

Belcher takes women's title

World Championships

In case any confirmation was needed, South Africa's Hank McGregor can lay claim to the greatest canoe marathon paddler ever after a stunning seventh world championship win in front of adoring home fans. In a repeat of the 2016 result, McGregor and team mate Andrew Birkett gave the host nation a perfect one - two in the men's K1 events at Camps Drift. After close to 30km of racing, the wily McGregor worked himself into pole position at the front of a four man group for the final 500m dash to the finish line and then had the speed to keep his compatriot back on the wave as they battled it out on the final sprint. After two desperate attacks, and with less than 100m to go, Birkett realized he was not going over McGregor's bow wave and settled back to come home just over half a boat length back and just ahead of the fast finishing Hungarian Adrián Boros. Portugal's José Ramalho faded over the final 150m to just miss out on a medal. The four leaders broke away from a big group of ten paddlers on the final turn before the first portage and from there simply worked together to maintain a gap on the chasing bunch. The quartet stayed together with a few half hearted attempts at domination until the paddle up to the final turn which saw a series of big attacks but nobody could get a decisive break. McGregor was able to position himself to come off the final turn in the front and then hold that until Birkett launched his final sprint from far out but could not get his nose over the wave and had to settle for 2nd. This is McGregor's ninth world championship gold medal, his seventh in a K1 and his fifth K1 win in five years to cement his position as at least the top marathon canoeist of his generation and possibly of all time. After the finish, an unusually emotional McGregor paid homage to both the home crowd and his support at home. 'My dad once said to me I would realize what it is like to race in front of your son and today I got that feeling. My dad (Lee) is watching me; he is somewhere in the middle of the hurricane so thanks to dad for everything you have done for me and thanks to my family, my son and wife. So this one is for my boy (Thorsten). I am so glad he was watching me today. Big thanks to the crowd, especially the guys on the opposite side of the bank. You kept us going. It is such a privilege and an honour to race for my country and be able to win in front of my home crowd. This was something incredible.'

Andy Birkett was full of praise for the man he beat at the South African champs recently. 'Thank goodness we had four boats so we could get a little bit of rest sometimes but congratulations to Hank; he was superb today and he deserved to win. I gave it my all. Earlier, Lani Belcher unleashed a powerful final sprint 150m from the finish line to win, going away from Hungarian Vanda Kiszli. Ireland's Jennifer Egan was left trailing in 3rd after being dropped on the final portage one kilometre from the finish. There may be some dispute about the nationality of Belcher after she has won world marathon titles for both Australia and Great Britain but there was no doubt who was the top women's K1 paddler in Pietermaritzburg. Belcher, who was born in Victoria and raised in Queensland, Australia, unleashed a devastating final sprint to claim the title in an event where she looked dominant throughout. Belcher, Kiszli and Egan were all that was left of a lead group of seven that was only reduced to four on the sixth lap (out of seven plus a half lap) and then became three a lap later when the legendary 27 time medal winner Renáta Csay from Hungary could not hold the group and eventually faded back to 6th. With just the colour of medals to be decided, Belcher powered away from the final portage and looked to have made the decisive gold medal winning break. Kiszli, who last year won medals in both the women's and the U23 races, had other ideas and fought back, only to become a spectator over the final 150m as Belcher unleashed her potent sprint for the line. This is Belcher's third world marathon championship medal and completes her collection after she took silver for Australia in 2008 and bronze a year later for Britain. Liudmyla Babak from the Ukraine won when she paddled away from the rest of the opposition and cruised to an easy 4 minute win in the women's C1 race. Zsanett Lakatos from Hungary and Czech Jana Jezová claimed the silver and bronze medals. In the men's C1 event Márton Kövér collected Hungary's eighth gold and 15th medal overall when he cruised to an emphatic victory over the Spanish duo of Manuel Garrido and Manuel Antonio Campos. The three moved clear on the second lap and then first Campos and then Garrido could not hold the pace on laps four and five to leave Kövér to build his lead over the final two and a half laps.

