

Canoe Slalom

Canoe slalom is a race where paddlers have to negotiate their canoe or kayak down a 250m white water rapid against the clock. They race through a series of up to 25 gates, which are made up of red and green poles. The colour of the poles determines the direction that the paddlers must pass through gates.

Qualifying – the road to Rio

New Zealand has qualified two boats for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, with Luuka Jones finishing 11th at the world championships in London in September 2015 and Mike Dawson finishing 28th. Both paddlers were comfortably inside the top 15 nations in both the men's and women's K1.

New Zealand will name its Olympic canoe slalom team in early 2016 following national selection events in New Zealand and Australia.

"Slalom is a beautiful sport as it allows both a competitive element against the clock and an aesthetic element of chasing a full flow of water amid a cauldron of noise and atmosphere. It was an amazing experience to attend my first Olympics in London, more for the aesthetics, but I'd love to have a chance to chase that competitive side in Rio." – Top New Zealand male Mike Dawson

"It's such a privilege to compete at one Olympics so it's mind-blowing thinking about qualifying for my third. Beijing was an incredible eye-opener for me, while I had some bad luck in London. Hopefully, Rio will give me the chance to lay down a run I can tell my grandkids about." – Top New Zealand female Luuka Jones

Rio 2016 Canoe Slalom

Canoe slalom at the 2016 Olympics will take place 7-11 August at the purpose-built Olympic Whitewater Stadium, nestled between a set of hills at the Deodoro X-Park cluster, with its whitewater course fed by an artificial lake. The stadium is in the west of Rio de Janeiro, near the thick rainforest of Serra do Mendanha.

There will be 61 men and 21 women competing in canoe slalom at Rio. Three men's events and one women's event will be contested.



MEN'S EVENTS	WOMEN'S EVENTS
Kayak (K1) Canoe single (C1) Canoe double (C2) () = boat abbreviation	Kayak (K1)

There are two main disciplines: kayaking, where competitors are sitting down using a double-bladed paddle; and canoeing, which sees competitors kneeling and paddling alternate sides with a single blade.

Paddlers are timed down a twisting 250m-long course with between 18-25 gates. Green gates need to be negotiated downstream, while red gates (always placed in eddies) need to be paddled upstream. Most slalom courses take 80-100 seconds to complete for the fastest paddlers.

Each competitor can attempt two runs in the qualification round, with the fastest 15 paddlers making the semi-final and the fastest 10 from the semi-final making the final.

If the competitor's boat, paddle or body touches either pole of the gate, a time penalty of 2 seconds is added. If the competitor misses a gate completely, goes through the gate upside-down or goes through it in the wrong order, a 50 second penalty is given.

This will be the last Olympics with C2 racing – the double boat is being dropped for Japan in 2020, with women's C1 paddling being introduced to provide gender balance.

The Stars of Canoe Slalom

France's Tony Estanguet holds the record for most Olympic gold medals in singles slalom canoeing, winning the C1 at the Sydney 2000, Athens 2004 and London 2012 Games. Slovak brothers Peter and Pavol Hochschorner earned three consecutive C2 gold medals between 2000-2008 and added bronze in London.

Czech Republic paddler Štěpánka Hilgertová paddled K1 at six Olympics from 1992-2012, winning gold in 1996 and 2000. In a delicious twist, Aussie Jessica Fox won silver in London, consigning Hilgertová to fourth. Sixteen years earlier, in Atlanta, Hilgertová's gold pushed Fox's mum Myriam into the bronze medal position.

Fox's pedigree stretches even further – her father Richard, competing for Great Britain, finished fourth in the 1992 Olympics and won five World Championship titles, while her French mum Myriam won two world titles. Jessica Fox created history in 2014, winning both the K1 and C1 titles at the World Championships.

Another Czech paddler, Vavra Hradilek, won silver in the men's K1 in London. He frequently uses New Zealand as an off-season training base, having formed a firm friendship with top kiwi Mike Dawson since they competed in the junior ranks against each other.



