

a CENTURY
of PADDLING

100 YEARS OF ICF

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100 YEARS IN 100 STORIES

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for their contribution.





PREFACE

On behalf of the International Canoe Federation, it is my honour and privilege to present this commemorative book celebrating the 100th anniversary of the ICF. Since our formation in 1924, the ICF has grown from humble beginnings to become a cornerstone of the global sporting community. This book, with the invaluable support of our National Federations, collects cherished photographs and stories that chronicle the rich history and development of paddle sports over the past century.

From our debut as a demonstration sport at the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924 to our current status as a central part of the Olympic Movement and, with 10 exciting disciplines, canoeing has blossomed into a sport beloved by millions around the world. Today, the ICF community flourishes with 171 National Federations, supporting millions of recreational paddlers and nurturing thousands of athletes who compete in approximately 32 major ICF events each year.

This book is more than a reflection of our storied past, it is a testament to the passion, commitment and unwavering support of our dedicated stakeholders. To each member of the ICF community, I extend my heartfelt congratulations and deepest gratitude for your invaluable contributions to making paddle sports what they are today.

As we celebrate our centenary, we also look to the future with ambition and optimism. The ICF is committed to achieving even greater heights, making our sport more enjoyable and accessible to everyone and continuing to support paddlers across the globe. Together, we will elevate the world of paddle sports to new levels of excellence.

Thank you for joining us on this remarkable journey. Here's to the next 100 years of paddling success!

With deepest gratitude

Thomas Konietzko
ICF President





HISTORY

Canoes, kayaks and similar boats have been used by mankind for thousands of years, largely for transport and fishing purposes. In the second half of the 19th century, people in western Europe and northern America started to use them for touring, mainly down the rivers. Probably the biggest influence in propagating canoeing at this time was Scottish lawyer John MacGregor. In 1865, he built a boat named “Rob Roy” and went on to make many tours in Europe and even on the Red Sea, the River Jordan and the Suez Canal. What is perhaps more important is that he wrote several books about his trips, thus promoting canoeing in Europe. Canoeing became increasingly popular in Europe and North America. Canoeists started to organise themselves into clubs and later into National Federations. The first was the American Canoe Association in 1880, followed by Great Britain in 1887, Canada in 1890 and both France and Sweden in 1904.

During those times, the first canoe disciplines were canoe flatwater for touring and competitions and canoe sailing, which was mainly popular in Scandinavia, Germany and North America.

FORMATION AND OLYMPIC DEBUT

On January 19, 1924, the representatives of four National Federations - Austria, Denmark, Germany and Sweden - met in Copenhagen, Denmark and created the “Internationale Representantschaft für Kanusport” (IRK) with the intention of becoming the international governing body of canoeing. They chose Franz Reinicke from Germany as the first IRK President.

At the Olympics in Paris that year there was a 2,000m canoe demonstration race featuring sportsmen from the United States and Canada. Not long after that Paul Wulff from Denmark became the IRK President before Mr Reinicke returned to the helm three years later. In the form-

ative years, the IRK had a problem with the unification of the boats. Different boats were used in Europe and North America. At the 1932 Congress in Vienna, Austria, the first IRK Board was established. It consisted of the President, Vice President and International Secretary. The new IRK President was also from Germany as Max W. Eckert took office. The IRK started to organise competitions with the Board making a great effort to include canoeing on the programme of the Olympic Games. Because of the different types of sprint boats, the first international event organised by the IRK was the European Championships, which took place in 1933 in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

After overcoming the challenges of several refusals from the International Olympic Committee, the IRK finally succeeded in securing canoe sprint’s place on the programme of the Games in 1936 in Berlin, Germany. This was the only Olympic Games where folding kayak events were organised. That same year saw the IRK Congress decide “to let slalom quietly develop but not to recognise it as a championship discipline”, despite the fact that during the 1930s slalom and wildwater competitions were slowly spreading from Switzerland, Austria and Germany to other European countries.

The inaugural World Championships in canoe sprint was held in Vaxholm, Sweden in 1938 with 12 medal events in men’s canoe, men’s kayak and women’s kayak. Besides 1,000 and 10,000-metre distances the ladies competed over 600 metres.

NEW NAME AND FRESH IMPETUS AFTER WAR

World War II greatly affected sporting activities and canoeing suffered. The first IRK Congress after the war was held in Stockholm in 1946 when a new President was elected in Jonas Asschier from Sweden. The Congress changed the official language from German to English and accepted that the new name of the organisation would be the International Canoe Federation. Due to Germany’s role in WWII, the country was expelled from the federation until it was recognised again in 1952. After the devastation of war, the Olympic Games London 1948 were

a huge boost to sport in general. The ICF was partially successful in lobbying for women’s events to be added to the programme with the exchange of men’s K1 relay to women’s K1 500m accepted by the IOC. Following the Olympic competition, the ICF staged a Canoe Sprint World Championships for non-Olympic classes at the same venue.

By 1949, slalom was developed enough to organise the first ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships, which took place in Geneva, Switzerland. The following year, a new ICF President stepped into office with Harald Jespersen of Denmark elected.

Throughout his presidency, canoeing activities and the number of ICF affiliated National Federations grew organically. The dominance of Europe continued at global events, but it started shifting from north west to east. In 1954, Karel Popel of Czechoslovakia was elected as the ICF President and the first ICF Wildwater Canoeing World Championships was held in 1959 on the Vezere River in France.

A new era commenced in 1960 with the election of France’s Charles de Coquereaumont as the ICF President and the silent takeover of fibreglass and nylon over wood as the main construction material of canoeing equipment. Under the leadership of Coquereaumont, National Federations on continents other than Europe became active and canoeing developed into a globally-organised sport. It was about time because the number of Olympic events dropped from nine to seven for Rome 1960. Despite this reduction, the K4 boats made their first appearance at the Olympics in Tokyo in 1964. Since the beginning, the ICF organised both the European and the World Championships in canoe sprint. This practice ended in Moscow in 1969 and the European Championships was discontinued for a while until the European Canoe Association took on the organisation of the event.

SLALOM SUCCESS AND ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

One of the great successes of this period was getting slalom into the Olympic programme with the powerful support from the West German Canoe Federation. It debuted in 1972 on the Eiskanal, the first artificial

slalom course in the world which was constructed in Augsburg, about half an hour away from Munich. With the four additional slalom events, canoeing grew to 11 sets of medals at the Games.

The 50th anniversary of the ICF was celebrated in 1974 in Duisburg, Germany. The celebrations consisted of a canoe sprint regatta, a canoe slalom competition and a big festival in Duisburg's football stadium, right next to the canoeing course.

While slalom was not accepted for Montreal 1976, the ICF managed to keep all 11 medal events which was a great advancement for sprint. Carbon and kevlar sneaking into manufacturing canoeing equipment started to transform boat building - and paddle construction too - and the general weight of equipment was gradually decreasing over the next decades. In 1980, Sergio Orsi of Italy was elected as the ICF president and the steady increase of the recognised disciplines started.

The number of countries grew from the four founding nations to 44 by 1981, but it was still not enough for the IOC, which required at least 50 affiliated members for any sport to be considered for the Olympic Games Seoul 1988. With the aim to boost this number, the first continental association was born. The Asian Canoe Confederation was established by 10 countries in Ikaho, Japan in 1983.

POLO AND MARATHON HIT THE GLOBAL STAGE

What began as a superb leisure activity in the 1920s and 1930s started taking the shape of an organised sport in the 1970's as canoe polo rose in popularity. The only obstacle preventing canoe polo from becoming global was the conflicting rules of different countries. For many years canoe polo had been played on rivers and lakes in a variety of craft with different-sized fields, different rules, under different names and for different reasons. There was little need to change what was an enjoyable and challenging activity. As the need for international tournaments grew, the issue of rules had to be handled. The birth of the modern sport can be considered the demonstration games at Duisburg, Germany

in 1987. A year later, the standardised rules were written and by 1992 they were generally accepted.

