



Quartet of women showcase paddling on two world stages: freestyle and slalom

La Seu d'Urgell, Spain – Four female freestyle kayakers are proving this month that freestyle kayaking and whitewater slalom need not be mutually exclusive paddlesports disciplines.

Prossy Derra of Uganda, Susmita Suniwar of Nepal and Norwegians Valerie Bertrand and Mariann Saether all competed in last week's International Canoe Federation Freestyle World Championships in Thun, Switzerland, then made their way here to Spain to compete in the ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships.

Of the four women, the Norwegians enjoyed the greatest success at Freestyle Worlds. Saether finished just off the podium in fourth place in the women's K1 competition and while Bertrand failed to advance past K1 prelims she did win a bronze medal in Squirt. Valentin Giollemund (FRA) is coaching the Norwegians. As a junior, Giollemund was a top-ranked slalom paddler on the French national team. He also competed in last week's Freestyle Worlds.

While Nepal's Suniwar did not advance beyond prelims in freestyle, she nevertheless said she enjoyed the support and encouragement she received first from freestyle boaters and now from the slalom community. Both Suniwar and Ugandan Prossy Derra were supported by the ICF's development program which helped pay coaching expenses for the two young women.

"We're thrilled to welcome these freestyle paddlers and wish them the best of success here in slalom, there is no doubt that the crossover is an advantage to the sport overall and there is a two way flow to the benefit of both disciplines," said ICF Second Vice President Richard Fox. Fox, who oversees whitewater disciplines for the ICF, said he really enjoyed the youthful energy of last week's Freestyle Worlds and was impressed by the huge crowd and spectator enthusiasm. The event also attracted the curiosity and attendance of international sports dignitaries including the top man himself, International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge.

According to ICF Freestyle Committee Chair Lluís Rabenedá, freestyle and slalom kayaking complement each other since both sports require a good eye and feel for the water and utilize the same core paddling strokes and concepts. Rabenedá noted the first kayaker to prove the potential crossover of both sports is 1992 Olympian and four-time World Freestyle Champion Eric Jackson (USA). Last year, Jackson and his daughter, Emily, both qualified for team trials for the US Olympic Slalom team though they did not



La Seu d'Urgell • Spain
9 - 13 SEPTEMBER



advance. At last week's Freestyle Worlds, Emily, 19, won gold and defending champ Eric, 45, took home silver in the senior divisions.

To follow the results of the four freestylers and get up-to-the-minute updates from this week's Canoe Slalom Worlds, visit <http://worldseu09.paralimpic.com>. For more information about freestyle and slalom kayaking, visit <http://www.canoeicf.com>.