

'I'm happy to be part of history and the first female paddler from Croatia to be going to canoe in the Olympics.'

Lithuania's Mindaugas Maldonis earned his country the men's K1 200 quota but had to put his celebrations on hold because it was still to be decided who the former Soviet state will send to Tokyo.

'I hope they take into consideration that I have managed to secure the quota for my country and that I am capable of going to the Olympics,' he said. Getting to the Olympics is the dream I have had since my childhood. Rio, I was not capable of going there. Tokyo was my dream country and I surely hope I can go there.'

China's Dong Zhang, who has spent most of his paddling career in team boats, took advantage of the opportunity to paddle in a K1 by securing his country a 1,000 metre quota for Tokyo.

There would be 50 countries represented in canoe sprint at the Tokyo Olympics, following the allocation of tripartite quotas to Joaquim Lobo and Amado .

Cuba and Austria celebrated golden doubles and there were also wins for Norway, the Czech Republic, China, Lithuania and host nation Russia on Saturday.

Several Tokyo bound competitors took advantage of a rare opportunity to race internationally after more than a year of disrupted preparation and cancelled events. Many competitors wouldn't have another event before the Olympic Games.

Austria's Ana-Roxana Lehaci and Viktoria Schwarz only had their Olympic K2 500 tickets confirmed earlier in the month and celebrated with World Cup gold on Saturday.

'Tokyo will be my second Olympics but my first one with Vicki in the K2; she is my best friend so I can't wait to be racing there,' Lehaci said.

'We didn't expect at all that we would get a quota before the qualifiers; it was a big relief. We were so relaxed. Now we are just trying to improve our K2 and we will see what comes out of Tokyo.'

It was double celebration for Schwarz, who also won the women's K1 200, despite not having contested the event internationally for three years. 'It was amazing to race here in Barnaul and to have this amazing crowd here was so nice,' Schwarz said.

'It was very cold; we had to use heating cream to warm ourselves up.'

Cuba sent out a warning to other nations that they would be a force to be reckoned with in canoeing events at the Tokyo Olympics with impressive wins in the women's C1 200 and the men's C1 1,000.

The 19 year old Yarisleidis Cirilo Duboys would be part of history when women's canoeing made its Olympic debut in Tokyo and showed she is a genuine medal prospect with a strong win in the C1 200.

The 2019 world junior silver medallist also took silver the previous week at the World Cup in Szeged, beaten only by current world champion American Nevin Harrison.

Jose Ramon Pelier Cordova won the junior world C1 1,000 title in 2019 and the 20 year old Cuban showed he is on track for a solid Olympic debut with a commanding win over the same distance on Saturday.

Just 24 hours after earning Lithuania an Olympic quota in the men's K1 200 Mindaugas Maldonis was finally able to celebrate a ticket to Tokyo after winning the World Cup on Saturday, in the process defeating teammate Arturas Seja.

It ended a tense wait for the 30 year old.

'It was very hard mentally because there was a lot of emotions, a lot of people congratulating me for winning the ticket for my country,' Maldonis said.

'There was so many of them I couldn't respond. I ignored all the social media because I needed to get my emotions straight. I couldn't be too happy. I couldn't be too sad. I needed to be in a steady place emotionally.'

Dong Zhang also confirmed his Olympic ticket in the men's K1 1,000 on Friday and then followed up with World Cup gold on Saturday.

Zhang began paddling as a 15 year old and said his win was the final piece of the Olympic jigsaw for the Chinese men's team.

'Now we have all the men's quota places that were available for China so this will be a very proud moment for our country,' Zhang said.

In the non Olympic events Russia's Zakhar Petrov and Kirill Romanov gave local fans reason to cheer in the cold weather with a win in the men's C2 500 while Czech Jakub Zavrel won the men's K1 500.

'It was hard for me because I was training for 200 metres last year and this was my first 500 metres for a very long time,' Zavrel said.

'I wasn't really sure how to do it but I think I did okay. The headwind made the race quite long and it hurt quite a lot.'

The 21 year old Norwegian Maria Virik followed up her K1 1,000 World Cup gold in Szeged the previous week with gold in Saturday's tough racing conditions, the biggest win of her career so far.

