

Press Release – Slalom Canoe/Kayak World Championships - Seu d'Urgell, Spain, September 14, 2009

Young paddlers shine at Canada's best Slalom Kayak World Championships.

The Canadian Slalom Kayak Team had a lot to be proud of this weekend at the Slalom World Championships in Seu d'Urgell, Spain. A mix of veterans and rookies competed in what was Canada's best overall World Championships. Edmonton's David Ford, the 1999 World Champion on the same course, was looking to finish strong again, while half the team were youngsters looking to make a name for themselves.

Alberta's Ben Hayward had the races of his life. Inspired by some strong paddling by Canadian C1's on day two, the young Canadian kayakers stepped up under pressure in the qualifier with some impressive results. In a three minute stretch, Edmonton's Ben Hayward and John Hastings of Ottawa stormed down the qualifier course less than 1.5 seconds apart. They then had to wait for 50 boats to see if they would qualify for the top 20 semi-final. After an agonizing wait, Hayward finished in 17th position, while Hastings finished in 31st emphasizing just how tight the field was. David Ford had trouble on the day and finished well out of contention.

The following day, Saturday, the three Canadian men joined up in the Team race. They qualified easily for the top 10 final and were looking to build upon the Team's momentum from the day before. In the final, Hayward, the last of the three ran into trouble in gate 5 when a camera man accidentally lowered a camera boom into his way and actually hit him, sending him off course. A re-run was issued so the Canadian Team ran back to the top for a run following the last scheduled Team. They had a brilliant re-run till the big drop, 3/4's of the way down the course, and gave the 2nd and 3rd placed British and Spanish teams quite a scare. The Canucks were 2 seconds faster to the last split, but unfortunately a gate was touched in the last section, adding 2 seconds to their time and bumping them into 4th position, just .36seconds out of a medal. This result is the best ever for a Canadian Team and shows the depth and confidence of the squad.

Racing in the individual Semi-Finals, Sunday, along with Hayward, in Kayak, were James Cartwright of Ottawa, in C1, and Sindy Audet of Montreal, in C1women. Cartwright and Audet finished 18th and 15th respectively. Ben Hayward proved that the qualifier was no fluke and cemented himself as a name to watch by finishing 13th. This is the best Canadian Kayak finish since David Ford's Medals in 1999 and 2003 and shows the promise of the young man from Edmonton, and of the Canadian Program. Ben after the race; 'I'm just so happy right now, i can't wipe the smile off my face. This just proves we (Canada) are not slow and the rest of the World better watch out'.

Jessica Groeneveld, of Calgary, was the top Canadian women finishing in 43rd position. Groeneveld was the PanAm Champion earlier in the summer in Kananaskis and will be the Canadian to watch in the women's class. 'I had a lot of fun at my first World Championships' said Groeneveld after the race. 'It's hard to know what to expect at your first Worlds, and now I have a better idea of what we need to do to make the next step'. The other Canadian women Sarah Boudens, and Sara Potvin of Ottawa/Gatineau finished 47th and 50th respectively.

Alberta's Head Coach, Mike Holroyd, was borrowed by the Team, as an assistant coach for the event, as was Alberta native Brendan Curson, now the Saskatchewan coach. 'It's great to see our young Alberta athletes competing and succeeding at the International level' said Holroyd. 'When I look at these results and the depth of the programs here in Alberta and indeed across the country, it really gives me confidence that we are on the right track for 2012 and beyond'.