



New slate of first-time Canoe Slalom World champs join Estanguet, Hochschorners

La Seu D'Urgell, Spain – The 2009 running of the International Canoe Federation Canoe Slalom World Championships resulted in a slate of new faces emerging amid some familiar champions.

Among the familiar old guard, the newest chapter of the ongoing drama between C1 slalom stars Tony Estanguet (FRA) and Slovakian Michal Martikan (SLV) closed with a happy ending for Tony Estanguet. The Frenchman bested longtime rival and most decorated man in the history of the sport, Michal Martikan, by nearly three seconds, 2.55 to be exact, to take home the gold today.

Estanguet said he wasn't sure he could top his first place semi-final run time of 99.59 but he in fact smoked it by three seconds, crossing the finish line in 96.21. Martikan who found himself in the unusual position of eighth after semis, had to wait all the way until Estanguet's final run to see his leaderboard-topping 98.76 take silver.

"Today, Tony was unbeatable," Martikan conceded, adding the silver would have sat better with him if he felt like he'd paddled his best which was not the case in the semifinal where he uncharacteristically touched the last two gates and the final where he felt he didn't get into the groove until the end of the run.

The future may be quite different for both champions. Estanguet, said he'll take some time off now to decide whether or not he will set his sights on London in 2012, when he'll be 34 years old. For his part, 30-year-old Martikan said he still has visions of more gold medals. "I love performing at this level," Martikan said.

Nowhere were there more fresh faces on the podium than in Women's K1 where veteran Slovaks and Czechs had their stranglehold on the podium broken by a German, a Spaniard and a Brit. Though she led at the end of qualifications and semis, one 2-point gate touch in the final heat cost Maialen Chourraut (ESP) the gold medal.

Though Chourraut's time on the water was .79 faster than Jasmin Schornberg, Schornberg's penalty-free run earned the 23-year-old German her first gold medal since being crowned Junior World Champion in 2004. Nevertheless, Chourrat's silver delivered her country its highest podium finish of this championship. Spanish men also tallied three bronze medals - C1 and K1 Team and K1 individual – Spain's first collection of World Championship medals.



Among other familiar faces atop the podium today, Slovakia's Hochschorner brothers added a third World title to complement their three Olympic golds, but not without a bit of drama. The legendary brothers, Peter and Pavol, barely squeaked into the final round with a startling ninth place finish in semis, which Peter said he thought was the result of a judging error.

On the run that counted most, the Hochschorners showed true championship form crossing the finish line in 105.70. Their winning time, marred slightly by a 2-point penalty, was still more than two seconds ahead of the semifinal winning time of 107.97 posted by countrymen cousins Ladislav and Peter Skantar. The Skantars took silver by the slimmest, 0.14 seconds, of margins. The young, ecstatic team of Luka Bozic and Saso Taljat (SLO), who came to these championships ranked 28th, won bronze.

In Men's K1 class, each of the top three finalists were newcomers to the World Championship podium. For top-seeded Peter Kauzer (SLO), the gold was almost a relief. Heavily favored to win Olympic gold last year, Kauzer said his failure to advance to finals in Beijing gave him something to think about and a new sense of determination. Kauzer's flawless, blazing final run of 92.84 was 2.05 ahead of silver medalist Boris Neveu (FRA) and 3.05 in front of bronze medalist Juanmarti, both of whom also enjoyed clean runs. Possibly the happiest of bronze medalists at this event was 30-year-old canoe slalom journeyman Carles Juanmarti. Juanmarti said his bronze medal is proof that if you train hard enough on technique and strength anyone can "explode your possibilities."

This year, some 22 women explored their own possibilities in the demonstration event of C1. After the last ten women crossed the finish line, the scoreboard showed a sweep for Australia: Leanne Guinea, 137.80, gold; Rosalyn Lawrence, 143.10, silver and 15-year-old Jessica Fox, 145.41, bronze. "I'd like to repeat this gold when the ICF grants C1 women full medal status, hopefully next year."

ICF Second Vice President Richard Fox was clearly pleased with this year's championship. "I think we saw a high standard of performance on the water and the fans created an absolutely electric atmosphere during the finals," Fox said. "Even more so, there were some really great stories from this event that will lay the foundation for the longterm health and future of the sport as well as create a lot of anticipation for the Worlds in Slovenia next year."

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