

# Russell placed over 500m

## U23/J World Championships

The biggest names competing at the U23 and junior world championships in Bulgaria all impressed on the opening day of competition. Italy's Carlo Tacchini relished racing without two of the biggest names in the sport, New Zealand's Aimee Fisher showed her passion for racing has returned and Canada's Katie Vincent won the early round of her eagerly anticipated C1 battle with Belarus's Alena Nazdrova. Tacchini has established himself as one of the leading C1 paddlers in the world, alongside Olympic gold medallist Sebastian Brendel and World Cup winner Martin Fuksa. He made the most of his opportunity to race without the German and the Czech alongside him and posted a comfortable heat win. 'Of course, it is a bit different but if you want to compete against Martin and Sebastian you have to be ready in these kinds of races,' Tacchini said. 'I'm ready; this is a step for the world championships so I'm quite focussed on the result. I'm kind of happy about my season and I'm also improving so that's pretty good.'

Fisher began her defence of her U23 K1 200 with a solid heat win. The New Zealander, who has also made her name as a member of the senior team, said she had fallen out of love with paddling but the excitement had recently returned. 'It's definitely weird being the reigning world champ. I'm usually the underdog going into these things,' she said. 'I'm just happy to be back and happy to be enjoying the sport again. The last year has been a bit rough. I lost the passion there for a bit. There were a whole lot of changes and I guess I just struggled to adapt to them for a while but it's really come together over the past month. I'm just so excited to be able to come out here and express some of those really good things that are going on.'

Vincent, the reigning C1 200 U23 gold medallist, fired the first shot in her battle against Belarus' Alena Nazdrova by winning her C1 200 and 500 heats, beating Nazdrova in the 500 metres. 'I definitely feel a bit of pressure,' Vincent said. 'But I'm okay with it. I'm feeling really excited to have that kind of pressure because it means you are one of the best so, hopefully, I can keep going at it and we'll see what happens. It's definitely a high calibre race. There's no risks to take; it's going to be hard racing for everyone.'

Germany and Hungary led the way on the first day of medals; 14 gold medals were awarded on a busy day with Germany and Hungary taking three each, Canada and Belarus two apiece and single gold medals to Australia, Portugal, Russia and Sweden. The Hungarians



dominated the women's team boats, taking gold in both the U23 and junior K4 500 races. Agnes Szabo, a member of the U23 K4 team, said the depth in women's kayak in her country was staggering. 'We have to train a lot because there are so many good girls that didn't get here,' she said. 'We are lucky because we train together a lot, even though we race against each other in different K4s, but it works. We were so nervous before today that we were talking a lot but it was funny and we enjoyed it, the anxiety.' Germany won medals in the men's U23 C1 and C2 1,000, as well as women's U23 K1 1,000.

Conrad-Robin Scheibner finished ahead of the highly regarded Carlo Tacchini in the C1 1,000 and issued a warning to his twice Olympic gold medallist countryman Sebastian Brendel. 'This was my first chance to do it in C1 and I had some problems to adapt to being lonely in the boat in the heat,' he said. 'But I told myself now is the time to shine and so I want Sebastian to know that he should be scared now!'

Katie Vincent broke through for her first C1 500 U23 world title, in the process seeing off rival Alena Nazdrova in a tight finish. 'I've come 2nd and 4th before so, to finally be in the middle of the podium, I'm really happy with that,' she said. 'I felt really good. It's nice to be with the juniors and the U23; we've got a really good mix. I've still got another 200 metre race tomorrow so I have to focus on that.'

Australia's Joel McKitterick and Thomas Green were among the more convincing winners on Friday, blitzing their U23 K2 1,000 opposition. 'If you had asked me yesterday I would have said I'm not sure, maybe top three,' McKitterick said. 'Being on top now is just awesome. It's like a long dream that everyone wants to achieve but only a few people actually do.'

Canada's Katie Vincent and Sophia Jensen both picked up second individual gold medals while Hungary and Lithuania also enjoyed winning doubles on day three. Jensen and Vincent followed up their C1 500 metre gold medals 24 hours earlier by winning the C1 200 metre junior and U23 titles respectively. Vincent and Laurence Vincent-Lapointe have been unbeatable in C2 at a senior level this year but Vincent said she enjoyed the opportunity to remind people what she can do individually. 'It's always a new game every weekend so, to come out and execute the plan the way I wanted to and go home with two gold medals, I'm ecstatic now,' Vincent said. 'It's good for my development to take a little bit of a break and focus on myself for two weeks and then it makes me more excited to get back in the boat with Laurence to train for Portugal.'

The 16 year old Jensen showed in Plovdiv that the future for women's canoe in Canada is strong. 'Yesterday, considering it was the first A final, I was pretty stressed,' she said. 'Today it was more of just go and do the same thing, just rip and have fun.'

The golden double for Lithuania came through Arturas Seja in the U23 K1 200 and Vadim Korobov in the U23 C1 men. The gold came as a shock for Korobov, who had been focusing more on the longer races. 'I'm really surprised because all of my training was much more towards the 1,000,' Korobov said. 'So it was a bit unexpected but I'm still not bad at 200. I missed the start and after yesterday's 1,000 I'm really tired and feeling a bit slow so my second 100 metres was better than my first one.'

One of the biggest upsets on Saturday came in the women's U23 K1 200 with Hungary's Anna Lucz taking gold and the defending champion, Aimee Fisher, finishing 7th. 'It was an amazing race. I did what I could and I'm really happy now,' Lucz said. 'I was nervous. I'm always nervous before a race but I think it is good for me. This means a lot for me because I've been trying with the 200 metres for a long time.' Hungary's second gold medal went to Alida Dora Gazbo, who followed up her K4 500 gold from Friday with a junior K1 200 victory.

Bartosz Grabowski won Poland's first gold medal of the world championships, taking the junior K1 200 metre title. 'This is my first medal at a world championships so I'm really happy,' he said. 'I started very slow but the rest of the race was okay. Russia's Nikita Nekrasov won the junior C1 men's 200 while France's Laura Ruiz and Flore Caupain took the honours in the women's junior C2 200. Belarus won the final gold medal on offer on Saturday with Volha Klimava and Nadzeya Makarchanka winning the women's U23 C2 200.

Teenager Sophia Jensen won her third gold medal and Hungary picked up five titles on the final day of competition. Jensen teamed up with Julia Lilley Osende to win the C2 women's junior 500, adding to the C1 500 and 200 medals she won earlier and making her the most



On course at Plovdiv.



Carlo Tacchini had less competition than expected.