

some team runs together in 2019, when it was not perfect,' Gestin said, 'but today it was really better and we were able to take the gold. For sure it is great to do this today; it is a step but we have another battle. We have a hard week in front of us.'

In the men's K1 Czechia returned to the top of the podium for the first time since 2017. Reigning Olympic champion Jiri Prskavec, reigning world champion Vit Prindis, and U23 world champion Jakub Krejci proved too strong.

'It's been six years but we are back here, Prskavec said.

'It's a combination of the three of us being good at individual categories, really fast. Jakub in the middle is really strong and Jiri and I are used to paddling together because for the past ten years we have been racing in the same position, just mixing the man in the middle. We had a good run and we really enjoyed it,' Prindis said.

Some of the biggest names in canoe slalom narrowly avoided heartbreak on the opening day of individual competition in horrendous conditions on Wednesday.

Among those who flirted with early elimination were reigning Olympic champion Jessica Fox, former world champion Elena Lilik and Tokyo silver medallist Lukas Rohan.

Germany's two time world champion Andrea Herzog posted the fastest time in a dramatic women's C1 while, behind her, a string of highly credentialled competitors struggled and were forced to take second qualifying runs.

Herzog performed best in the challenging windy conditions, posting an error free run of 95.11, almost one second ahead of Mallory Franklin with Brazil's Ana Satila third fastest.

'It's really windy today so the gates are moving pretty much but I think I did fine,' Herzog said.

'I would love to be world champion again but I think all the other girls are pretty good and everyone is fighting for it. I was here in 2015 at the world championships; it was my first senior world championships. I like it; it's challenging and tricky and physical.'

Fox and Lilik were able to qualify on their second runs with Fox expressing her relief.

'It's probably the toughest conditions I've ever raced in,' Fox said.

'I had to come back for a second run which I don't do often and at a world championships that's not how I really wanted to start. Those conditions definitely made it more of a nerve wracking race so I'm really pleased to have qualified and put that one out of the way.'

Spain's Miquel Trave was one of just a handful in the men's competition doing both the C1 and the K1 and on Wednesday he dominated the men's C1 qualifying with a time of 84.07. Incredibly, his run also included a two second penalty for a gate touch.

'I feel really comfortable. I came here during last year for a few times; it's a hard course,' Trave said.

'I always focus more on C1. I've been doing K1 just for a bit but I spend much more time for the C1. I can't relax because it's a world championships; everyone wants to win but to get the Olympic quota would be amazing.'

Italy's Raffaello Ivaldi and Nicolas Gestin, who both posted error free runs, finished second and third quickest.

There were 12 Olympic quota spots available for both men's and women's C1. A total of 16 countries qualified for both the women's and men's semi finals.

A welcome change in the weather brought out the best in the planet's best slalomists.

There were nervous moments for a handful of the top paddlers but by close of business nearly all of the top ranked competitors were safely through to Saturday's semi finals.

Germany's defending Olympic and world champion Ricarda Funk

showed she was in top form by posting the quickest qualifying time in the women's K1. Jessica Fox, chasing her first world title since 2018, was second quickest while Dutch paddler Martina Wegman was third fastest.

'My first race here was the 2015 world championships. I won my first ever world championships medal here; it's just great to have another major event here,' Funk said.

'I never feel relaxed, no matter if I am world champion or something else. I'm never relaxed and I want to show my skills.'

Several top ranked competitors needed second runs to qualify for Saturday's semi finals, including Mallory Franklin, Ana Satila and New Zealand's Luuka Jones. Slovenia's Eva Tercelj, a 2019 world champion, was the biggest casualty, missing the semi final by one position.

There were no surprises that a paddler from Czechia qualified fastest in the men's K1; however, few would have bravely tipped it would be their youngest paddler, Jakub Krejci.

The 21 year old Krejci edged out team mate and reigning world champion Jiri Prskavec while Brazil's Mathieu Desnos was third quickest.

'I knew that my run was good but the top of the course section did not go the way that I wanted so I thought that someone would beat this time,' Krejci said.

'In all our preparation I was focussed for this race so I'm happy with this run but it is just a qualification; we don't know what will happen in the semi and the final but I hope it goes like this.

'It's always tough, like in the Czech national cups. There are four world champions and so many European champions so we have a good preparation in our country.'

The top 15 countries in both the men's and women's K1 would earn quotas for next year's Olympics. However, anyone who earned a quota in C1 would not be able to also earn a ticket in the K1.

Six years after they last celebrated canoe slalom world titles, Mallory Franklin and Slovenia's Benjamin Savsek were once again on top of the podium on Friday.

Franklin delighted a big home crowd in London by taking the women's C1 crown while Savsek added another men's C1 title to the Olympic crown he won in Tokyo.

Alongside the crowning of world champions, Olympic quotas for Paris 2024 were also earned with the top 12 countries in both the men's and the women's booking their tickets to the Games.

Franklin had enjoyed a successful decade in women's canoe, missing the world championship podium only twice since 2013. She won her first world title in 2017, had four silver medals and, on Friday, added her second crown to her collection.

She had to wait a long time at the bottom of the course before the final paddler crossed the line, which added to the drama for both Franklin and the British fans.

'It's amazing to be able to do it at home and at Lee Valley; it's my favourite course in the world and in front of the crowd it's pretty amazing,' Franklin said.

'I've generally not performed amazingly well at worlds since 2017 although I've medalled so that sounds bad but I've not been able to put down that performance. There's some really good girls in C1 now and if you look at the standard of some of those runs that won the worlds over the years there's been some amazing stuff gone down.

'I'd like to consider myself part of that without ever being able to put it together but it's amazing to do it now. It was a really cool race; it was nerve wracking. I didn't enjoy it very much after I'd been through the finish but, to know I'd done as much as I could, the result was going to be what it was; to end up on top of the podium was pretty cool.'

Kimberley Woods took the silver, the first time in world championship history that one country has taken the first two places.



Benjamin Savsek, C1 winner.



Cross winner Kimberley Woods.



Men's cross winner Joe Clarke.

Antony Edmonds photographs