'1,000 metres is always very hard and you have to work with yourself over the last parts,' Virik said.

'I felt a bit tired today after the Olympic qualifications yesterday. I'm learning how to race the 1,000 metres every time because sometimes I do something wrong and I learn.'

Cuba's emergence as serious medal contenders in canoe events at this year's Olympic Games was further underlined with two more gold medals on the final day.

The Cubans also picked up a gold in the men's C1 5,000, giving the island country five gold medals for the weekend.

On Sunday they picked up gold in the Olympic events of the men's C2 1,000 and the women's C2 500. Tokyo bound competitors from Portugal, Croatia and Moldova won 500 metre events while there were also two wins for Germany and a victory for Sweden.

Teenagers Yarisleidis Cirilo Duboys and Katherin Nuevo Segura would make their Olympic debut in Tokyo and could not have been more impressive in winning C2 500 on Sunday.

'My friend and I have trained very hard this season so we are very happy to win here but the race is not finished because now we are thinking about Tokyo,' Duboys said.

'We are very proud to have been selected to compete for Tokyo at our young age but we are very happy to paddle together because we are also best friends.'

Tokyo will be the fourth Olympic Games for Serguey Torres and his second with Fernando Dayan Jorge in the men's C2 1,000. After a difficult year with very little competition 34 year old Torres said the win in Barnaul was a good sign ahead of Tokyo.

'We now have a very good feeling; we have been training a lot together for a very long time so to come here and still be at the top is amazing,' Torres said.

'Tokyo is very close. It's been hard for the past year but our boat is getting better every year. This time I think we will do good.'

Fernando Dayan Jorge also won the men's C1 5,000, surviving an epic finish against Mexico's Rigoberto Camilo.

Vasconcelos and Vanesa Tot both confirmed their Tokyo quotas on Friday and celebrated with World Cup wins in the K1 and C1 500 metre races respectively.

Having already made Croatian history by qualifying for the Olympics, Tot's win on Sunday was another first for her country after teammate Anamaria Govorcinovic earlier in the day took bronze in the K1 500.

'This is a big thing for Croatia because never in the history of Croatia has any woman in canoe or kayak taken a medal so the two of us have written history,' Tot said.

'I've been thinking about Tokyo a lot. I was excited after the race but I didn't know how to feel. Today I was thinking how big my results have been, how much work I have put into this.'

Serghei Tarnovschi was another who confirmed his place at the Olympics this week and celebrated with victory in the men's C1 500 on Sunday.

'I still don't feel relaxed because all the competitors came to this final trying to win a medal so it was not easy,' Tarnovschi said.

'Today was a nicer day but the wind made the race longer.'

Germany's Tamas Gecso and Felix Frank underlined their country's depth in men's paddling with a win in the K2 1,000. Teammates Max Hoff and Jakob Schopf would start favourites for gold in Tokyo but Gecso and Frank enjoyed their opportunity to paddle for World Cup gold.

'It's not easy racing the 1,000 metres in Germany. I think everyone in our team can show the world we are good and strong.'

'We can push ourselves to the limits all the time. We have such a good training group in Potsdam which pushes us to the limit every day.'

In the mixed races, Sweden's Melina Andersson and Petter Menning took gold in the K2 200 while Germany's Peter Kretschmer and Ophelia Preller won the C2 200.

## ICF

**200m: C1W:** 1 Y Cirilo Duboys, Cuba, 48.736. 2 M Maillard, Chile, 49.297.

3 I Andreeva, Rossija, 49.473.

**C1WQ:** 1 V Tot, Hrvatska, 50.006. 2 M Kerdikashvili, Georgia, 50.184.

3 V Conceicao do Nascimento, Brasil, 51.657. 4 K Reid, GB, 51.792.

**1km: K1M:** 1 D Zhang, Zhongguo, 3:42.057. 2 A Olijnik, Lietuva, 3:43.390.

3 D Kernen, Sverige, 3:45.085.

**K1MQ:** 1 D Zhang, Zhongguo, 3:45.215. 2 A Schera, Italia, 3:45.624.

3 A Olijnik, Lietuva, 3:45.919.