



Fernando Rufino de Paulo.



Corbin Hart.



Cociu/Olarasu.



Peters of Belgium.

ICF photographs

for the Olympic Games. We will see. If it is okay what I do here then maybe but first I have to qualify for the German team.

'The K2 is already the most important boat for me. Max and I are not only partners but we are a crew. We are strong together and the K2 is the most important boat for me. The K1, I think it is a little bit for the ego but I will see what I can do.'

Schopf and Hoff later teamed up to post the fastest time in the men's K2 1,000 and to lock away their place in Sunday's final.

In other Olympic classes, Germany's Sabrina Hering-Pradler and Tina Dietze posted the quickest time in the women's K2 500, three time world championship silver medalists Virag Balla and Kincso Takacs of Hungary were fastest in the women's C2 500 and Serghei Tarnovschi was fastest in the men's C1 1,000.

Germany's three time Olympic gold medallist, Sebastian Brendel, was not contesting the C1 1,000 in Szeged but teamed up with Tim Hecker to progress straight to the final of the men's C2 1,000.

The fastest qualifiers were Cuba's Serguey Madrigal and Fernando Enriquez.

Germany picked up three gold medals and the next generation of world class canoe sprint paddlers showed they are ready for the sport's biggest stage with triumphant displays on Saturday.

The 18 year old American Nevin Harrison, 21 year old Jacob Schopf and 25 year olds Emma Jorgensen of Denmark and Conrad Scheibner of Germany all sent out a warning on the eve of the Tokyo Olympics that they are ready to shine.

In winning the men's K1 1,000 final, Schopf confirmed all the rumours that have been circulating in canoeing circles for some time that he was easily the fastest male paddler in the German team.

On Saturday he outgunned the past two ICF world champions and the best in the world from 2014.

'It was nearly a perfect race for me. I showed my best performance but I think there are also things I can do better,' Schopf said.

'I didn't think I could win here so now I think I'm happy but I'm also confused. I showed what I can do in the K1.

'I think I can do both the K1 and K2; we are trying here to see if I can do it and I think I can.

'The K2 is my most important boat and that is still the fact.'

Nevin Harrison would turn 19 in two weeks' time and showed she had not lost any speed in the women's C1 200 during the pandemic. Harrison was the defending world champion and would be looking to become the first Olympic champion in the new event in Tokyo.

'It's been a journey for sure. I'm excited to see what I can do in about two and a half months,' Harrison said.

'Definitely there's been some pressure lifted off me as I've become more accustomed to racing at this level but there's been the added pressure that there are a lot of people counting on me.

'I just hope I don't let them down and I don't let myself down.

Rio 2016 gold medallist Liam Heath emerged from a difficult lockdown period in Great Britain to remind fellow competitors he is still the favourite for the K1 200 in Tokyo. Heath held on by a fingernail to take the gold.

'It was an incredibly tight race, as you would expect in a race of such high class athletes after a year of absolutely no racing,' Heath said.

'It's really good to get out here and race again. Last year I just trained in my back garden but I'm feeling pretty strong. There's still a bit of fine tuning to go; it's just around the corner but there is still a way to go. I'm hoping to peak for the Olympics.'

The absence of New Zealand's Lisa Carrington and Hungary's Danuta Kozak threw the race for the women's K1 200 wide open. Emma Jorgensen grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

'The most important thing was to see where I am and where the other girls are who are headed to Tokyo,' Jorgensen said.

'Right now it seems good but there is still some time to go so we need to go home and train some more.'

Sebastian Brendel has dominated the men's C1 1,000 for a decade but on Saturday it was teammate Conrad Scheibner who took the honours.

Brendel was only racing the C2 in Szeged but Schreiber believed

his strong win from lane one should have put him in the picture for German Olympic team selection.

'I had the feeling I could really achieve something off the start,' Schreiber said.

'I hope this result proves my capabilities. I'm really looking forward to what's coming this season. After two years of almost no international competition it was hard to know where I was.'

The third German gold medal came in the women's K2 500 with Sabrina Hering-Pradler and Tina Dietze making a clear statement to German team selectors in their first race together.

Their teammates, Sarah Bruessler and Melanie Gebhardt, secured the K2 500 Olympic quota on Thursday, providing a headache for German team management.

'Sabrina is the best paddler in our team so I am very happy to race with her,' Dietze said, 'But we need more races. I think it was good to win because we hope we will go in the K2 to the Olympics. We will wait for the coaches to tell us.'

In non Olympic events, Hungary's Emese Kohalmi took gold in the women's K1 1,000, Spain's Marcus Walz and Rodrigo Germade won the men's K2 500 and teammates Cayetano Garcia and Pablo Martinez, fresh from earning Spain a C2 1,000 quota during the week, won the men's C2 500.

Ukraine's Liudmyla Luzan, a bronze medallist in the women's C1 200, took the C1 500 and Hungary's Bence Nadas won the men's K1 500.

The emotion that comes with earning a place at a Paralympic Games was on full display as the last available quotas for Tokyo were decided.

Among those who shed tears freely were Helene Ripa and Poland's Kamila Kubas, finally confirmed for the Tokyo Paralympics after more than 12 months of uncertainty.

Alongside the Paralympic qualifiers, a handful of paddlers already confirmed for Tokyo took the opportunity to have a rare international race, and underlined their medal potential for the Games.

Ukraine's Serhii Yemelianov and Maryna Mazhula, who have dominated the men's KL3 and women's KL1 respectively since Rio 2016, again greeted the judge first on Saturday.

Hungary's Peter Pal Kiss in the men's KL1, Germany's Anja Adler in the women's KL2 and Great Britain's Laura Sugar in the women's KL3 were able to race without the pressure of needing to qualify and responded with strong victories in the near perfect race conditions.

Ripa would compete at a fourth Paralympic Games, less than one month after she turned 50.

After a nervous 12 months she picked up one of the final quotas on Saturday.

'I've struggled so hard for this and I never stopped believing in myself but it's been so hard,' an emotional Ripa said after her race.

'Just to make this is such a relief. After my world championship gold in 2018 I thought this was going to be a straight journey but there have been so many downfalls so, just to make this today, I'm so happy and proud of myself that I kept on fighting.'

'Even though I haven't done all that I wanted to do it's still enough and it can only get better from here.'

British paddler David Phillipson went to the last three Paralympic Games as a wheelchair tennis player.

'I did more than I expected to do. I'm chuffed,' he said. 'I got the spot I needed. My goal was Tokyo all along and, for it to come down to the wire like this, it was a lot of stress and hard work but it's paid off.'

Teammate Laura Sugar relished the opportunity to race again against the best in the world after a long period of lockdown in the UK and is set to go to her second Paralympics but her first as a paracanoe competitor.

'It was definitely worth testing myself against a strong field to see how the last 18 months have gone,' Sugar said.

'I knew I was going faster than I was two years ago when I was still new at the sport. It's really great in Britain that I also have Hope Gordon and we keep pushing ourselves all the time.'

'To be at the Paralympics in a sport that is so thrilling will be so amazing.'