A small revolution between 1986 and 1988 also happened in sprint when the new wing paddle wiped out the old wooden paddles in three years. Along with sprint, known as flatwater racing at the time, events on longer distances became popular. It was a struggle within the ICF to have marathon recognised as a new discipline but the participation figures convinced everyone that marathon deserved to be independent of sprint. The first ICF Canoe Marathon World Championships was held in Nottingham, Great Britain, in 1988 over a 42km distance.

The events on the ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships programme have always varied, with boat types and distances changing over the years but 1989 indicated the beginning of an even more hectic future. The new C4s and the women's 5K were added in Plovdiv that year.

The continued growth resulted in the establishment of the Pan-American Canoe Council in 1991, renamed the Pan American Canoe Federation four years later.

After 20 years the campaign to get slalom back in the Olympics succeeded in 1992, growing the medal events of canoeing to 16.

In 1993, the European Canoe Association was established in Rome, while the long-distance events were removed from the ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships programme. Instead, the 200m events were added the following year, anticipating increasing excitement and growing TV ratings due to the shortness of these races.

Canoe polo had its first World Championships in 1994 in Sheffield under the new standardised rules, with 18 countries from five continents present. In the last decade of the 20th century, the number of member National Federations surpassed the magical 100 number.

MEMBERSHIP GROWS AS MORE CONTINENTAL BODIES FORM

After Atlanta 1996, the development of an automatic start system for sprint began, which debuted at the World Championships in 1998, the

same year as Germany's Ulrich Feldhoff took office as the new ICF President. It was a time of much concern for slalom due to Sydney not intending to host the slalom events at the 2000 Olympic Games. With the combined effort and investment of the ICF and 14 National Federations, the slalom venue was built in Penrith. Sprint also gave 72 of their places to slalom in order to stay within the canoeing quota limit set by the IOC. From the beginning the ICF secretariat, later called the headquarters, was based where the Secretary General resided. When Otto Bonn, Vice President of the ICF for 20 years and Secretary General for another 12 from 1988 to 2000 retired, the baton was taken by Jose Perurena Lopez who moved the headquarters from Budapest to Madrid. That same year the Confederation of African Canoeing was established in Casablanca, Morocco.

By the end of 2004, membership increased to a record high of 135 countries. With the importance of multisport events besides the Olympic Games growing, 2005 was a great year for the ICF as canoe polo was added to the World Games programme and dragon boat was also included as a demonstration event. As a new discipline for the ICF, dragon boat held its first World Championships the same year. Slalom reduced its minimum boat length from 400cm to 350cm, adding more agility to the discipline.

While the Oceania Canoe Association was created much earlier, the organisation reestablished themselves in 2006 after years of inactivity. At the same time, the ICF moved its headquarters from Madrid to the Olympic capital in Lausanne. The next year another new discipline, freestyle, had its first ICF World Championships organised. The beautiful rapids of the Ottawa River in Canada offered a fantastic location for the six medal events.

In 2008, Jose Perurena Lopez of Spain was elected as the ICF President. Two years later, sprint and slalom were featured at the inaugural Youth

Olympic Games in Singapore with a special head-to-head format aimed at attracting young paddlers from around the world.

PARALYMPIC INCLUSION AND GENDER EQUALITY

After a successful demonstration the previous year, paracanoe held its first World Championships in Poznan, Poland in 2010 together with the sprint equivalent where the long-distance events (5,000m) were again part of the programme and the ladies started paddling in canoes. The shot clock was introduced to canoe polo, following a few years of debate over it.

The Olympic programme - which was unchanged for seven editions - got new events introduced in 2012. The 200m sprint events were a huge success. The 2008-2012 Olympic cycle was historic not just because of this change but also the women's canoe movement gained strength and was gradually accepted in all disciplines. Paracanoe had even more momentum and the rapid growth of the discipline skyrocketed it to the Paralympic programme at Rio 2016.

The two youngest disciplines of the ICF both had their first World Championships in this decade. Ocean racing held it in 2013 in Vila do Conde, Portugal, while stand up paddling (SUP) started off in 2019 in Qingdao, China. The Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games both brought something new to the ICF. The women's canoe was added to both the sprint and slalom events, reaching complete gender balance in both disciplines. The Paralympic canoe programme grew from six to nine medal events with the addition of the va'a races.

After the election in 2021, the ICF welcomed a new President in Germany's Thomas Konietzko. His energetic persona and vision were widely accepted by the majority of the 168 member federations, and the implementation of the fresh Fit for Future strategy began to grow the influence of canoeing even further.



BIRGIT FISCHER

Germany's Birgit Fischer won an incredible eight gold and four silver medals across six different Olympic Games, spanning 24 years. Fischer made her Olympic debut at Moscow 1980 aged 18 and was 42 when she competed at her final Games at Athens 2004, winning her eighth and last gold in the women's K4 500. She also amassed 38 medals at the ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships, including 28 golds.



IN THE BEGINNING...

Six months before canoeing featured as a demonstration event at the Paris 1924 Olympic Games, the Internationale Repräsentantenschaft für Kanusport, the former name of the International Canoe Federation, was established in Copenhagen, Denmark. The National Federations of Denmark, Germany, Austria and Sweden gathered on January 19, 1924 to form the international governing body for the sport. Regulations for the classes of racing kayaks, sailing canoes and Canadian canoes were agreed along with rules for international races. German Franz Reinicke assumed office as the first President of the IRK following a meeting in July 1924.



BENEATH THE SURFACE LIES A WORLD OF ADVENTURE

The building of a new slalom venue for the London 2012 Olympic Games was finished in 2010. It featured quite a few never-seen-before elements, like the size of the pond and the usage of treated (swimming pool quality) water. It meant great opportunities to media because the colour of the water got reflected on beautiful imagery and the possibility to take underwater pictures opened up. After the Games the venue opened to the public with new visitor facilities and daily operation is a huge success ever since with rafters, paddlers of all sorts and various other activities.