ICF



Balint Vekassy photographs



Hank McGregor and Lani Belcher.

- K1WJ:** 1 Z Csikós, Magyarország, 1:35:42. 2 D Fekete, Magyarország, 1:35:43.
3 C Mackenzie, SA, 1:37:27. 13 F Duffield, GB, 1:44:05.
K1WU23: 1 S Mihalik, Magyarország, 1:49:40. 2 Z Voros, Magyarország, 1:50:09.
3 A Lane, GB, 1:52:13.
K1MJ: 1 A Varga, Magyarország, 1:41:34. 2 C Smith, GB, 1:44:15. 3 S Masina, SA, 1:44:18.
K1MU23: 1 F Balboa, Argentina, 1:52:53. 2 N Notten, SA, 1:53:03.
3 K Máthé, Magyarország, 1:53:29. 10 M Gregory, GB, 1:56:30.
K1W: 1 L Belcher, GB, 2:05:04. 2 V Kiszli, Magyarország, 2:05:10. 3 J Egan, Ireland, 2:05:39.
7 L Broughton, GB, 2:08:04.
K1M: 1 H McGregor, SA, 2:09:34. 2 A Birkett, SA, 2:09:35. 3 A Boros, Magyarország, 2:09:35.
3 Peters/Russell, GB, 1:31:19.
K2W: 1 Kiszli/Mihalik, Magyarország, 1:56:31. 2 Csay/Bara, Magyarország, 1:56:44.
3 Belcher/Mason, GB, 1:56:45. 13 Lane/Broughton, GB, 2:06:29.
K2MJ: 1 Vékassy/Adám, Magyarország, 1:35:43. 2 Evans/Mackenzie, SA, 1:35:52.
3 Gómez/Sánchez, España, 1:38:01. 4 Petersen/McKittrick, GB, 1:38:03.
K2M: 1 McGregor/Mocke, SA, 2:00:11. 2 Boros/Solti, Magyarország, 2:00:13.
3 Birkett/Van Der Westhuizen, SA, 2:00:15. 11 Gregory/Smith, GB, 2:05:05.

Levels of support

Steve Misson's chairing of the marathon AGM was an example of how to do it. Everyone got a say but nobody was allowed to ramble on. Thus, the meeting was efficient but covered everything. My one concern was over the elections. There were six nominations for six places. That should have avoided the need for a vote. However, he was concerned about the lack of democracy, all too cozy, and suggested that each nominee needed to obtain 50% support in a vote. Fortunately that happened. It could have proved awkward if anyone had failed to get the necessary support after being properly nominated and with nobody opposed, something which has no statutory precedent. Taking on board Steve's concerns, perhaps the answer would be to propose another name so that there was a proper election with seven candidates for six vacancies. The situation was no different in principle from having the chairman re-elected unopposed by the satisfied electorate.

The way you tell it

Two members of the Bay Area Sea Kayakers of San Francisco were competing in a marathon on the Yukon. Three quarters of the way through the race they had a mishap which resulted in one of them being taken to hospital by helicopter. In the absence of any other paddling witnesses, another of the group, Don't Follow Don, suggested he would have reported it as follows.

'Within 100 miles of the finish, the valiant duo go ashore for their first pee break. Squatting in the woods, the women don't hear the grizzly's approach until she's within yards of their toilet. Acting as one, the two women lead the bear on a wild chase through the tangled forest. Close to their boat, the exhausted bear stumbles over an exposed tree root, rolls down a cliff into a rocky ravine, breaks a leg. Concerned for the bear's well-being, grizzlies a threatened species, the women call for help, the bear is helicoptered to a major veterinary clinic, one of the women accompanying the bear to ensure proper care. The other woman paddles the remaining distance singlehanded, places a close second in a race she and her partner would've won if not for the grizzly.'