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## **2003 Sprint Canoe/Kayak World Championships Bring Olympic Dreams and Competitive Drama to United States**

*588 Athletes from 73 Nations to Compete Sept. 11-14 to  
Qualify for 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece*

GAINESVILLE, Ga., Sept. 4, 2003 – When the World Championships of sprint canoe and kayak racing come to the United States for the first time next week, the dream of competing in the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Athens will come true or come to a heartbreaking end for hundreds of athletes from the United States and around the world. Some will look to break records while others rekindle old rivalries, but athletes competing in Gainesville will focus on two things above all: winning a World Championships and securing a spot for their country in next summer's Olympic Games.

Presented by The Jim Walters Management Company and Cellular World, the 33<sup>rd</sup> International Canoe Federation Flatwater Racing World Championships – as it is officially known – is the most important qualifying sprint canoe/kayak event for the 2004 Summer Olympic Games. Of the 276 paddlers who will compete in Greece, more than half can qualify in Gainesville. None of the four remaining competitions between now and next summer will qualify as many boats.

To make the grade for an appearance in Athens, a country's entry has to finish in the top eight in the K-1 500m and 1,000m events and the top six in every other Olympic event. Keep in mind that countries qualify only boats, not athletes. The individual athletes still will have to compete at each country's Olympic trials to secure their personal slots. This is how the races break out.

### **Competition Basics**

The World Championships, like the Athens Olympics, will include nine paddling events for men and three for women:

(K = kayak, C = canoe; 1 = single paddler, 2 = two paddlers and 4 = four paddlers; W = women's)

- K-1 – 500m, 1,000m
- K-2 – 500m, 1,000m
- K-4 – 1,000m
- C-1 – 500m, 1,000m
- C-2 – 500m, 1,000m
- K-1W – 500m
- K-2W – 500m
- K-4W – 500m

In addition to these Olympic events, the World Championships will feature:

- K-1 – 200m
- K-2 – 200m
- K-4 – 200m

- C-4 – 200m, 500m, 1,000m
- K-1W – 200m, 1,000m
- K-2W – 200m, 1,000m
- K-4W – 200m, 1,000m

### **Participating Countries**

Approximately 73 countries from around the world will compete in the 2003 World Championships, making the event the largest canoe/kayak world championships ever in terms of the number of participating countries. Hungary is sending the largest contingent, with 33 athletes, followed by Poland with 28, Russia Federation with 27, Canada with 24 and 21 each from Germany and the United States of America. Numerous countries are sending only one athlete including Albania, India, Iran, Seychelles, Tajikistan and Tunisia.

### **Competition Preview**

Along with the 2000 Sydney Olympics, several other international competitions over the past year have set the stage for the competition in Gainesville. They include the 2002 World Championships in Seville, Spain, last September; the World Cup in Szeged, Hungary in May; and the International Kanu Regatta in Duisburg, Germany in June. Based on results from these competitions, the following are a few of the teams and athletes to watch in Gainesville.

### **Local U.S. Athletes**

**Sonrisa Reed** and **Ty Hagler** both live and train in Gainesville, Georgia and will be competing for the **United States** in the World Championships. Sonrisa, 21, will be racing in the K-4 500 meter event. Sonrisa was introduced to sprint kayaking through the 1996 Olympic Games as volunteer boat holder during the Olympic Canoe and Kayak events held here on Lake Lanier. Ty, 23, is a recent Georgia Institute of Technology graduate and 1998 alumnus of Gainesville High School. He is racing for the United States in the K-4 500 meter event. Ty began kayaking in 1995 with the beginning of the Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club. The 1996 Olympic Games first inspired him to start seriously training for competitions.

### **Men's Kayak Singles**

In the 200m, the competitors to beat will be **Lithuania's Alvydas Duonela**, **Germany's Ronald Rauhe**, **Uzbekistan's Anton Ryahov** and **Poland's Tomasz Mendelski**. Don't count out **Bartosz Wolski** for the **United States**. He placed 6<sup>th</sup> recently in the 200m in Szeged and the 200m is short enough to be anybody's race.