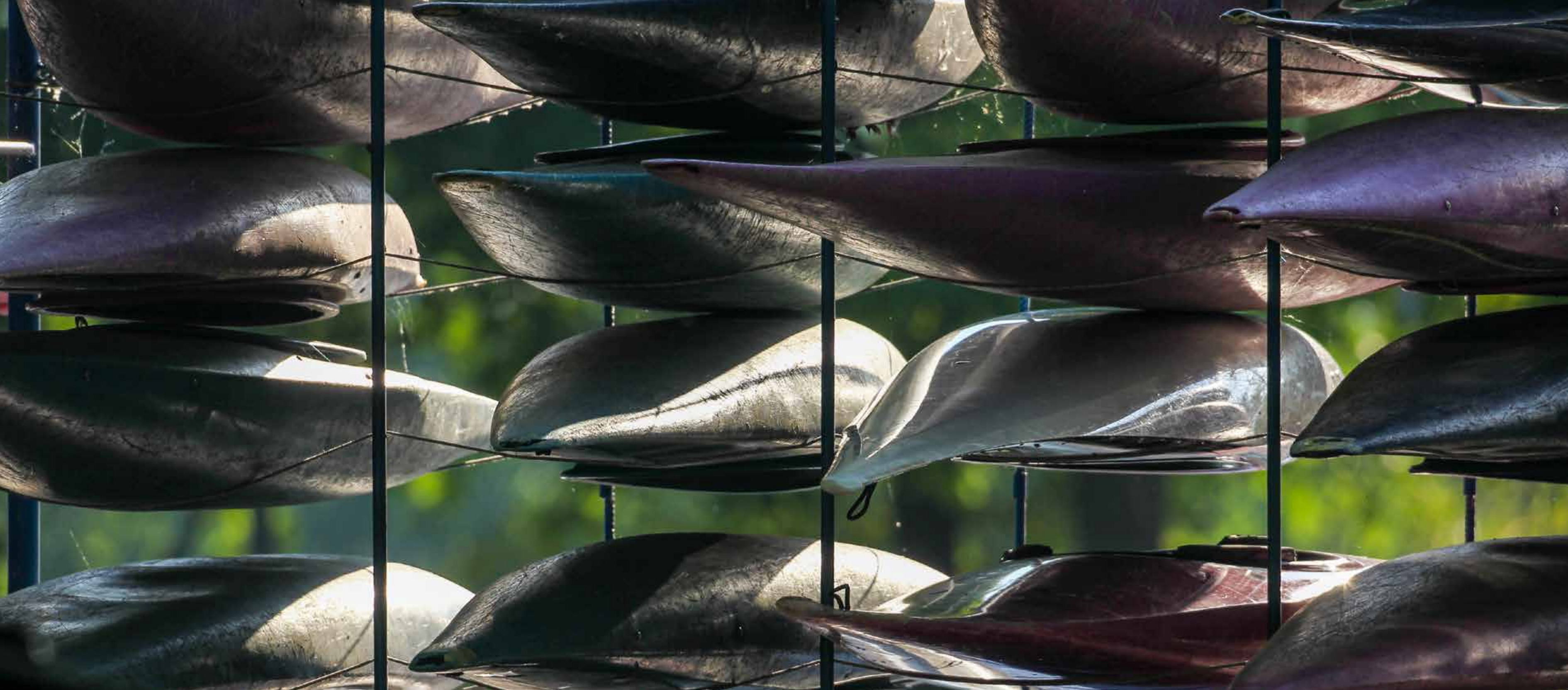
CONNOR BAXTER

In the short history of the ICF SUP World Championships Connor Baxter (USA) is the most decorated paddler who already collected 4 gold and 4 silver medals. He won sprint gold and technical silver in 2019, then silver in both in 2021. He must have had enough of silverware as he earned double-gold in 2022 and succeeded in defending his title in the technical race in 2023 but there was one faster in sprint.



WHERE PADDLERS FEEL AT HOME

Exactly 50 years after the first ICF World Championships in Sweden, Hungary joined the prestigious line of organisers to stage the first World Championships in Szeged. The number of spectators was unprecedented, no wonder that Szeged returned three more times as a host (2006, 2011, 2019) having an average daily turnout of canoe-kayak fans of 10.000.





SMALLER BUT STILL FIRING

The shorter, more agile type of the dragon boat is the 10-seater, where the drummer sets the rhythm to ten paddlers (5 on each side) and the steerer has less overall weight to handle. The racing distances are the same as for the 20-seaters and it's also open to all age-groups and genders.



LIFE ISN'T A RACE. IT'S A RELAY.

Relay races were installed on the programme for the 2009 ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships in Dartmouth, Canada. Russia won men's C1 4x200 gold, Spain claimed the men's K1 4x200 title and Germany were crowned women's K1 4x200 champions. All three events remained on the race schedule until after the 2014 World Championships in Moscow, Russia where they made their final appearance. You need to dig deeper, Geoff, relay races are much older. Check out 1948 Worlds, for instance!



MICHAL MARTIKAN

In 2024, Michal Martikan was still C1 paddling at ICF Canoe Slalom World Cup events, almost 30 years after he won at Atlanta 1996- the first of his two Olympic gold medals. Martikan also won gold at Beijing 2008, silver at Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 and bronze at London 2012. His total of five Olympic medals is the most won by an individual slalom paddler. The Slovakian champion also won 15 world titles, including four individual C1 golds.

LISA CARRINGTON

Lisa Carrington became New Zealand's most decorated Olympian of all time during Tokyo 2020 where she won three gold medals. Heading into Paris 2024, Carrington will look to add to her six Olympic medals including five gold and one bronze. She won her first world title in 2011, becoming the first New Zealand woman to do so, and secured three golds at last year's ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships to take her overall total to 15.





LIGHTS ON

Freestyle is a very unique one on the wide range of disciplines ICF is responsible for. As it does not require big venues like most of the others, it creates opportunities that would be challenging to replicate in other disciplines. One of these is the potential to have competitions at night with artificial lighting, creating a special vibe under the summer moon. The photos present the night session of the men's decked canoe competition from Thun, Switzerland (2009) and the celebration of the finalists after the men's kayak showdown in Sort, Spain (2019).



FLOODED BY LIGHTS

Despite the general difficulty to access parts of rivers where wildwater competitions are held, some organisers do go the extra mile and prepare something extraordinary: artificial lighting of a short stretch of the course. It is not realistic to have a classic race at night due to the several kilometers of length but the sprint races are a possibility. Organisers of the World Championships in 2013 (Soca River, Slovenia) and 2016 (Vrba River, Bosnia and Herzegovina) though alike and both had the sprint races under floodlights (photos).



LET'S TRY TO BE FAIR!

The world first saw an automatic starting system in 1996 at the Atlanta Games where it did not prove to be a total success. Based on the experience a company named Polaritas started working on a new system, aimed to be introduced for the World Championships in 1998. The first test was in a swimming pool where ICF Secretary General Mr. Ottó Bonn was overseeing the experiment that included athlete Ferenc Csipes (K1 1000m World Champion of 1985). After the success of testing the new automatic starting system saw the first real-life action in Szeged in 1987 and then went on to become a worldwide hit from the 1998 World Championships. Since 2004 the Olympic Games are also run with the assistance of this revolutionary system.



HEAD-TO-HEAD GAMES

Canoeing has been part of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) since the first edition in Singapore in 2010. The schedule at the inaugural YOG consisted of three head-to-head canoe sprint and three obstacle canoe slalom events. Hungary's Sandor Totka and Australia's Jessica Fox both claim golds at Singapore 2010 before going on to become Olympic champions. Canoeing also featured on the sports programme at Nanjing 2014 and Buenos Aires 2018.



LOCKED IN TRAFFIC

On July 31st, 1936, only a week before the canoe-kayak competitions at the Berlin Olympic Games began a surge of kayakers were on their way on the Spree River to a nearby lake for a paddling event. It is not known if it was the short window to arrive on time or the operation schedule of the lock or simply just the unexpected popularity of canoeing that created the pile up of all these boats in a lock but it does give a hint how widespread the paddle sports were in Germany.



GREGOR HRADEZKY

Born into a family of organ builders, Gregor Hradetzky started kayaking at the age of 17 before competing internationally. The Austrian etched his name in canoe sprint folklore at the sport's first appearance at the Olympic Games in 1936. He was the only paddler to win two golds in Berlin, triumphing in the K1 1000m and K1 10.000m folding kayak. After the Second World War forced him to call time on his canoeing career, Hradetzky took over his family organ building business.



Jackson
kayak

Jackson
kayak

TEVA

TRF

Jackson

Multivo

JK



INCLUSIVITY AT ITS BEST

The inclusivity of dragon boating is hard to compete with. Its origins rooted in Asia, dragon boating is an activity which is enjoyed by many around the world. Crews of 12 or 22 can compete, juniors, seniors, masters, men, women and mixed events on different distances are all part of the programme. On the photo the Iranian ladies' team is sprinting at the 2010 World Championships.



WATCH OUT! KAYAK CROSSING

The 100th year of the ICF brings a brand new addition to the Olympic programme in Paris: kayak cross, as part of the canoe events. It first appeared on the World Cup programme in 2015 and steadily gained popularity, being an official medal event at the World Championships in 2017. The concept of four athletes competing in a head-to-head format is a definite crowd-pleaser with the close-contact action and the mandatory eskimo roll.



OCEANBORN

The triumvirate of ocean racing champions discuss the day of racing on the ocean shore in Quiberon, France in 2019. Between the three of them they share all but one of the titles of ICF World Champion. South Africa's Sean Rice (147) won the inaugural World Championships in 2013 and succeeded again in 2019, his brother, Kenny Rice (97) triumphed in 2022 while Cory Hill (137) from Australia boasts three golds: 2015, 2017 and 2023.



HANK MCGREGOR

Hank McGregor is considered by many to be the greatest marathon paddler in the history of the sport. The South African paddled his way to individual world gold seven times, the first time in 2003 and the final time in front of a jubilant home crowd in Pietermaritzburg in 2017. He won six of his titles between 2011 and 2017, only missing out in 2012. McGregor was also part of jubilant K2 world title-winning crew three times and secured two silver medals at the ICF Canoe Ocean Racing World Championships.





