

# Chappell wins extreme slalom

## Markkleeberg Slalom

German slalomists Ricarda Funk, Sideris Tasiadis and Hannes Aigner moved one step closer to qualifying for next year's Tokyo Olympics with impressive performances on the opening day of the fourth World Cup in Markkleeberg.

If the trio finished as the best Germans in their respective events this weekend they would book their places for next year. Tasiadis and Funk qualified quickest in the men's C1 and women's K1 respectively, while Aigner was eighth quickest in the men's K1.

Funk was more than 3 seconds quicker than reigning world champion Jessica Fox of Australia. The German narrowly missed qualifying for the Rio 2016 Olympics but she was trying not to think about what was at stake this weekend.

'It's quite an important weekend because it is part of our Olympic selection, so I am just trying to be focused and do my own thing,' Funk said.

'To qualify for Tokyo would be great but all the girls are great and I don't want to concentrate too much on this. I just want to be satisfied with my racing. Of course I'm nervous but I'm looking forward to racing.'

Tasiadis was hoping to qualify for his third Olympics after taking silver in London in 2012. He was in a tight tussle with team mate and reigning C1 world champion Franz Anton for the German Olympic team and put the pressure on early by qualifying fastest on Friday.

'Franz is very good here because this is his home course,' Tasiadis said, 'but if I can keep my line like I did today then I could get pre selection for the Olympic Games. I'm not nervous; maybe that's how I get to paddle so fast.'

'I want to lock it away one year before because then I can train for the Olympic Games, not like other nations that have only two or three months to prepare.'

Fox was quickest in the women's C1 heats, despite running into trouble at the top of the course. She edged out local paddler Andrea Herzog who was also in a close tussle for the German women's C1 Tokyo position.

Fox, who was already an Olympic silver and bronze medallist, said it was exciting to be competing in events where Olympic places were up for grabs.

'The Germans are very good here so it's been nice to watch them and learn from them,' Fox said.

'The Olympic qualifiers have made for pretty exciting racing all season and I think in Prague it will make for a pretty big finish.'

Rio Olympic bronze medallist Jiri Prskavec was quickest in the men's K1, ahead of Australia's Lucien Delfour and the USA's Michal Smolen.

'I was a little afraid of the course; it looked really hard physically so I tried to start slow and not use too much power up until the bottom and it worked for me,' Prskavec said.

'I've been training a lot but stopped on Tuesday so it is not really a race where I will be 100 percent so I will just try my best. Right now it's good and if it stays this way I'll be happy.'

Ricarda Funk almost certainly locked away her ticket to Tokyo and Slovakia's Alexander Slafkovsky took a successful first step towards qualifying for his first Olympics in an action packed day on Saturday.

Funk smashed a world class field to win the women's K1 final by more than 3 seconds and, in doing so, earned Olympic qualification to the German team. The selection would be finalized if Germany earned a Tokyo quota at the next month's world championships.

'Four years ago I was really nervous and I really messed up my Olympic qualifications,' Funk said.

'This is why it means so much more for me. It will be great. I don't want to be happy too early but this is a good position to start.'

Funk's time was 95.27 with Australia's reigning world champion, Jessica Fox, 2nd in 99.02. The bronze went to Italy's Stefanie Horn in 99.62.

Competition for the one available Olympic berth in the Slovakian men's C1 team, one of the most hotly contested positions in the sport, began this weekend in Markkleeberg and it was Alexander Slafkovsky who landed the first blow by winning Saturday's World Cup final.

Slafkovsky, 2016 Olympic silver medallist Matej Benus and two time Olympic gold medallist Michal Martikan would battle it out over four events to determine who will go to Tokyo. Slafkovsky is the only member of the trio never to have been to the Olympics.

'This is why it is so emotional for me; it is probably the last chance for me to go to the Olympics,' Slafkovsky said.

'I'm really happy that I made the first step but there is way too long to go still. This is the first step of the journey.'

Slafkovsky posted a time of 92.54 to finish 1.79 seconds ahead of Slovenia's Luka Bozic with Franz Anton third in 94.43. Anton kept his Olympic dreams alive by finishing ahead of team mate Sideris Tasiadis with the battle for Germany's quota to be decided at the world championships.

Almost two years to the day since Czech Vit Prindis and Spaniard Nuria Vilarrubla last won slalom World Cups both returned to the winners' circle in Markkleeberg on Sunday.

Vilarrubla's last C1 World Cup gold came in La Seu, Spain, on September 8th 2017. One week earlier and exactly two years ago to the day Prindis won his last World Cup in Ivrea, Italy.

It was an emotional win for the Spaniard, who admitted she had been struggling for confidence in recent times. She held on to win by just 0.04 of a second, her time of 104.98 edging out Czech Tereza Fiserova in 105.02.

'After a long wait without results and having worked so hard now I'm feeling much more confident,' Vilarrubla said.

'Sometimes when you don't find the right way or you don't find the right way for the win your confidence goes lower but I know I've been working hard for it and I'm proud of the work that I've been doing.'

'It's good to have this result now. I would love to go to the Olympics. I'm dreaming of it but there is still a long way to go.'

Reigning world champion Jessica Fox was 3rd in 105.14. She had a 2 second penalty for a gate touch which cost her the gold medal.

Prindis returned to the form which saw him dominate the 2017 season, rattling down the Markkleeberg course in 87.78 seconds to finish an incredible 2.43 seconds ahead of Lucien Delfour in 90.21.

'I'm really happy to be again on the top of the podium after two years with the gold medal; it's good for me and a good start to the second part of the season,' Prindis said.

'I was always missing that little piece and today I found all of it in one run in the final but the main race of the season is coming; in one month we will be fighting for points in Olympic selection so it's a first step. I'm really happy for it but the big races are coming.'

Team mate Jiri Prskavec took the bronze in 90.32. Hannes Aigner finished 4th but had cause to celebrate after successfully wrapping up the German men's K1 quota for the Tokyo Olympics.

## ICF

**K1W:** 1 R Funk, Deutschland, 95.27. 2 J Fox, Australia, 99.02. 3 S Horn, Italia, 99.62.

**K1M:** 1 V Prindis, Ceska, 87.78. 2 L Delfour, Australia, 90.21. 3 J Prskavec, Ceska, 90.32.

**C1W:** 1 N Vilarrubla, Espana, 104.98. 2 T Fiserova, Ceska, 105.02. 3 J Fox, Australia, 105.14.

**C1M:** 1 A Slafkovsky, Slovensko, 92.54. 2 L Bozic, Slovenija, 94.33.

3 F Anton, Deutschland, 94.43. 18 W Smith, GB.

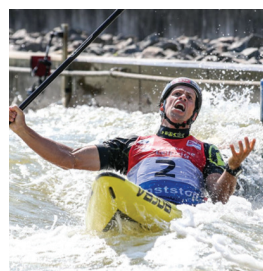
**K1XM:** 1 E Chappell, GB. 2 M Karlsson, Sverige. 3 T Long, USA.



Tasiadis in C1.



K1W winner Funk.



Slafkovsky won C1M.



K1 men's winner Prindis.



C1W winner Vilarrubla.

ICF photographs