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Olympic Sport Information



New Zealand's top paddlers, Luuka Jones and Mike Dawson, have each made finals in the world cup in recent years. Tauranga doctor, Ella Nicholas, competed for the Cook Islands in London and has qualified again for Rio along with her brother Bryden, also a doctor based in Tauranga

Did you know?

- The Rio de Janeiro Olympic Whitewater Stadium consists of two independently accessed channels: a Class III-IV Olympic standard competition channel that will be used for commercial rafting and other forms of whitewater recreation after the Games; and a Class II-III training channel.
- There's much to admire in the Benjamin Boukpeti story, which provided an unforgettable image from the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Biceps bulging in his tight white lycra top, the French-born Togo kayaker snapped his paddle-like kindling after winning an unlikely K1 bronze, erupting in primeval delight. No-one really cared that he'd only been to Togo once before, or that the small West African nation has just three rivers, mostly lined with brackish swamps. Unwanted by France, he threw allegiance behind the country of his father's birth and, in 87 seconds of controlled fury, captured Togo's first Olympic medal and the first by a black African in any water sport.
- By the time the Olympics roll around, New Zealand will have its first purpose-built artificial whitewater course, with the Wero Whitewater Park in South Auckland due to open in April 2016. Until now, aspiring paddlers have had to travel regularly to Australia, or further afield, to get quality training on Olympic-standard courses, but kiwi officials believe the Wero project will be a "game-changer".
- New Zealand has a proud history of producing top whitewater kayakers. However only four paddlers – Donald Johnstone in 1992, Owen Hughes in 1996, Luuka Jones in 2008 and 2012 and Mike Dawson in 2012 – have ever qualified for the Olympics, all of them in K1 boats. Jones finished 14th in 2012, while Dawson's 15th is the best by a kiwi male.
- With the exception of the altered riverbed of the Ocoee River in Atlanta in 1996, every Olympic venue for canoe slalom has been a man-made concrete channel.
- While canoe slalom basically uses the same type of craft as canoe sprint, the boats are designed differently. While in canoe sprint the boats are long and streamlined, in canoe slalom the boats are small, light and agile, allowing for greater manoeuvrability through the rapids.

Canoe Slalom terminology

- Kayak:** Competitors sit in a kayak and use a double-bladed paddle. Kayaks have a minimum length of 3.5m and minimum width of 60cm, and must not be less than 8kg.
- Canoe:** Competitors kneel in a canoe and use a single-bladed paddle. Single canoes have a minimum length of 3.5m and minimum width of 60cm, while double canoes must have a minimum length of 4.1m.
- Rapid:** A turbulent stretch of whitewater, usually caused by rocks or a narrowing of the channel.
- Eddy:** A current of water running in the opposite direction to the main current.
- Roll:** An emergency manoeuvre to right an upturned boat, based on the 'Eskimo roll'.
- Gate:** An obstacle, made up of either one or two vertically-hanging poles, which competitors must negotiate in the correct order.
- Penalty:** An added time penalty, of either 2 seconds for touching a gate or 50 seconds for missing it entirely.
- Swim:** When things go pear-shaped and a competitor exits their boat.

Timeline

The first kayaks were built by the Inuit and Aleut peoples nearly 8,000 years ago, from whale bones and animal skins, with seal bladders helping them float and whale fat used for waterproofing.

- Early 1800s** Kayaks arrived in Europe
- 1930s** Whitewater slalom was invented by the Swiss as a summer spin-off from slalom skiing.
- 1960** Whitewater slalom first appeared in New Zealand in the 1960s.
- 1965** First recorded canoe slalom New Zealand championship.
- 2008** The sport changed its name from whitewater slalom to canoe slalom.
- 1972** Canoe slalom made its Olympic debut as a demonstration sport at the Munich Games in 1972 on an artificial whitewater course in Augsburg. It was then dropped as an Olympic sport.
- 1992** Barcelona Olympics saw the return of canoe slalom to the Olympic competition schedule and it has been included at every Olympic Games since.