UNLEASHING THE MADNESS

The start of the marathon races are always fun from the outside and always a grind from within. Reaching the right position, catching the good wash, end up with the fastest group are based on very quick decision-making to find the best trajectory and strength and agility, of course. At the beginning of a 2-3-hour long race everyone has the energy, the question is how much of it to burn with sprinting after the start and how much of it needs to be saved for the steady high-paced parts and the bursts before turns and portages.

TO THE LAST (WO)MAN STANDING

Long-distance paddling may be the heart of the SUP movement where millions buy boards to spend some leisure time on the water after work or during weekends. The racing distance is generally set for the competition to last between 40 minutes to 2 hours. Being an endurance event it has the most resemblance to a street running event but more fun, of course as athletes don't need to wait for the refreshment station as water is at hand.

LONDON 1948

With the world gripped by war there was a 12-year wait before the Olympic Games returned in 1948. Canoe sprint made its second Olympic appearance at London 1948 with women featuring for the first time. There were 110 athletes from 16 countries with Germany and Japan banned from the Games due to their involvement in the Second World War. Sweden, led by the great Fredriksson, won all four of the men's kayak events with Czechoslovakia winning three canoe titles. Sweden's Gert Fredriksson (c) leads from Belgium's G van de Moere (r) and Holland's J Bobeldijk (l) in the men's K1 10.000m at Henley-on-Thames.



WILD AT FIRST

By 1949 both sprint and slalom had their World Championships and wildwater also intended to have one. It was 1959 when it actually happened when ICF entrusted the French Federation to organise one. They picked a 13-kilometre-long course on the Vezere River through the small town of Treignac in the heart of France. Ten countries participated and there were 97 boats entered in the five medal events. Interestingly, mixed C2 was one of them! From this date on the Wildwater Worlds became a biannual event until 2010 when it turned to annual with only sprint races in the odd years. The team events first got on the World Championships programme in 1963 while the sprint events were introduced in 2002. The photo from 1959 is about the winning French crew of the men's C2 event: Georges Dransart (front) and Georges Turlier (rear).



FERNANDO FERNANDES DE PADUA

Brazil's Fernando Fernandes de Padua was the first star of paracanoe. Before his car accident in 2009, he was a football player, amateur boxer and an international model working with brands like Dolce & Gabbana. After becoming paraplegic he started paddling for rehabilitation purposes. He then began starring on the international stage, winning his first world title at the inaugural ICF Paracanoe World Championships in the most impaired category in K1. He defended his title twice, in 2011 and 2013. His energetic, positive personality shone a great light on the entire paracanoe community.



HOW IT ALL CAME TOGETHER

Spain's Saul Craviotto and Carlos Perez won the K2 500m event at the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 over Germany's duo of Rauhe and Wieskotter and the Belarussian pair of Piatrushenka and Makhneu. The medals have been presented by Mr. Thomas Bach, IOC member (elected president in 5 years), accompanied by Mr. Ulrich Feldhoff, President of the International Canoe Federation. What an illustrious company! The easter egg on the photo is Mr. Jose Perurena Lopez (on top of the stands in blue shirt) who followed the footsteps of Mr. Feldhoff, becoming ICF president a few months after the 2008 Games concluded.



IVAN PATZAICHIN

Romania's Ivan Patzaichin participated in five Olympic Games, winning four gold and three silver medals. Patzaichin won Olympic titles in men's C2 1000 at Mexico 1968, Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984. He also captured the men's C1 1000 crown at Munich 1972 by almost four seconds. As well as achieving Olympic success, Patzaichin won 22 world medals.





WHERE SKILLS REALLY SHOW

The 10-20-minute long SUP technical race is the most fun to watch. Athletes need all sorts of skills from strength and endurance to good paddling technique and special turning moves. The pile-up at some of the buoys can be chaotic and those not confident with their turning routine or can't adjust quickly enough according to the position of other competitors, will lose valuable seconds.

NEVIN HARRISON

Nevin Harrison of the United States made history at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics when she became the first paddler to win the women's C1 200 event. The American clinched victory in a time of 45.932. The race was making its debut appearance at the Olympics after replacing the men's C1 200 as canoeing achieved gender equality at the Games with six female and six male Canoe Sprint events.





A HISTORIC PUSH FOR SLALOM

After a long and hard-fought campaign, led by the determined West German Canoe Federation, canoe slalom was introduced at the Olympic Games for the first time in 1972. The IOC Session agreed in 1970 that the events would be held at the Eiskanal in Augsburg – about 64 kilometres away from the Olympic Village in Munich. Slalom joined sprint on the programme, taking the overall number of canoeing events to 11. Paddlers competed in the slalom races of men's C1, men's C2, men's K1 and women's K1, with East Germany winning all four events. Slalom's appearance was an historic moment for the ICF, although it took until Barcelona 1992 for the discipline to feature at the Olympics for the second time.



THE RETURN TO EISKANAL

The golden jubilee of the Munich 1972 Olympic Games was celebrated at the Eiskanal in Augsburg with a World Championships. It was the fourth time that the world's best slalom paddlers gathered here to fight for the Championships titles. The channel itself did not change much over the course of 50 years, neither the size of the crowd. 299 athletes from 51 countries enjoyed the support of thousands at this festival which was not only focused on crowning new heroes but commemorating the champions of old.





EVERYTHING STARTED WITH THE BUSEATER

In 2007 the six events of the first freestyle World Championships was staged on the aptly named feature of the Ottawa River: the Greyhound Buseater. From that time on it was always held every other year. In 2015, it was the Ottawa River's turn again, within an arm's reach from the 2007 location. The Garburator (photo) treated the 189 athletes from 29 countries well and the spectators also had a terrific time by the river. The Worlds got pushed from 2021 to 2022 in Nottingham but everything got back on track when Columbus, Georgia hosted a memorable Championships in 2023. By that time the number of medal events were up to nine.

BALLGAME OF GAMES

Canoe polo debuted on the World Games programme in Duisburg in 2005 with Germany winning the women's and the Netherlands the men's tournament. Since then all World Games featured canoe polo with Germany dominating both genders, earning six gold medals all together (3 men-3 women). France won one each the Great Britain succeeded in the women's contest in 2009 in Kaohsiung. Though lately most top canoe polo tournaments moved outside, there are occasions when swimming pools accommodate the matches, like the indoor venue of Birmingham, Alabama from 2022 (photo).



SAY VA'A!

The va'a boat, as the single-bladed paracanoe sibling of kayaks, was part of the first demonstration event in Canada in 2009. At the time it was C2 and there were two paddlers in a boat. That was never repeated and the V1 debuted at the first World Championships only for men in one unified impairment class. The following year it went into two classes and in 2013 there were six V1 events at the World Championships: three for men and three for women. The Paralympic breakthrough of va'a came in 2021 when three medal events (two for men, one for women) became part of the programme at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, bringing the overall number of events to nine.



BLACK, RED AND GOLD DOMINANCE

The all-time best team of women's canoe polo is the German team. They won their first World Championship title in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 2000 and another six since then, including the last two. To complete their seven gold medals they have also earned four silver and one bronze medals in the course of 30 years.

TIED ON THE TOP

Checking the men's all-time World Championships medal table's standings in 2024 there are two teams with the exact same amount of medals in the lead. Both France and the Netherlands have 3 gold, 2 silver and 1 bronze medals. They were taking turns at winning between 2004 and 2014 by Netherlands starting. The last two World Championships were won by Germany but they haven't prevailed prior to 2018.





CLAIRE O'HARA

Some of the most entertaining show elements of freestyle are the ones when it breaks free of the rule-shackle during the intermissions of the competition. At these times the hilarious King of the Wave contest begins where there are no rules, athletes try to push off each other of the wave and the one remaining is the King. Sometimes organisers prepare surprise setups to build on the playful nature of freestylers, like in Thun in 2009 where a waterslide provided the show (photos).



STAND UP AND FIGHT

According to rules the sprint distance of stand up paddling can be anything up to 250 meters. Out of the three different types of events in stand up paddling this is the strictest in the sense that the ideal straight trajectory of the paddlers is set by well-defined start and finish lines and the other contestants travelling parallel. Even boat numbers come into play.