### **Nathan Baggaley, Australia**

Baggaley is the reigning K-1 500m world champ, a title that was long in the making. At the Sydney Olympics, Baggaley failed to make it out of the semis. Then in 2001, at the world championships in Poznan, Poland, he finished only 7th in the 500m. He secured his 500m title last year in Seville, but in case there were any who would call it a fluke, he disproved that notion by winning gold again in the 500m at the recent World Cup in Duisburg. Look for Baggaley to come out strong so he can keep his title and secure an Olympic spot for Australia in the 500m.

### **Rami Zur, United States of America**

Rami Zur is the United States' best hope for an Olympic kayak medal in 2004. Zur grew up in Israel and competed for his native country in the Sydney Olympics. With teammate Roei Yellin, he reached the semifinals in both the 500m and 1000m K-2 events.

Unfortunately for Zur, fellow Israeli Olympian Michael Kolganov outperformed him in his strongest events. Because the structure of world kayaking allows each country to send only one participant per event, the Israel Olympic Committee could not justify giving Zur the grant money he needed to continue to compete while starting his college education.

With debts piling up and the road to the Olympics blocked by Kolganov, Zur, who also had an American passport, moved to the United States where he could have another shot at the Olympics. Now residing in the California, Zur has helped the United States establish a much stronger presence in international competition.

Zur won gold in the K-1 500m in the 2002 Duisburg World Cup, beating former teammate Kolganov by 1.14 seconds. Most recently, he finished third in Szeged. If the United States is going to medal in singles kayak in Gainesville, it will likely hinge on Zur's performance in the 500m.

### **New Zealand – Ben Fouhy**

Fouhy, New Zealand's Marathon Kayak National Champion, only recently turned his focus to sprint racing at the urging of national coach Ian Ferguson. Since then he has been a sensation, finishing strong in his first two international regattas and emerging victorious at the World Cup earlier this year in Poland.

Fouhy's winning time of 3:27.375 in the K-1 1,000m at the Poland World Cup puts him second on the all-time fastest list published by the International Canoe Federation. The only time anyone has paddled the 1,000m faster was when Norway's Knut Holman finished in 3:25:785 on the Lake Lanier racecourse during the 1996 Olympics.

Under the expert tutelage of gold medal coach Ferguson, expect Fouhy to be a factor in the 1,000m. The burning question: can he beat Holman's record 1,000m time on the same racecourse where it was set?

### **Men's Kayak Doubles**

#### **Germany – Ronald Rauhe/Time Wieskoetter**

Rauhe and Wieskoetter have been a powerful pair for Germany over the past year. The two won gold in last year's World Championships and won bronze and silver in Szeged and Duisburg, respectively. Their success will depend not only on their own performance, but also on the performances of **Hungary, Poland, Lithuania and Belarus**, all of whom have beaten the Germans and/or finished in the top three in international competition over the past year.

### **Hungary – Zoltán Kammerer/Kristian Vereb**

Hungary's Kammerer and Vereb are strong contenders in both the 500m and 1,000m doubles events. The duo won bronze in the 500m at last year's World Championships, placed fourth in Szeged earlier this year and won bronze again in Duisburg soon after. In the 1,000m, they won bronze at last year's Worlds and gold at Szeged. In Gainesville, they will be strong in all doubles events as they look to best the competitive German, Lithuanian and Belarusian teams.

### **Men's Canoe Singles**

#### **Russian Federation – Maxim Opalev**

Since his C-1 500m silver medal win at the Sydney Olympics, Maxim Opalev has continued to be a force in singles canoe events. He is ferocious over any distance, but has been most successful over short distances – he won gold medals in both the C-1 200m and 500m races at last year's World Championships in Seville, gold medals in the 200m at two World Cup events earlier this year and a silver medal in the 500m at the World Cup in Duisburg, Germany. In Gainesville, look for 500m showdowns between Opalev and **Hungary's György Kolonics**, another powerful sprinter, and 1,000m bouts with Germany's Andreas Dittmer.

