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Slalom Women's K1 semi-final and final report and photographs

Beijing - On a day when some of the finest female K1 slalom paddlers were cut down to size by the merciless Shunyi white water course, Slovakia's Elena Kaliska grabbed her second Olympic gold medal in succession with a staggering performance that proved she was peerless on this course.

Kaliska blitzed the churning channel with a clear run that was a full two seconds faster than the clear run she posted in the semi-finals, making her not only the fastest woman on the water, but also the only woman not to incur a penalty on either run.

She shrieked with delight as she crossed the line, earning Slovakia its third gold medal of the Games.

Silver went to the 26 year old Australian Jacqui Lawrence, who was the only other athlete to post a clear run in the final, earning her a medal on her Olympic debut. Austria's Violetta Oblinger Peters won the bronze medal.

The treacherous course was merciless on many of the women, few more so than the iconic two times gold medallist Stepanka Hilgertova of the Czech Republic. After being slow into the testing upstream gate three, she was thrashed in the hole above gate five, capsizing and struggling to Eskimo roll her boat upright in the turbulent water.

She was underwater as she passed through gate five, and the resultant fifty second penalty changed the entire face of the final. The disconsolate Hilgertova picked up two more fifties for missing subsequent gates as she digested the disaster that had befallen her, before gallantly completing the rest of the course at her normally high standard of clinical execution.

Classy French athlete Emilie Fer paid for a lapse in concentration as she missed gate seven, after battling with the strong lateral above gate five. That fifty second penalty together with two further touches shackled what seemed to be a genuine medal prospect for France.

That threw the final wide open, and suddenly Lawrence and Oblinger Peters were in the medals. Lawrence's medal is particularly notable given the cool-headed manner in which she responded to a potentially serious problem early on in her final.

Her boat spun out of a stopper sideways, and she tailwalked out of the hole and onto the side of the concrete canal. She kept her wits about her, and back paddled the kayak back into the current, successfully negotiating an unsighted gate backwards.

Seasoned Italian paddler Maria Cristina Gai Pron was another of the tough courses female victims as she picked up back-to-back fifty second penalties on the tough sequence through the upstream gate three and four, and the gate five below a nasty wave, and then added a further fifty to her score when she was catapulted sideways at "The Vortex" drop above gate fifteen.

Former British paddler Heather Corrie, racing for the USA was another casualty on this section of the course, and ended the final in eighth position after missing gate five altogether.

Kaliska said afterwards that she had been oblivious to the drama that had played itself out before her final run. "This was all about the head, the mind and mental strength. I was just concentrating on my own race."

Oblinger Peters said that the support from her husband Helmut Oblinger, who had raced earlier in the week for Austria in the men's K1 competition had helped her. "You have to be ready to improvise on a course like this," she said. "Everything he told me was useful to me."

Earlier in the day the semi-final result was revised following a protest by Kaliska at a two second penalty that was upheld, edging her into the top seeding for the final ahead of the French women Emilie Fer.

The semi-finals were dominated by the dramatic demise of world champion Jennifer Bongardt of Germany. She was mauled by the big hole called "the Dragon's Mouth" at gate 3 and 4, resulting in her losing time and then incurring a fifty second penalty.

In her desperate bid to try and salvage a place in the final she picked up another two second penalty, and then in the bottom part of the course, a further fifty second penalty as she realised that her chance at an Olympic medal had disappeared.

"The disappointment is huge," said Bongardt, before adding "but it means that someone else is going through to the final, which is kinda cool, so I am happy for them."

She was joined on the list of casualties in the semi-finals by Ariane Herde of the Netherlands, Maria Ferekidi of Greece, Kazakhstan's Yekaterina Lukicheva and Brazils Poliana De Paula.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS






WOMEN'S K1 FINAL

- 1.Elena Kaliska SVK 192.64
- 2.Jacqueline Lawrance AUS 206.94
- 3.Violetta Oblinger Peters AUT 214.77
- 4.Yuriko Takeshita JPN 219.30
- 5.Agnieszka Stanuch POL 221.08
- 6.Ariane Herde NED 231.99
- 7.Emilie Fer FRA 251.96
- 8.Heather Corrie USA 270.88
- 9.Stepanka Hilgertova CZE 344.41
- 10.Maria Cristina Giai Pron ITA 355.78

SEMI-FINAL

- 1.Elena Kaliska SVK 97.13
- 2.Emilie Fer FRA 98.50
- 3.Stepanka Hilgertova CZE 101.78
- 4.Jacqueline Lawrence AUS 103.40
- 5.Maria Cristina Giai Pron ITA 104.52
- 6.Yuriko Takeshita JPN 107.86 5
- 7.Violetta Oblinger Peters AUT 110.6
- 8.Heather Corrie USA 114.51
- 9.Agnieszka Stanuch POL 116.46
- 10.Ariane Herde NED 117.60
- 11.Maria Ferekidi GRE 118.99 DNQ
- 12.Yekaterina Lukicheva KAZ 128.08 DNQ
- 13.Jingjing Li CHN 161.79
- 14.Poliana De Paula BRA 168.29 DNQ
- 15.Jennifer Bongardt GER 203.29 DNQ

ENDS

Photo	Caption	Photographer	Click to download the hi-res pic
	Defending Olympic champion Elena Kaliska celebrates after crossing the line to win the women's K1 Olympic slalom gold medal at the Shunyi Olympic Canoeing Park on Friday.	Pic:Balint Vekassy / ICF	HERE
	Australian Jacqui Lawrence survived a scare in the final to claim the silver medal in the women's K1 Olympic competition.	Pic:Balint Vekassy/ ICF	HERE
	Violetta Oblinger Peters of Austria en route to her Olympic bronze medal in the final of the women's K1 competition.	Pic:Balint Vekassy/ ICF	HERE
	The medal winners Jacqui Lawrence (left, AUS, silver), Elena Kaliska (Centre, SVK, gold) and Violetta Oblinger Peters (Right, AUT, bronze).	Pic:Balint Vekassy/ ICF	HERE
	German star Jennifer Bongardt runs into trouble early on in her semi-final that led to her elimination from the women's K1 competition.	Pic:Balint Vekassy/ ICF	HERE

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