OTHMAR EITERER, THE FIRST SLALOM WORLD CHAMPION

Austria's Othmar Eiterer was crowned the first canoe slalom world champion courtesy of his historic triumph in the men's K1 folding. The inaugural ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships in 1949 saw Austria finish with three gold medals- one behind France who topped the standings. Eiterer backed up his success in Geneva with gold in the men's K1 folding team event at the next edition of the biennial World Championships held in Steyr, Austria in 1951 (in photo).



STARTING OFF WITH A BANG

Canoeing became an official Olympic sport at Berlin 1936 after the IOC Session accepted the IRK's application in 1934. Previous attempts to gain admission at Amsterdam 1928 and Los Angeles 1932 came to no avail after fearing as a demonstration sport at Paris 1924. A total of 158 male paddlers from 19 nations participated across nine events staged at Grünau on the Langer See. Austria was the most successful nation winning three golds, three silvers and one bronze.

EXPLORING THE WORLD, JUNIOR-STYLE

The first ever Junior World Championships for U18 athletes took place in Castelgandolfo in 1985, the same location where the 1960 Olympic Games were held. There were all together 13 medal events on the programme on 500m and 1000m distances. What started as a biannual event turned into annual from 2013 when the U23 age-group as a new addition also debuted. By 2023 the Junior/U23 World Championships grew to be a 5-day long event with 65 countries participating in Auronzo di Cadore, Italy (on photo).





KATALIN KOVACS - DANUTA KOZAK

Over 50 Olympic and World Championships gold medals in the same boat. Hungary's Katalin Kovacs (front) is the most decorated athlete in the history of World Championships with 31 golds and she also boasts 3 Olympic golds. Her partner, Danuta Kozak was more focused on collecting precious metal at the Olympic Games, stopping the count at 6 golds to accompany her 15 World Championships titles. On the photo the duo just won the K2 200m event at the 2011 World Championships in Szeged, which was Kovacs's last World title.

DOES MARATHON SOUND LIKE A GAME?

The introduction of marathon to the World Games programme happened in 2013 when it was an invitational event in Cali, Colombia. It took almost ten years to return to the programme as an official sport. 40 athletes from 22 countries fought for four sets of medal in men's and women's kayak races. On the photo gold medallist of the long-distance event, Andy Birkett (South Africa) grabs his boat at the beginning of a portage while on his right Mads Pedersen (Denmark), winner of the short-distance event prepares to jump out.





ENTER THE DRAGON

2005 was a big year for dragon boating in the ICF. It was the year for the first World Championships in Germany and dragon boating became an invitational sport of the programme of the World Games in Duisburg. Four years later it was the same at the next edition of the World Games in Kaohsiung. Dragon boat will be an official medal event at the next World Games in Chengdu in 2025. World Championships are held every year with national crews racing in the even years and club crews in the odd years. The phot was taken at the World Games in 2005.



FIRST TIME PLAYING

The inaugural Paracanoe World Championships in 2010 was such a hit that the International Paralympic Committee announced the same year that it would be part of the Paralympic programme from 2016. There were six events contested, all in kayaks, three for men and three for women. The qualification had two phases, the World Championships in 2015 and 2016. A total of 60 athletes from 25 countries qualified and Great Britain topped the medal table with three gold and two bronze medals. The fastest race of the competition was the men's KL3 where Ukraine's Serhii Yemelianov triumphed with a time of 39.81. Liam Heath won the Olympic K1 event the same year with 35.19. In the photo Yemelianov is on the right, Germany's Tom Kierey (silver medalist) is in the middle and Brazil's Caio Ribeiro de Carvalho (bronze) is on the left.



FREESTYLE FREERIDE, KING OF THE WAVE

Some of the most entertaining show elements of freestyle are the ones when it breaks free of the rule-shackle during the intermissions of the competition. At these times the hilarious King of the Wave contest begins where there are no rules, athletes try to push off each other of the wave and the one remaining is the King. Sometimes organisers prepare surprise setups to build on the playful nature of freestylers, like in Thun in 2009 where a waterslide provided the show (photos).



WHERE TO START?

The beach start of any paddling event is eye-candy but to witness that of an ocean racing World Championships is a true sight to behold. The hundreds of competitors racing for their boats first and then fighting for positions as soon as they get on the water is sheer viewing pleasure.



BURNING CALORIES, CONSUMING ENERGY

The evolution of feeding techniques has greatly developed along with the deepened knowledge on the necessary energy intake of competitors during marathon races. In the old days, coaches running side by side with the athletes in the feeding zone was quite common but clearly too much energy drink and gel got spilled so the modern way of supplying the needed boost is by the means of drink pouches hanged around the neck, which is an easy maneuver during the short portage.



STRENGTH IN UNITY

The slalom team events are part of the World Championships programme since the beginning. A team has always consisted of three boats competing together on the course where all the boats need to negotiate all the gates the same way as they would individually but synchronising their moves makes all the difference. Mastering the art of rhythm, timing and impeccable negotiation of gates takes three highly-skilled athletes who can work as one in this quickly changing environment while making sure that they all cross the finish line within 15 seconds.



ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS PARIS 1924

Canoeing made its first appearance on the Olympic stage as a demonstration sport at Paris 1924 along with the national sports of French boxing and pelota. The Canadian Olympic Committee had accepted a request from the French Olympic Committee to exhibit the sport at the Games. Representatives from the Canadian Canoe Association and the Washington Canoe Club in the United States participated in K1, K2, K4, C1, C2 and C4 races.



BEST OF SLALOM BESTS

The first slalom World Championships was held in Geneva, Switzerland in 1949 with the participation of seven countries who contested for eight sets of medals, four in individual and four in team events. Initially the Slalom Worlds were held every other year but the turn of the century meant a turn of that tide and from 2002 the Slalom World Championships were held annually. On the photo the races from the 4th edition in Tacen, Slovenia (1955), where there were already 14 nations competing and the crowd was as supportive as ever since.





GOODBYE C2, WELCOME C1!

Rio 2016 was the first Olympic Games where perfect gender balance was achieved in slalom, with the women's C1 race replacing men's C2. On the photo Jana Dukatova (SVK) racing in the semifinal of the women's K1 competition.



PUFFED-UP

The build of the wildwater boats is quite special. It must combine speed, agility, tracking and manoeuvrability in a constantly changing, bubbly environment. The bottom resembles the tipsy curvature of the sprint boats but the top is far from anything else. In the middle, around the cockpit it's slim so the athlete can paddle comfortably and the stroke is effectively close to the side of the boat. But the front and the back are where miracles happen. In order to increase the volume of the boat (so it would remain on the surface of the water more) both decks are elevated, the back is widened and the general appearance of the boat is puffed up.



A TOUCH TOO MUCH

Originally the gates of the slalom course were hanged wooden poles. Then came plastic replacing it but the rule remained the same, it is a fault to touch any of the poles and the penalty is adding seconds to the result. The colour of the downstream (green) and the upstream (red) gates differ and it's also stipulated that every course needs to have six or eight upstream gates. The width of the gates has not really been restrictive for many years, according to rules anywhere between 120 and 400 centimeters is accepted but experience shows that 140 centimeters work best.



ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE AND A LAKE

The history of the canoe sprint Olympic venues starts with natural bodies of water being used for this purpose for many editions until Munich 1972. Since then it's either custom-built venues, enclosed parts of a river or sea or just beautiful lakes, like Lake Sagami (Tokyo 1964) or Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas (Rio 2016) where the natural surroundings complement the activity on the water.



SEE YOU ON THE BEACH

The beach start is always a colourful spectacle and is widely used for the long-distance races as the simplest and fairest method to let hundreds on their way at the same time. Stand up paddle boards have evolved according to the varied needs of people standing on them. The board of the professionals got narrower and the inflatable one is still hard to beat due to its compact nature when it comes to travelling.

