentin Burgi was quickest in the men's K1. His time of 88.26 was almost two seconds quicker than Australia's Lucien Delfour (90.22) with Poland's Dariusz Popiela completing a surprise top three in 90.47.

Austria's Corinna Kuhnle and Germany's Franz Anton picked up the gold medals on the first day of finals on Saturday.

Both had previously celebrated significant career milestones in Bratislava. Kuhnle won her second K1 world title on the course while Anton won his first ever World Cup medal as part of a German C2 boat.

It proved to be another challenging day for many of the world's best paddlers. Among the casualties were France's Rio 2016 Olympic champion, Denis Gargaud Chanut, who once again failed to make the C1 final, and Rio bronze medallist, Takuya Haneda of Japan, who also fell at the semi finals.

Kuhnle showed a welcome return to form in the women's K1, posting a winning time of 99.71 to edge out Olympic silver medallist Luuka Jones, on 100.65. Ricarda Funk was 3rd in 102.05.

'I've been struggling a bit with the last two races so I feel like I'm

getting back to my race performance,' Kuhnle said.

'I think just for my self confidence this is going to give me a good push in preparation for the world championships.'

For Jones it was her first ever World Cup medal.

In the men's C1 it was reigning world champion Franz Anton who did the best on the difficult course. Despite running into trouble at the bottom of the run, Anton was still able to post a time of 96.02 and then watched as all five paddlers after him came unstuck.

'I was expecting a winning time of maybe 93 or 94. I now have a good feeling for the next World Cup and I am looking forward to my next race at home in Leipzig.'

Rio 2016 silver medallist Matej Benus did the best of the three big name Slovak paddlers, finishing 2nd in 96.32, while Luka Bozic of Slovenia was 3rd in 97.32.

Among the surprises on Saturday was the performance of 15 year old American Evy Leibfarth, who made the women's K1 final at her first ever World Cup.

The teenager ran into trouble on her final run and finished 10th but would have the chance to redeem herself when she competed in the women's C1 on Sunday.

First time medal winners dominated the podium as the world's best canoe slalom paddlers came unstuck on the final day on Sunday.

France's Claire Jacquet broke through to win the women's C1, her first medal since 2012, while Slovakia's Andrej Malek thrilled the home crowd with his first ever medal by winning the men's K1.

Olympic gold medallists and world champions were left floundering on the demanding Bratislava white water course with four time world champion Jessica Fox, reigning men's world champion Hannes Aigner and World Cup winner Vit Prindis of the Czech Republic among those to miss medals.

Jacquet was close to tears after her win was confirmed. The slalom was also part of the Olympic selection trials for the French team, giving the 31 year old valuable points in the race to Tokyo.

'I'm really happy to have done that today for the selection for the French Olympic team; it's just so amazing and I can't really explain my feelings,' Jacquet said.

'I have never done that before. Of course it's frustrating because I have always been in the game but every time I miss something, a little thing, so I am out, so today I'm more confident with the course. It's just a good story; it's just incredible.'

Jacquet posted a time of 112.15 to just squeeze out Andorran teenager Monica Doria Vilarrubla on 112.32. It was Vilarrubla's first ever World Cup medal.

Brazil's Ana Satila took the bronze in 113.32.

Malek headed a new look podium in the men's K1, posting 88.54 to win his first ever World Cup medal.

'I'm very happy but right now I don't feel so good but I'm sure that after some time I will feel very good,' Malek said.

'It's nice because I've been training hard every day so this is a good result. I like this course; we are training here so often so we know it.'

Poland's Michal Pasiut also won his first ever World Cup medal, his 88.66 enough to secure silver, while France's Boris Neveu, the 2014 world champion, finished 3rd with 90.13.

## ICF

**K1W:** 1 C Kuhnle, Österreich, 99.71. 2 L Jones, NZ, 100.65. 3 R Funk, Deutschland, 102.05. 20 S Ogilvie, GB.

**K1M:** 1 A Malek, Slovensko, 88.54. 2 M Pasiut, Polska, 88.66. 3 B Neveu, France, 90.13.

**C1W:** 1 C Jacquet, France, 112.15. 2 M Doria Vilarrubla, Andorra, 112.32.

**3 A Satila, Brasil, 113.80. 6 E Gibson, GB, 122.84. 9 S Ogilvie, GB, 176.34.**

**C1M:** 1 F Anton, Deutschland, 96.02. 2 M Benus, Slovensko, 96.32. 3 L Bozic, Slovenija, 97.32.



Men's C1 winner Anton.



Funk, 3rd kayak, .



Jacquet won women's C1.



Men's K1 winner Malek.

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