#### **Germany – Andreas Dittmer**

In the C-1 1,000m event, there is no one stronger than Andreas Dittmer right now. He won gold in the Sydney Olympics, gold in the past three World Championships, and gold in two World Cup events this year. But that doesn't mean the 1,000m is locked up. **Stephen Giles of Canada** and Maxim Opalev of Russia have been trading the number two and three spots behind Dittmer over the past year and are capable of upsetting the Germans.

### **Men's Canoe Doubles**

#### **Cuba – Ibrahim Rojas/Ledi Balceiro**

Rojas and Balceiro were the doubles canoe team to watch at last year's World Championships, and based on their record since then, they will be the team to watch again at this year's Worlds. From Seville, Szeged and Duisburg collectively, they have taken home two golds and a silver in the 200m, a gold and a bronze in the 500m, and a silver and a gold in the 1,000m. No other team has a record that compares, but look for potential upsets by **Hungary** or **Poland** in the 500m and 1,000m races.

#### **Hungary – György Kolonics/György Kozmann**

György Kolonics is eager to return to Olympic competition in 2004, and why not? On his last two trips to the Olympics in 1996 and 2000, he came home with gold medals. Lake Lanier has been especially kind. In 1996, he won both gold and silver on this racecourse – gold in the C-2 500m and silver in the C-2 1,000m. In Sydney in 2000, he took home another gold medal, this time in the singles 500m race. More recently, Kolonics won silver in the singles 500m in Seville and silver in the doubles 1,000m with teammate György Kozmann in Szeged. They could give Cuba a run for their money.

### **Women's Kayak Singles**

#### **Hungary – Katalin Kovacs**

Kovacs is the athlete to watch in singles kayak women's events. She has cleaned up in both the 500m and 1,000m races in the past year, winning gold in both events at all three major international competitions – Seville, Szeged and Duisburg. In the 500m, look for a tight race between Kovacs and **Aneta Pastuszka of Poland**, who finished second behind Kovacs in both Szeged and Duisburg. In the 1,000m, Kovacs' main competitor will likely be **Katrin Wagner of Germany**, who finished second behind Kovacs in Seville and Szeged.

#### **Canada – Caroline Brunet**

A formidable singles competitor, Brunet is a 14-year veteran of the Canadian national team and a two-time Olympic silver medalist in K-1W 500m. She earned her second silver in Sydney in 2000, but her first silver was won on Lake Lanier in 1996. She is in fine form, having finished second in both the 200m and 500m in the Duisburg World Cup in June. She will be looking to deliver another powerful performance on a course that has been good to her in the past.

#### **Germany – Katrin Wagner**

Wagner established herself early in international competition by becoming Junior World Champion in the K-4W in 1993 at the tender age of 15. At 19, she won two more World Championships medals. At her first Olympics in 2000, she won not one but two gold medals as part of the winning doubles and quad 500m teams. In the past year, she has been a standout in singles and doubles competition, picking up three singles silver medals– two in the 500m and one in the 1,000m – and a bronze in doubles 500m at Duisburg with partner **Manuela Mucke**.

### **Women's Kayak Doubles**

#### **Hungary – Szilvia Szabo/Kinga Bota**

Szabo and Bota are the powerhouse team to watch in women's doubles. They have been unstoppable in the past year, winning gold in both 500m and 1,000m at Seville, Szeged and Duisburg. In Gainesville, they will be the team to beat, with **Germany** and **Poland** not far behind.

#### **United States of America – Ruth Nortje/Kathy Colin**

In women's events, the United States will rely on Nortje and Colin to help secure an Olympic spot. The duo finished sixth in the 1,000m at last year's World Championships, fourth in the 200m at Szeged, and most recently, Nortje won gold in the singles 500m at the Pan American Games, then teamed up with Colin to win another gold in the doubles 500m. Look for strong performances from these fan favorites on their home racecourse in Gainesville.

### **Additional Information**

More information about the 33rd International Canoe Federation Flatwater Racing World Championships, including schedule of events, ticket prices, participating nations/athletes, media accreditation and local tourist information is available online at [www.LanierCanoe2003.org](http://www.LanierCanoe2003.org).

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