THE NEW CONCEPT OF A FLOODED RIVER

The start of the Descent of the Sella River is unique and constitutes a spectacle in itself. It is a beach mass start where the boats must be out of the water. Due to the number of entries (850 in 2023) the line of boats on the river bank stretches almost a kilometer. Earlier it was called „Le Mans-type start” but in the canoeing world it is now known as “Sella-type start”. The paddles are placed in locks that open only when the starter gives the start signal, which is a cannon shot since 1968. Within seconds the river is covered with hundreds of paddlers fighting to better positions.



HOW IT ALL CAME TOGETHER

In the beginning there was nothing, then people started playing canoe polo and then there was chaos. Regarding the rules, at least, but there was a lot of joy too to play this game. Some countries had goals floating on the water, some hanged it above. Some played with the paddles only, others used their hands too. In the midst of much debate the ICF tried to standardize the rules in 1986 and the first exhibition match was staged during the Sprint World Championships in Duisburg in 1987. It took another five years to complete these standard rules and have them accepted by everyone and the stage was set. The photo was taken in 1985 by the Baldeneysee near Essen, Germany.

YOU WANT TRULY FLAT WATER? GO TO DUISBURG!

Starting in 1979, when Duisburg (then West Germany) first hosted the World Championships, there was no decade passing without Wedau Sportpark in Duisburg seeing the elite of canoe sprint athletes from around the world competing for the crown of World Champion. The second time was 1987 followed by 1995, 2007, 2013 and recently 2023, making Duisburg a record-holder in the history of World Championships, being a six-time host. On the photo from 1979 the final spectacle, the 10.000-meter races of the K4 boats coming to a turn at the end of the lake.





RENATA CSAY

What more to say about a 20-time canoe marathon world champion? Hungarian Renata Csay strung together five consecutive individual world titles from 2010 to 2014 and proved almost unbeatable in women's K2, notching up 13 world titles with a variety of partners between 1999 and 2019. Csay also won four individual silver medals and eight K2 silvers. Incredibly, Csay only missed the podium twice in the women's K2 between 1999 and 2022.



JESSICA FOX

In 2024, Jessica Fox won her 50th individual ICF Canoe Slalom World Cup gold medal, confirming the Australian as the most successful female paddler of all time. Fox won K1 silver on her Olympic debut aged 18 at London 2012 before earning bronze in the K1 in Rio four years later and then again in Tokyo. But the Japanese Games also saw the debut of women's C1, for which Fox had played a major role in having it recognised at the Olympics after being on the World Championships programme since 2009. It's only fitting that Fox won the C1 gold in Tokyo. Fox has been individual world champion eight times, four times each in C1 and K1.



TRUSTED UNTAMED WILDNESS

Bourg-Saint-Maurice, tucked away in one of the southwestern corners of France, at the foot of the high peaks of the Alps is wildwater paradise. The city of 7000 inhabitants hosted three Wildwater World Championships (1969, 1987, 2012) and three Slalom World Championships (1969, 1987, 2002). The events have always been supported by huge crowds like the one on the photo during the women's wildwater K1 team event in 1987.



TURN, TURN, TURN

Due to the constant repositioning of the boat in a group and the number of turns in a marathon competitions the skill of changing direction quickly and confidently is a must have for any marathon paddler. All the turns in marathon are left turns (counterclockwise), which means that canoeists paddling on the right have an advantage. Still, the most successful three men of the C1 boat class (Edvin Csabai and Marton Kover from Hungary and Manuel Antonio Campos from Spain) with a combined number of 14 World titles seem to beat the odds, as all of them were (are) lefties.

RAINDROPS KEEP FALLING ON HIS HEAD

Peter Kauzer (SLO), defending World Champion of the men's K1 event arrived at the London 2012 Olympic Games as the top contender. Wearing bib number 1 he was to come down last in both heats. Towards the end of the second heats dark clouds gathered and a heavy downpour struck the venue right before the very last run of the day by Peter Kauzer was about to begin. It may well have been a foreboding celestial signal that the World Champion will not become Olympic Champion at these Games. Kauzer finished 6th in the final but earned a silver medal four years later in Rio.



SUMMER IN THE CITY

Marathon competitions can be held almost anywhere where there's water. Sea, lakes, rivers are all perfect for staging a long-distance canoeing competition and this flexibility ensures that venues in natural and urban settings are both used. The location on the photo is Ponte de Lima in Portugal where the marathon course is set on the River Lima, which crosses the city.

THE WORLD AS YOUR BALL

The inaugural world championships in 1994, based indoors in an Olympic sized swimming pool in Sheffield, saw 18 Men and 6 Women's teams and included teams from Australia, Germany, Great Britain, Netherlands, France, Belgium, Ireland, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Chinese Taipei, South Africa, Finland, Austria, Japan, Brazil, Portugal and Canada. With both categories won by Australia the fierce competition at the world's Canoe Polo well and truly launched. The biannual World Championships have rapidly grown and the U21 teams were added to the programme in 2002. The 2022 edition had 63 teams (26 countries from 5 continents) contesting in front of a crowd of 8000 people. The photo is of the main pitch from the 2016 World Championships in Syracuse, Italy.



COPYCAT CHANNEL

Augsburg was chosen as the location for the canoe slalom competition at the Munich 1972 Olympics with racing taking place at the Eiskanal. The West Germans invested 15 million deutsche marks building the world's first artificial whitewater venue of its kind, becoming a model for the design of future canoe slalom courses. Training at the Eiskanal in the lead-up to the Games, West Germany hoped to have an advantage over East Germany. But an exact replica of the venue was built in Zwickau where East Germany trained. It proved to be decisive with the East Germans claiming all four slalom gold medals on offer. In the picture Walter Hofmann and Rolf-Dieter Amend triumphed for East Germany in the men's C2. The other photo is from April 1971 showing West Germany's Alfred Baum, Wolfgang Peters and Bernhard Heinemann in the finished channel.





GATHERING THE WORLD'S BESTS

What culminated in the first ICF Paracanoe World Championships in 2010- and one of the success stories of the ICF in the 21st century- started as a conversation in 2007 between like-minded people. Under the name paddleability, demonstration events were held at the 2009 ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships in Dartmouth, Canada where seven nations took part in the four races. The selected distance was 200 metres. The inaugural ICF Paracanoe World Championships was held in Poznan, Poland in 2010 with seven medal events as part of the sprint programme. There were 71 athletes from 27 countries participating, which was a very strong start to this new discipline. Brazil and Canada both won two gold medals.

WHERE DRONES ENJOY THEMSELVES

One of the advantages of long-distance paddling on open water is the potential to show the activity from above in exquisite environments. The state-of-the-art drone technology enables really high-quality TV broadcast where the production can concentrate on the action on the water and the beauty of the surroundings alike.



JENNA SMITH

No woman in the history of the ICF Canoe Ocean Racing World Championships was able to do what Jenna Smith of Australia has done. She's not just the first to boast two gold medals but she won them back-to-back in 2022 and 2023. Since the World Championships turned from a biannual to an annual affair in 2021, the opportunity to win multiple medals over a paddling career has grown but defending the title is still a feat. Winning the second gold in Perth, in her home country had an additional touch to her victory.

ISAQUIAS QUEIROZ DOS SANTOS

Isaquias Queiroz dos Santos delivered Brazil's first-ever Olympic medal in Canoe Sprint when he won silver in the men's C1 1000 at Rio 2016. It was one of three medals won by Queiroz at his home Games with two silvers and one bronze. He then became Brazil's first Olympic champion in canoeing when he struck gold in the men's C1 1000 at Tokyo 2020. He also has seven world titles and three Pan American Games gold medals to his name.



EMMA WIGGS

One of the pioneers of paracanoe, Emma Wiggs has won gold at every Paralympics since the sport joined the programme. Wiggs won KL2 gold at Rio 2016 and then followed up with VL2 gold at Tokyo 2020. She also won KL2 silver in Japan. Wiggs has been a world champion on 11 occasions, racing in kayak and va'a alike. Wiggs came to paracanoe after captaining Great Britain's sitting volleyball team at the London 2012 Paralympics.





ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

During the 1995 Sprint World Championships there were quite a few meetings on the future of canoeing. On this rare photo three ICF presidents were captured. From left to right: Italy's Sergio Orsi (in office from 1980 to 1998), Germany's Ulrich Feldhoff (1998-2008), Spain's Jose Perurena Lopez (2008-2021) with the representative of the Americas, Joao Tomasini Schwertner from Brazil and Asia representative from Japan, Etsuya Hosotani.



STEPANKA HILGERTOVA

An international career stretching three decades and featuring six Olympic appearances places Czech slalom paddler Stepanka Hilgertova in the very top bracket of ICF paddling legends. Hilgertova won two women's K1 Olympic golds- the first at Atlanta 1996, and the second four years later in Sydney. Hilgertova also won seven world titles, including individual golds in 1999 and 2003. Hilgertova officially retired in 2017, although she continued paddling at amateur events.



TURNING TWO TONNES AROUND

Turning a long vessel like a dragon boat requires skill. The sheer weight of the boat with 22 persons inside hints that the job of the steerer cannot be taken lightly. The 2000-meter races are conducted as a pursuit race with two laps of the 500-metre course completed incorporating three turns. Those who perfect these turns without slowing the boat considerably down already have an advantage.



ELENA KALISKA

During an incredible paddling career that lasted more than three decades, Elena Kaliska won two Olympic gold and two world titles for Slovakia. Kaliska competed at four Olympics, winning K1 gold in 2004 and 2008. She was overall ICF Canoe Slalom World Cup champion six times, including four years in a row between 2003 and 2006. After making her international debut in 1988, she announced her retirement in 2021 at the age of 49.



GERT FREDRIKSSON

Gert Fredriksson is a legend in kayaking, winning eight Olympic medals including six golds across four Games. The Swede won his first two gold medals on his Olympic debut at London 1948, triumphing in the men's K1 1000m and K1 10,000m. This was followed by a gold and silver at Helsinki 1952, two golds at Melbourne 1956 and a gold and bronze at Rome 1960. His glittering career also featured seven world titles, making him one of the sport's greatest paddlers. Fredriksson's home town of Nyköping in Sweden created a statue of him to celebrate his incredible achievements.

DOUBLE UP, IT'S GOING TO BE LONG!

The canoeing events were dominated by Czechoslovakia at the 1948 London Olympics. They took three out of four gold medals. The only race they came second was the C2 10.000m, where crew USA paddled two minutes faster. What had looked like a relatively straightforward result was soon thrown into turmoil, when a report was received from the turning point control that the leading canoe had fouled one of the buoys marking the turn. Eventually, common sense prevailed, with the umpire deciding against disqualification, presumably taking account of the fact that the buoy was struck by a paddle during recovery and not by the canoe, and that the incident had in no way affected the outcome of the race. The photo commemorates the start of this very event in Henley-on-Thames with six boats at the start: USA, Czechoslovakia, France, Austria, Canada and Sweden.



CORY HILL

Australia's Cory Hill is the only ocean paddler who won two consecutive world titles (2015-2017). Additionally, he also earned gold at the 2023 ICF Canoe Ocean Racing World Championships. His medal collection is complete with one silver from 2013 and one bronze from 2019, which makes him the most decorated paddler of the discipline. Hill has also won all the major surfski races around the world at least once, including the Molokai Challenge.





WHEN NATURE CALLS

The wildwater is the most sustainable discipline of the ICF due to races hardly require any infrastructure and the best races are run on natural rivers where the surroundings complement the activity. There is one challenge though, accessing the river if the environment is pristine, the banks are overgrown or steep or both. The solution is quite simple: not trying to find one because there isn't one and just slip back a few decades and wait nervously when the boats appear around the bend. It's one of the beauties of wildwater paddling.



YOU BLINK AND YOU MISS IT

The 200-meter sprint made its debut on the World Championships programme in Mexico City in 1994, replacing the long-distance races. It took less than twenty years to make it appear on the Olympic Programme and in London (2012) four out of twelve events were 200 meters with champions from Great Britain, Russia, New Zealand and the Ukraine. With the shortness of the distance and the closeness of the finishes a new technique (already existing at that point) evolved into a spectacle: kicking the boat in right on the finish line. There are true masters to this art, like Sebastian Brendel from Germany 3-time Olympic and 13-time World Champion (on photo).





CURTIS MCGRATH

Former Australian soldier Curtis McGrath is the most successful male paracanoe paddler at a Paralympic and world championship level. McGrath won KL2 gold at the sport's Paralympic debut in Rio, then successfully defended his KL2 gold and also won VL3 gold in Tokyo. He is the first athlete to win two paracanoe gold medals at a Paralympic Games.



VLADI PANATO

Vladi Panato's nickname is Il Mito (The legend) for a reason. He was only 21 years old when won his first World Championships in C1 and remained unbeaten in the C1 classic race until 2002. In addition to these 6 gold medals he also earned a silver medal (2004) and a bronze medal (2006) in the same event. When the sprint events were introduced in 2002 he triumphed in the C1 race and was able to repeat that six years later. He came second in 2004. In the team events he achieved one gold, one silver and one bronze. As a retired athlete he remained close to wildwater, started working for the Italian Federation as a technical director. His daughters, Alice and Cecilia are also World Champion wildwater canoe paddlers. Photo was taken at the 1998 World Championships.



TONY ESTANGUET

Tony Estanguet won Olympic gold in C1 at three Games, winning at Sydney 2000, Athens 2004 and London 2012. The Frenchman also enjoyed enormous success at the World Championships level, becoming champion five times. Three of those titles were achieved in the individual race. Estanguet carried the flag for France at the Beijing 2008 opening ceremony, the only Games where he did not win a medal. He later led the successful bid for Paris to host the 2024 Olympics, and was head of the organising committee for the Games.

FOUR IS COMPANY

The introduction of the new boat type, the C4 to the Senior World Championships level was the result of a careful step-by-step approach. It was a demonstration event at the Junior World Championships in 1985, then a full medal event at the next Junior Worlds in 1987. The success with the juniors resulted in the full-scale launch of C4s into the grown-up world and when Plovdiv hosted the next Senior World Championships, men's C4 was on the programme with official medal events on two distances: 500m and 1000m. The Czech Republic's four-man canoe team clearly demonstrates the effort that the racing of this boat entails as they cross the finish line, winning the men's C4 200m final during the 2006 World Championships in Szeged.





TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

The shot clock was introduced in 2010. It was widely debated before whether it was really necessary to speed up the gameplay but it has proven itself worthy. The 60 seconds for a shot at goal puts the right amount of pressure on teams not to delay their attack formation. Now the shot clock is mandatory requisit of World Championships and World Games.



PADDLING TO NEW HORIZONS

Paracanoe spreading to disciplines other than sprint is a natural reflection of the success of the discipline. Marathon, as the closest relative to sprint, is an evident stepping stone to attract more paddlers with impairments all around the world. At the 2022 and the 2023 editions of the ICF Canoe Marathon World Championships paracanoe featured as an exhibition event. The photo is of the start of the paracanoe race in Ponte de Lima, Portugal in 2022.



FASTER TOGETHER

Although the K4 races were part of the World Championships programme from the beginning, it took almost three decades to achieve its Olympic debut. The breakthrough Games were at Tokyo 1964 when the men's K4 1000m first appeared on the programme. A total of 15 crews from four continents participated and the Soviet Union won, beating Germany and Romania. In the photo the Japanese crew is getting off the water after their race.





UNITED BY DIVERSITY

Bringing male and female athletes together, the mixed boats featured for the first time at the ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships in 2021. Irina Andreeva and Ivan Shtyl of the Russian Canoe Federation won the mixed C2 200 title and Hungary's Anna Lucz and Kolos Csizmadia secured mixed K2 200 gold. The events aimed at showcasing gender parity in the sport continue to be part of the World Championship programme.



