

# Wins for Heath, Henshaw and Wiggs

## Poznan Regatta

The world's best paracanoe athletes battled strong winds and choppy water to post strong results on the opening day of the sprint and paracanoe World Cup in Poznan, Poland.

Among those to impress in the early rounds were Ukraine's Serhii Yemelianov, Italy's Esteban Farias, Great Britain's Charlotte Henshaw and Poland's Katarzyna Sobczak.

The World Cup would be the only major international event for most of the world's top paddlers before this year's paracanoe world championships.

Austria's Markus Swoboda, who took silver in the men's KL2 in Rio in 2016, won his heat on Thursday but said he was still well off his best.

'I've gained a lot of weight but there is still another three months until the world championships and one and a half years until the Paralympics,' he said.

Great Britain's Emma Wiggs was another who was happy there were still several months until the world championships. The 2016 Rio gold medallist won her KL2 heat but was still recovering from wrist surgery in the off season.

'The winter has been a long challenging one so I'm just chuffed to be back on the international stage and lining up,' she said.

'I was back on the water gently at the end of January so it's been challenging but we love a challenge.'

Team mate Charlotte Henshaw took the KL2 world title from Wiggs last year and finished ahead of her again this week at the European Championships. She was also a very convincing heat winner.

'I think there's definitely things that I've learnt in the past 12 months, that perhaps if this had been the conditions this time last year I wouldn't have coped so well,' Henshaw said.

Serhii Yemelianov had dominated the men's KL3 event since before Rio and he was untroubled, winning his heat in the strong wind on Thursday.

'The wind is no problem for me, he said.

'I feel I am getting better. Next year will be power, power and power.'

Katarzyna Sobczak was having a third attempt at qualifying for a Paralympic Games after missing out twice as a swimmer.

She looked impressive in winning her heat of the KL3 in front of her home crowd.

'Tomorrow marks two years of being a paddler after ten years of being a swimmer,' she said.

'Here is my heart. I know Polish people; its for me much better to paddle here than in any other country.'

Paralympic and world champion Curtis McGrath was not competing

in Poznan, with New Zealand's Scott Martlew one of several athletes hoping to take over in the absence of the big Australian.

He was impressive in his heat of the men's KL2 and said being reclassified into a new category had changed his focus.

'With the new classification it definitely has given me new motivation,' he said.

'The Paralympics is obviously my big goal on the not too distant horizon so I'm pretty excited for that.'

The first medal of the Poznan World Cup was won by Russia's Larisa Volik in the non Paralympic VL3 race.

Volik, who has won the past two VL3 world titles, had to fight off a strong finish by Ukraine's Nataliia Lahutenko to snare the gold. She said it made up for a disappointing race in the kayak class earlier in the day.

'It was so hard because the wind is very strong and it was difficult to feel the water,' she said.

'It was difficult to do a good race after my kayak. I want to believe I could do my kayak better.'

There were finals in two other non Paralympic events, the women's VL1 and the men's VL1. Japan's Monika Seryu took the VL1 while Russia's Artur Chuprov won the men's race.

There were few surprises during afternoon racing on the canoe sprint programme, with all the big names safely progressing through to their semi finals or finals.

Paracanoe convert Charlotte Henshaw tightened her grip on the women's KL2 with another stirring win on Friday.

The two time Paralympic swimmer once again finished ahead of her team mate and 2016 Rio gold medallist, Emma Wiggs, in the 200 metre race.

Earlier, an emotional Wiggs overcame a disrupted preparation and a painful wrist injury to take the women's VL2.

Wiggs punched the water with delight after repeating her result from the 2018 world championships.

Other gold medals on Friday were won by Russia's Roman Serebryakov in the men's VL2, Ukraine's Vladyslav Yepifanov in the men's VL3, Uzbekistan's Shaknoza Mirzaeva in the women's KL3 and Brazil's Luis Cardoso Da Silva in the men's KL1.

Henshaw revealed after her win that she had also overcome a disrupted preparation because of a rib injury.

'It was enough to take its toll a little bit there at the end,' she said.

'A few weeks ago I wasn't even sure I was going to be at this event, so to complete a full programme is a bit of a personal goal that I wanted.

'You can't reach your limit without having someone pushing you and I absolutely would not be where I am without Emma.'

Russia's Nadezda Andreeva took the bronze.

Wiggs had cause for celebration earlier in the day with a win in the VL2.

'All the emotion of being back on the water after a pretty tough year, I think it was nice to be able to deliver in better conditions,' she said.

'I believed more in myself today than yesterday. I believed I could do a decent run. I just wanted to be able to do it at the end of what's been quite an emotional and tough week.

'I often struggle with confidence so to know I have quite a disrupted year and to still be able to get out there and be competitive with the best in the world is a huge boost.'

Australia's Susan Seipel took the silver while there was a dead heat for bronze between Russia's Mariia Nikiforova and Great Britain's Jeanette Chippington.

After nearly five years of paracanoe paddling, Vladyslav Yepifanov took the gold in the men's VL3, edging out Brazilian world championship silver medallist Caio de Carvalho and France's Eddie Potdevin. Less than one second covered the top four finishers.

'It was hard work. I have come a long way to do this,' Yepifanov said, but gold did come for Brazil, courtesy of world championship bronze



Men's KL3 winner Yemelianov.



Swoboda racing in KL2.



Wiggs won women's VL2.



Martlew winning KL2.



Volik winning VL3.



Serebryakov winning VL2.



Pimenta, 500m winner.



Scheibner challenging in 1km.