

Heath pipped in photofinish

Beograd Regatta

Germany's Franziska Weber and Tina Dietze moved quickly to put their disappointing result in Szeged behind them by blasting their way into the women's K2 500 final at the third World Cup in Belgrade.

Weber and Dietze, gold medallists at the London Olympics and silver medallists in Rio last year, had a rare event the previous weekend where they finished off the podium, 4th behind New Zealand's Lisa Carrington and Caitlin Ryan.

The result stung the Germans into action, on Friday blitzing a strong field to take the one direct spot into Sunday's final and, while they know everyone always expects them to win, they try to ignore the pressures.

'It was good after a not so good race in Szeged last weekend; we wanted to show we could do it better,' Weber said.

'I think this is something we don't want to know. We don't look what others say to us; we only have the things we have in our mind.

'We know we have trained after a long break after Rio, so the pressure for us is not so big; it doesn't matter for us what others think.'

The men's K1 1,000 was set to be another hard fought final with the top three placegetters from Rio taking the field.

Of the trio it was gold medallist Marcus Walz who was the outsider after the Spaniard only just made the final for the second week in a row.

'Everyone's expecting me to win and if I come second then they think that is very bad,' Walz said.

'But I don't want to think about that. I just want to have fun and enjoy and gain a bit more experience on the water.

'Even before last year's Olympics I had decided that this year I will take it a bit easier because last year was such a strong year. I just needed a mental rest this year.'

Silver medallist Josef Dostál vowed to bounce back after the Czech had a disappointing final in Szeged while Russia's Rio bronze medallist, Roman Anoshkin, looked strong in his preliminary races.

The C1 final would provide the latest chapter in the ongoing rivalry between Germany's multiple Olympic champion, Sebastian Brendel, and Rio finalist, Martin Fuksa of the Czech Republic.

Brendel was yet to stand atop the podium after two World Cups this year while Fuksa had enjoyed success at both.

Belarus made an impact on its return to top level racing and had athletes in six finals on Saturday. Volha Khudzenka would be hard to beat in the women's K1 500, while Aleh Yurenia was the athlete the rest of the field would be watching in the men's K1 1,000.

Hungary's Virag Balla would be out to continue her dominance of the women's canoe events, while Spain's Francisco Cubelos and Ingo Pena got the chance to defend the K2 500 title they won in Szeged the previous weekend.

Poland's Vincent Slominski and Mateusz Kaminski were another combination looking to make it two wins in a row after qualifying for the final of the C2 1,000.

Austria's Markus Swoboda won on Friday in the men's KL2 paracanoe final while Serbia's Arsen Arsenovic provided excitement for his home crowd when he won the KL3 200.

Belarus celebrated its return to international sprint canoe racing with three gold medals while Spain and Germany picked up two golds each on day two.



Aleh Yurenia could not have been more impressive in beating a crack field for the men's K1 1,000, finishing in 3:24.772 with Denmark's multiple world champion, Rene Poulsen, 2nd in 3:26.328.

The three medallists from Rio were all in the field but none could match the consistent speed of the 2010 world championship bronze medallist.

Yurenia was not able to compete in Rio but said he is already focussed for Tokyo in 2020.

'My start and my finish were no good but the middle of my race was good,' Yurenia said.

'I was so angry and had a broken heart not to compete in Rio but now I have an eight month baby girl, my life is good and I am going to do my best to fulfil my Olympic dream in Tokyo for my little girl.'

Volha Khudzenka took gold for Belarus in the K1 500, her first individual gold medal, and in the very next race teammate Alena Nazdrova outlasted Hungary's Virag Balla in the C1 500, the first time the Hungarian has been beaten this year.

Martin Fuksa picked up his fourth gold medal of the World Cup season, once again finishing ahead of triple Olympic gold medallist Sebastian Brendel in the C1 1,000.

'It's absolutely amazing for me because I have never won four gold medals in a season,' Fuksa said.

'I started training in January so maybe the long rest after the Olympics was good for me.

'When I finished all three races ahead of Brendel or (Brazil silver medallist) Isaquias it is great for my confidence.'

Francisco Cubelos and Inigo Pena backed up their surprise K2 1,000 gold medal from Szeged with a win in Belgrade, finishing just ahead of German veterans Max Hoff and Marcus Gross.

'We are surprised still because this is still only our third race together,' Cubelos said.

'I think in the Europeans and the worlds the other crews will be stronger so we have to work a lot and continue to improve so we can be in better shape. Right now we are very happy and we are going to celebrate it but on Monday in Spain work will continue.'

Spanish teammates Oscar Carrera and Rodrigo Germade won a thrilling K2 500 final, just edging out the French crew of Sebastian Jouve and Guillaume Decorchement.

The Spaniards, who were part of their country's K4 1,000 boat in Rio, had been paddling K2 for two months and competition for places on the national team was heating up.

'The people who did not go to the Olympic Games started training at the start of the year and the people who did go only started more recently,' Carrera said.

'But we are all aiming for this year's world championships.'



Weber/Dietze took the 200m.



Josef Dostál won the 500m.



The 1km race went to Aleh Yurenia.

Balint Vekassy photographs