PETER AND PAVOL HOCHSCHORNER

The Slovak twins are the most successful C2 paddlers in the history of canoe slalom. They won Olympic gold in 2000, 2004 and 2008, and bronze in 2012. They announced their retirement from the sport when C2 was dropped from the Olympic programme for the Tokyo Games. The brothers were also crowned C2 world champions on five occasions and were European champions six times. After retiring from slalom competition the Hochschorners contested wildwater competitions.

IT'S ONLY THE BEGINNING

The long-distance events were always part of the programme of the World Championships. In 1938 almost half of all the events were the 10,000-meter races. For many years only men had long-distance events but 1989 brought change when the ladies 5000-meter races were introduced. The World Championships in 1993 put the long-distance to rest for a while before it was re-introduced again in 2010 when the distance got gender-balanced: 5K for all. On the photo Ken Wallace, 4-time World Champion of the men's K1 5000m event looking back at the mass start at the World Cup in Copenhagen in 2015.





JEREMY WEST, THE POSTER BOY OF THE WING REVOLUTION

The development of a brand new type of paddle began in Sweden before the '84 Olympic Games, it was called Wing. The best athletes were cautious to switch so nobody used the invention in Los Angeles. The following year the Swedish team won three gold medals at the World Championships with the new Wing paddle which caught everyone's attention. Still, the top paddlers were wary. Then came Jeremy West (photo) who won both K1 500m and K1 1000m at the World Championships in 1986. It started a landslide and at the next Worlds seven national teams used it, winning three out of five Olympic events in men's kayak. In 1988 at the Seoul Olympics all finalists in men's kayak used the Wing. Jeremy came 5th in the semi and couldn't make the final in K1 500m.



SLALOM SUMMIT 2009

A day before the 2009 Slalom World Championships was to begin, a meeting was organised at the La Seu d'Urgell venue to talk about the future of the discipline. The turnout of Olympic and Worlds medals at the table was quite difficult to count. Starting with ICF president Mr. Jose Perurena at the head of the table going clockwise the following people were present: Tony Estanguet (FRA), Stanislav Jezek (CZE), David Florence (GBR), Campbell Walsh (GBR), Stepanka Hilgertova (CZE), Elena Kaliska (SVK), Pavol Hochschorner and Peter Hochschorner (SVK), Michal Martikan (SVK), Fabien Lefevre (FRA), Jean-Michel Prono (ICF Slalom Committee Chairman), Simon Toulson (ICF Secretary General), Richard Fox (ICF Vice-president).

HOW LONG IS A MARATHON?

The first ICF Canoe Marathon World Championships took place in Nottingham, Great Britain in 1988. It all began with six events and a distance of 42 kilometres and a biannual World Championships. It did not take long to realise that matching the feeling and the excitement of marathon running, the three to four-hour-long competitions should be reduced.

The shaving off the 42km started in 1996 and by the time the World Championships turned into an annual event (1998), the distance was set at 36 kilometres. From 2006, the distances of the different categories started to differ, reducing the length of the men's canoe and women's kayak course. The format was changed to standard laps and it became easy to adjust the distances to ideal two-hour-long races by simply defining the number of laps and portages.



VAXHOLM 1938

The very first ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships were held in Vaxholm, Sweden just outside Stockholm. There were 12 medal events, three in canoe and the rest in kayak, two of them for women. The distances were 1000m and 10,000m for the men and 600m for the ladies. Finland's Magiie Kalka, who won the women's K1, became an Olympian as a foil fencer at Helsinki 1952. There was a wait of 10 years before the next edition of the World Championships and when it was finally staged at London 1948 only non-Olympic events were held due to the Games taking place in the same year. For two more decades the World Championships were on and off inconsistently. The standard annual routine started in 1970 in Copenhagen where the medals were distributed to 14 countries. The photo is from Vaxholm 1938 and it shows the finish of the men's K2 1000m race with Germany winning, Sweden second and Denmark third.



KAREN HOFF

After the men-only competition in 1936, the International Canoeing Federation made an official application for women's competition to be included in London. The IOC agreed that an event for women could be added, provided there was no increase in the number of canoeing events already fixed. The ICF decided to omit the proposed men's K1 relay and included a K1 women's event over 500m. There were 10 ladies from 10 countries on the start line and Denmark's Karen Hoff forever etched her name in the record books as canoeing's first female Olympic gold medalist.



WINTER PADDLING

What did paddlers do in the '50s when it froze over and they couldn't travel to warmer climate? Exactly what can be seen on the photo, which was taken in February, 1959. In the front Olympic Champions Janos Uranyi and his kayak partner, Laszlo Fabian behind him. The duo won the K2 10.000 gold medal in Melbourne in 1956.



GENDER BALANCING ON WILDWATER

More than fifty years after the first wildwater Worlds the women started competing in C1. The same kind of revolution happened simultaneously in other disciplines as well, so it came naturally to the downriver community.

There were seven ladies from six countries on the startline of the classic race in 2012 and four years later it was already up to 16 contestants. Initially France and Czechia dominated but now Italy is a major player too.



WHAT A COMEBACK!

Twenty years after making its Olympic debut at Munich 1972, canoe slalom returned to the Games in 1992. The IOC Session in 1988 agreed to its readmission after an insistent request by the organisers of Barcelona 1992. La Seu d'Urgell was built in 1990 to stage the four Olympic slalom events with Czechoslovakia, the United States, Italy and Germany winning the gold medals. The competition proved to be a huge success, leading to canoe slalom remaining on the Olympic programme ever since.

SLIDES AND KINGS

Some of the most entertaining show elements of freestyle are the ones when it breaks free of the rule-shackle during the intermissions of the competition. At these times the hilarious King of the Wave contest begins where there are no rules, athletes try to push each other off the wave and the one remaining is the King. Sometimes organisers prepare surprise set-ups to build on the playful nature of freestylers, like in Thun in 2009 where a waterslide provided the show (in photos).



OFF THE WATER

Portages are the most essential part of marathon canoeing. The excitement of sudden turn of events is concentrated around the portage. There are two different types: beach and pontoon. The length varies between 60 and 120 metres. Beach portages are more spectacular and require a lot of practice to master the disembarkation and the embarkation.

ICF PRESIDENTS

	in office	name	country
1	1924-1925	Franz Reinicke	Germany
2	1925-1928	Paul Wulff	Denmark
3	1928-1932	Franz Reinicke	Germany
4	1932-1945	Max W. Eckert	Germany
5	1946-1950	Jonas Asschier	Sweden
6	1950-1954	Harald Jespersen	Denmark
7	1954-1960	Karel Popel	Czechoslovakia
8	1960-1980	Charles de Coquereaumont	France
9	1980-1998	Sergio Orsi	Italy
10	1998-2008	Ulrich Feldhoff	Germany
11	2008-2021	José Perurena López	Spain
12	2021-	Thomas Konietzko	Germany

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	name	country	title
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10	Jean Zoungrana	FRA	European Canoe Association President
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14	John Edwards	CAN	Paracanoe Chair
15	Bridgitte Hartley	RSA	Athlete Committee Chair
16	Shao Yaping	CHN	Asian Canoe Confederation Continental Representative
17	Budiman Setiawan	INA	Asian Canoe Confederation Continental Representative
18	Ola Oluode	NGR	Confederation of African Canoeing Continental Representative
19	Ahmed Mahamoud Abdoukader	DJI	Confederation of African Canoeing Continental Representative
20	Branko Lovric	CRO	European Canoe Association Continental Representative
21	Andrej Jelenc	SLO	European Canoe Association Continental Representative
22	Jovana Stanojevic	SRB	European Canoe Association Continental Representative
23	Danielle Woodward OAM	AUS	Oceania Canoe Association Continental Representative
24	Maria de Fatima Fernandes Vara	BRA	Pan American Canoe Association Continental Representative
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27	Ruud Heijsselaar	NED	Canoe Marathon Committee Chair
28	Greg Smale	GBR	Canoe Polo Committee Chair
29	Terry Best	GBR	Canoe Freestyle Committee Chair
30	Colin Simpkins	RSA	Canoe Ocean Racing Committee Chair
31	Jane Gibson	GBR	Acting Medical and Anti Doping Committee Chair



a CENTURY of PADDLING

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