

# Britain top freestyle nation

## Word Championships

Great Britain's Claire O'Hara won her fifth world championship squirt title with a thrilling final run on the opening day of competition at San Juan in Argentina.

In the men's competition, 50 year old American Clay Wright won his third squirt world title, 20 years exactly after he won his first.

His performance included a high scoring mystery move which saw him disappear under the water for more than 20 seconds.

'I just really wanted to make squirt boating look cool,' Wright said.

'My highest scoring run was good. I'm psyched to win for sure but sticking that mystery move on the end, that was everything.

'I'd be happy just to get that in front of this crowd. I'm stoked.'

Japan's Hitomi Takaku moved into the lead in the women's competition with her final run, leaving O'Hara with the task of posting a score close to 1,000 with the last run of the competition to take the gold.

'I knew after Hitomi's last ride that it was going to be close and then she took the lead and I thought "Okay, game on!"' O'Hara said.

'And then I started and it was falling to pieces and I thought "Oh no, here we go."

'I just had to totally reset and I knew if I got three or four of my main tricks and my mystery it would be game on. I'm just so happy; all day I haven't been able to hit a 1,000 and then I did it.'

It was O'Hara's ninth overall world championship title and, she said, one of her most difficult.

'This one is probably one of the hardest,' she said.

'Normally about 2,000 points is what we're aiming for but this venue is so challenging, unbelievably hard.

'I wanted it and I'm so happy that I've got it.'

American Dane Jackson justified his red hot favouritism for the K1 event with a dominant display on the opening day of preliminaries.

23 year old Jackson was chasing his third senior world title and made it clear he means business with 3,306.67 points from his two runs on Wednesday.

'I'm fired up; prelims is always an exciting and nervous round to see what you can do under pressure so I'm fired up to have laid down two good rides,' Jackson said.

'I think definitely I'll have a little bit of a target on the back of my head but I'm just fired up that there is so many good people.

'So far I know some people have put down some rides I didn't know they could put down and a couple of the better people I know can get bigger scores. That's what's exciting about it.'

Great Britain's Gavin Barker was the only other athlete to crack 3,000 points, his 3,033.33 putting him almost 300 points behind Jackson.

'I felt pretty confident, actually. I felt like I was well prepared and that I could do that ride so it was good to do it,' Barker said.



'I think if I nail my big ride I'll definitely be in contention. There's a few more big scoring moves I can fit in there.'

Third qualifier was France's Sebastien Devred on 2,993.34 while Spain's Joaquim Fontane Maso qualified in fourth place.

The Spaniard said he was working within himself in the preliminary round.

'I was a little bit conservative because I know a mistake here is paying very high so I just wanted to make sure I made it through to the next cut,' Fontane Maso said.

'My objective for this worlds is to hit the 2,000 point mark for one of my rides so today I had a 1,500 so it is getting there.

'I think some people think people at the top don't feel the pressure but we definitely feel it in our tummy before the start.'

The crowd favourite this weekend will be local athlete Maximiliano Montoya, who led the competition early on Wednesday before eventually qualifying in ninth place.

'This is my area, this beautiful place, and it's amazing to have the world championships here,' Montoya said.

'Before I started the competition I felt very nervous.'

Dane Jackson was showing the form to win another golden double at the world championships after posting the highest score in the preliminary round of the C1 event on Thursday morning and Hitomi Takaku threw down the challenge to Jackson's sister, Emily, in the women's K1, finishing almost 300 points ahead of the defending world champion after the preliminary round.

Takaku, who won a World Cup event at the same San Juan venue last year, notched up 1,306.67 points compared with Jackson's 1,013.33.

'I'm really happy,' Takaku said.

'It was nice for me out there today. The competition is very exciting.'

'I had to change my plan just a little bit and I'll try for bigger loops in the final.'

France's Marlene Devillez posted the highest single run of the day, finishing third with a 1,010 total.

Dane Jackson followed up his chart topping performance in the K1 less than 24 hours earlier with 1,936.66 points in the C1, ahead of Sebastien Devred on 1,796.67 and Czech Lukas Cervinka on 1,721.67.

Jackson has dominated freestyle kayak in recent years and won the K1/C1 double at the 2015 world championships in Ottawa, Canada.

Cervinka was expected to be one of the main challengers for the C1 gold on Saturday after winning the past three European titles.

'Before each competition I feel really good. I don't feel stress any more,' Cervinka said.

'There's not much difference competing here than in the Europeans but it is better here. There are a lot of really good people here.'

Emily Jackson said she felt her runs went well.

'I feel pretty good; it's a day by day, cut by cut. You can't win until you're in the finals so the goal is just to get there,' Jackson said.

'I felt like I performed my tricks really well but the scores didn't really reflect that.'

Dane Jackson smashed two records in an awesome display of freestyle kayaking and canoeing and was less than 70 points from cracking the magical K1 2,000 mark.

Jackson broke his own record in the C1 for the second time this week and then posted an incredible 1,936.67 in his K1 semi final.

'The most important thing was to make it to the finals but luckily it worked out that I made it to the finals, had one of the highest ICF rides and made it through in first position,' Jackson said.

'So I achieved all three on one ride so I'm pretty stoked and looking forward to tomorrow.'

Jackson said he could improve further on his high scoring ride, which could see him become the first athlete to crack 2,000 in a world championship.



Claire O'Hara.



Charlie Blackpool.



Dane Jackson.