



Anezka Paloudova.



Curtis McGrath.



German K4.



Van der Westhuyzen/Green.

Four British women's para wins

Szeged Regatta

The Netherlands earned its first women's canoe sprint Olympic quota for more than 30 years while Poland and two crews representing neutral canoeists also picked up tickets to Paris on the opening day of the European Olympic qualifiers in Hungary. The last time there was a Dutch woman competing at an Olympics was in 1988 but on Wednesday Selma Konijn and Ruth Vorrsselman ended the 32 year drought by storming to victory in the women's K2 500 in Szeged.

Konijn and Vorrsselman triumphed after an epic struggle against the neutral crew of Svetlana Chernigovskaya and Anastasiia Dolgova.

'It's been such a long time so it seems a little bit unreal to be going there,' Vorrsselman said.

'We knew if we did a really good race it would be possible so we had to believe in it but it was also a bit scary.'

'I did believe in it but it was also scary to say because it is so unreal,' Konijn said.

Poland fell agonizingly short of earning a men's K4 quota at last year's world championships but on the Wednesday two of the members of that crew guaranteed the country will have at least two competing in kayak in Paris.

Jakub Stepun and Przemyslaw Korsak took victory in the men's K2 500, finishing ahead of the neutral pair of Uladzislau Kravets and Dzimistry Natynchyk.

'The main word in this competition is believe,' Stepun said.

'We thought we could do it here and our coach believed in us and now we are going to Paris, to the Olympic Games.'

Two crews representing the neutral canoeists also earned Olympic quotas. Alexey Korovashkov and Ivan Shtyl, both 2012 Olympians, won the men's C2 500 while Anhelina Bardanouskaya and Volha Klimava won the women's C2 500.

Danish paddler Rene Holten Poulsen is set to compete at a fourth Olympic Games while several will get the chance to compete at their first after a dramatic day of qualifying on the Thursday.

Poulsen, who made his debut at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, taking K2 silver, also competed in London and Rio but failed to qualify for Tokyo. In Szeged on the Thursday afternoon he turned back the clock and silenced the doubters by winning one of two European Olympic quotas available in the men's K1 1,000.

'Today was really hard mentally to try and enjoy it because you know it might be your last race so you can't enjoy it,' Poulsen said.

'It's been a very long journey for me, a lot of mental battles, a lot of battles within the federation. Going off on my own, it's been a long fight.'



'It's really cool to be at the end of it and to start to enjoy it again.'

Czech paddler Anezka Paloudova and Italian Nicolae Craciun are set to compete in their first Games after earning quotas in the women's K1 500 and the men's C1 1,000 respectively. Paloudova said it was hard to bounce back from the disappointment of not winning a quota at last year's world championships in Duisburg.

'I can't believe what has happened; it will take some time for me to believe that I am an Olympian,' Paloudova said.

'Duisburg was pretty tough for me. I didn't do a good race there and I was really upset after my race.'

'I really focused then on my mental preparation and tried to do everything correctly. On one hand it was pretty hard but on the other hand there wasn't so much pressure on me because in the Czech Republic there are much better paddlers in the boys, in kayak and canoe, and for the girls we are getting better but we are still not on the same level as the boy athletes.'

Craciun has made his name as a C2 paddler, having won both a C2 500 and C2 1,000 world title, but his decision to try his hand at the C1 paid dividends on Thursday.

'I never expected this result for me because I've never raced in C1 1,000 metres in my career,' Craciun said.

'I did all my life in C2 but this year I had a new goal. I started the season with a preparation in C1 but I really didn't believe in my form so I didn't expect when I saw the starting list that I could get better than fourth or fifth.'

'I don't have the words to explain this emotion because the Olympics was a dream of my family.'

Ukraine's Mariya Povkh is set to compete at a third consecutive Olympics after winning the women's K1 500 qualifier, while Hungary's Kincso Takacs has the opportunity for a second Games after snatching a quota in the women's C1 200.

Neutral competitors also picked up quotas, although under ICF qualification rules they will not be able to accept all the positions. No one country can earn two boat and single boat quotas at a continental qualifier.

On the Thursday Yuliya Trushkina won the women's C1 200, Aleh Yurenia is set for a third Olympics after winning the men's K1 1,000 and Zakhar Petrov could be competing at his first Games after winning the men's C1 1,000.

The Thursday also saw the first day of competition in the paracanoe world championships, which was also doubling as the final Paralympic qualifiers.



Konijn/Vorrsselman.



Rene Poulsen.