



INTERNATIONAL CANOE FEDERATION

Media Service

International Canoe Federation Media Release

No: beijing0805

**12 August
2008**

Slalom C1 semi-final and final report and photographs

Beijing - Michal Martikan returned to the top of the Olympic canoeing world on Tuesday, winning the gold medal in a thrilling men's C1 final, and adding another gold to the one he won at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Martikan was in a class of his own throughout the competition, using his composure, fluid technique and sheer strength on the difficult Shunyi course to post the two fastest times in the semi-final and final to secure victory despite a two-second time penalty on each of those runs.

"Winning the Olympic Gold medal still feels very special. It is a special Olympic feeling," said the 29 year old Slovakian, who had to settle for silver medals behind Frenchman Tony Estanguet in 2000 and 2004.

Martikan was quick to label the 30 million Euro Shunyi course as the most difficult in the world, and the toughest artificial course he has paddled on, but said the gates set up for the two days of competition had been relatively easy. "The water is always changing, which makes it very hard to race on," he said.

Scot David Florence sensationally snatched a silver medal for team Great Britain, as he raced consistently hard when other around him faltered in the pressure of the final. Had it not been for his elbow brushing gate three in the semi-finals, the 25 year would have won the gold medal on his Olympic debut.

Australia's Robin Bell secured the bronze medal after a fast clear run in the final that saw him leapfrog from fifth after the semi-final, to a place on the podium.

"Winning a medal is the cream of our sport," said a delighted Bell afterwards. "It feels brilliant to have one hanging around my neck."

In the final the challenge from the Czech Republic's Stanislav Jezek, who was second going into the final, imploded when he touched two gates, while Poland's Krzysztof Bieryt limped home last in the final after making a mess of the upstream gate three and then, when he was trying to make up for lost time, he missed gate fifteen, and was forced to return to the gate to avoid the ignominy of a fifty second penalty.

Spaniard Ander Elosegui was also denied a place on the podium by momentary lapses in concentration as he touched gates in both the semi-final and final.

In the semi-finals, two of the sports giants crashed out of contention in the charged atmosphere of the packed Shunyi white water stadium. Germany's Jan Benzien, who had to depose world number two Nico Bettge to earn the right to race the C1 for Germany at the Games, was caught by the vicious "Dragons Mouth" hole below gate five, and lost three decisive seconds as he battled to extricate himself from the turbulent water.

Then, the depending champion Tony Estanguet of France became the most dramatic casualty when a solitary touch on a gate resulted in two seconds being added to his time that saw him slide out of the top eight qualification cut for the final.

RESULTS OF FINAL OF OLYMPIC SLALOM MENS C1

- 1.Michal Martikan SVK 176.65
- 2.David Florence GBR 178.61
- 3.Robin Bell AUS 180.59
- 4.Ander Elosegui ESP
- 5.Stanislav Jezek CZE 182.29
- 6.Benn Fraker USA 183.14
- 7.Christos Tsakmakis GRE 186.67
- 8.Krzysztof Bieryt POL 200.21




SEMI-FINAL RESULTS

- 1.Michal Martikan SVK 88.92
- 2.Stanislav Jezek CZE 89.85
- 3.Krzysztof Bieryt POL 90.08
- 4.David Florence GBR 90.46
- 5.Robin Bell AUS 91.16
- 6.Christos Tsakmakis GRE 92.18
- 7.Ander Elosegui ESP 92.19
- 8.Benn Fraker USA 92.27

DID NOT QUALIFY

- 9.Tony Estanguet FRA 93.92
- 10.Alexander Lipatov RUS 94.16
11. Liming Feng CHN 94.64
- 12.Jan Benzien GER 95.15

ENDS

<i>Photo</i>	<i>Caption</i>	<i>Photographer</i>	<i>Click to download the hi-res pic</i>
	Slovakia's Michal Martikan en route to his second Olympic gold medal in the men's C1 competition.	Pic:Balint Vekassy / ICF	HERE
	Great Britains David Florence in action during the final of the Olympic men's C1 slalom competition.	Pic:Balint Vekassy/ ICF	HERE
	Olympic Slalom C1 medallists David Florence (left, GBR,silver), Michal Martikan (Centre, SVK, gold) and Robin bell (right, AUS, bronze).	Pic:Balint Vekassy / ICF	HERE

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