

Heath still the world's fastest

World Championships

Great Britain's Charlotte Henshaw kicked off her paracanoe world championship campaign with a gold medal on the opening afternoon of competition in Szeged, Hungary.

Henshaw won the non Paralympic VL3 200m while there were also gold medals for Japan's Monika Seryu in the women's VL1 200m and for Ukraine's Mykola Fedorenko in the VL1 200m, also both non Paralympic events.

Henshaw's main focus this week would be the defence of her women's KL2 gold from last year's world championships but she said she was happy to claim the VL3 title after finishing 3rd last year.

'For me it's nice to get that bonus event under my belt,' she said.

'I don't spend a lot of time in this boat. I've probably done about five sessions this year. It's good to get in it every now and again and if it gets onto the programme for Paris 2024 I might spend a bit more time in it.'

Fedorenko saw off the challenge of German reigning world champion Peter Happ and Chile's Robinson Mendez to take the VL1.

'It is a very special moment for all Ukrainians when they get to represent their country like this,' Fedorenko said.

Monika Seryu is used to racing against herself in the women's VL1 200m but on Wednesday she had to see off the challenge from Germany's Esther Bode. She also had to overcome tricky wind conditions.

'There was a strong headwind so it was difficult to keep direction,' she said.

'It is very special to be world champion for a third time.'

In other paracanoe racing, Australia's Curtis McGrath would get to defend his two world titles after qualifying for the finals of both the KL2 and the VL3, Italy's Esteban Farias won his heat of the men's KL1 and Ukraine's Serhii Yemeljanov looked strong in the first round of the men's KL3.

In the women's KL2 both Henshaw and her team mate, Emma Wiggs, won their way through their heats, while there could also have been a British showdown in the women's KL3 after Hope Gordon and Laura Sugar both impressed in their heats.

In able bodied racing defending Olympic champions Lisa Carrington of New Zealand and Liam Heath of Great Britain both easily won their heats in their 200 metre races.

Curtis McGrath and Emma Wiggs both successfully defended their world championship crowns and the Hungarian favourites for the women's K2 500m were sensationally disqualified in a day of drama.

The first quotas for next year's Tokyo Paralympics were earned with the top six in Thursday's three gold medal events all earning places for their countries.

Curtis McGrath held on by a fingernail to successfully defend his VL3 world title, edging out Brazil's Caio Carvalho by just 0.10 of a second to repeat the gold and silver result from last year.

Great Britain's Stuart Wood took bronze.

'That's the closest I've ever had, so it's nice to be pushed all the way,' McGrath said.

'Caio's always been there. Some days he gets a really good start and some days he just doesn't have the right go but today was one of those days and he pushed me all the way.'

Tears flowed freely for Emma Wiggs after she defended her VL2 world title. Wiggs has been battling a wrist injury and revealed she had contemplated retiring because she began to doubt herself.

'It's just been quite a tough year. I'm really pleased for Matt (her coach) because I've been a really difficult athlete this year and he's stuck by me and so's my wife and my family because I've been hard to live with this year,' Wiggs said.

'I always said if I couldn't get faster I'd retire and I just haven't felt competitive. I've just been on the verge of thinking I'm too old for this but Matt still believes and my family still believes so I just want to make them proud.'

Australia's Susan Seipel took the silver and Russia's Mariia Nikiforova took the bronze.

There was elation for Brazil's Luis Da Silva when he broke through to win the men's VL2. After taking silver 12 months earlier, Da Silva stepped up to take gold ahead of Portugal's Norberto Mourao, who won his country's first ever paracanoe world championship medal, and Poland's Jakub Tokarz.

'I wanted to win and I wanted to make sure we can go to Tokyo next year,' the Brazilian said.

'Now I will have to train really hard for next year.'

Hungary's Danuta Kozak, the most successful female canoe sprint athlete of the modern era, and partner Anna Karasz easily won their K2 500m semi final but then looked on in disbelief as their boat weighed in light and they were disqualified.

Kozak has won in the K2 at the past two Olympics and, with Karasz, was the defending world champion. Slovenia's Spela Ponomarenko Janic and Anja Osterman marked themselves as medal favourites with a strong semi final win.

'We will do our own race but it will be a bit easier because one of the best countries is out,' Ponomarenko Janic said.

'It's disappointing because we love to race against the best and we want to beat the best ones.'

In other results the women's C2 500m took on a different look following the withdrawal of world champions Canada after Laurence Vincent-Lapointe's suspension for a positive drug test.

Hungary's Virag Balla and Kincso Takacs, who defeated the Canadians at the Duisburg world cup earlier this year, easily won their heat.

'They were the biggest name here and we really wanted to race against them,' Balla said.

'This is the world champs; everyone is preparing for this and I wanted to see how our training was going. I just want to race against them again.'

The 16 year old Hungarian Peter Pal Kiss backed up his shock 2019 European title win with the biggest win of his career, thrilling the home crowd with a stunning gold medal on Friday.

The teenager upset two time world champion Esteban Farias in the men's KL1 final with Luis Cardosa Da Silva taking the bronze. He also left the current Paralympic champion in his wake and stamped himself as a gold medal favourite for next year's Games in Tokyo.

'I have only been paddling for three years; this is fantastic,' Kiss said.

'It's very good. I'm very happy. This is my best result ever; it's amazing.'

Charlotte Henshaw won her second world title of the week and confirmed herself as a Tokyo 2020 gold medal favourite when she defended her KL2 crown.

Henshaw beat 2016 Paralympic gold medalist Emma Wiggs with Susan Seipel taking the bronze.

'In any sport you can never take anything for granted and I certainly can't take anything for granted when I line up alongside Emma,' Henshaw said.

'I think that's what is amazing about our partnership, our rivalry if you want, that every time we race we are pushing the event forward. Again we have two Brits at the top of the podium, which is always a good day at the office.'

'Last year was such a surprise to me. I'm still relatively new to the sport and I still feel like I've got some improvement to make. I'm not a perfect paddler, and I hope I never am because that means there is nothing else to find.'

Uzbekistan's Shakhnoza Mirzaeva took the gold in the women's KL3 and, in doing so, she hoped she'd booked a place for herself at next year's Paralympic Games.

'This was my target and I worked very hard for this,' Mirzaeva said.

'I have trained every day for three years so it was hard work. This is very important for me and I am so glad that I have got the opportunity to go. I will work hard to make sure our flag is the highest.'

Laura Sugar took the silver while Iran's Shahla Behrouzrad made history for her country by taking the bronze medal.

'This is the first time in the history of canoeing in Iran that a women



Wiggs.



Henshaw.



Khuzenka/Litvinchuck.



Xing/Li.



Kopasz.



Hungarian K4.