
New Zealand lightweights lead the way at World Cup in Italy

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Lightweight rowers led the way for the Kiwis on the opening session of the the second World Cup regatta in Italy on Friday night (NZ time).

Last year's world champions in the women's lightweight double scull, Julia Edward and Sophie MacKenzie, were among six Kiwi boats to qualify immediately for the semifinals on the opening day.

The duo won their heat in a time of six minutes 54.69 seconds, seeing off a stern challenge from Great Britain 2 to head into Saturday night's (NZ time) semis in Varese.

Last year's silver medal boat at the world champs, the NZ lightweight men's four, went straight to the semifinals with a heat win. The crew of James Hunter, Alistair Bond, James Lassche and Curtis Rapley won in 5:54.46 - just over a second quicker than China 2, who also gained direct entry into the semis.

Zoe McBride scored an impressive heat win in the lightweight women's single scull. The 19-year-old recorded a time of 7:35.04, with the top three advancing to the semifinals the following day. Fellow Kiwi sculler Jackie Kiddle also made it directly to the semis by finishing second in her semi.

The women's pair of Grace Prendergast and Kerri Gowler were second in their heat in 7:02.58, just over a second behind the United States 1 crew of Felice Mueller and Eleanor Logan. That allowed them to comfortably progress to Saturday night's semifinal.

A new women's double scull combination of Zoe Stevenson and Eve Macfarlane made a promising debut with a second-place finish behind the US in 6:54.72, with the top two in each of the three heats progressing to the semifinals.

With the top four in each heat of the men's single scull moving on to the quarterfinals later in the day, Mahe

Drysdale wasn't pushed in winning heat three in 6:53.44. **As also expected, Cuba's Angel Fournier Rodriguez won heat six**, Croatia's Damir Martin led home heat two while 2014 world champ Ondrej Synek won heat four - with New Zealand's Giacomo Thomas also making the quarters by finishing fourth in Synek's heat.

Fiona Bourke finished second in her debut in the women's single scull behind Austria's Magdalena Lobnig, who won in a quick 7:35.10. Only the four heat winners moved directly to the semifinals, with Bourke (7:43.44) forced into a repechage. Olivia Loe also had to contest the repechages after finishing sixth in her heat.

The new-look NZ women's eight found the competition hot among the world's elite when finishing last in their four-strong heat. The eight was 11 seconds behind winners the United States and had to join Germany, Great Britain and Australia in the repechages.

New Zealand men's eight had won the world under-23 title for the past two years and is also looking to break through into the finals in the senior ranks. They led their heat after 500 metres and were second at the halfway stage before finishing third behind heavyweights Germany and France. The top two went directly to the final and the Kiwis into the repechage.

The new lightweight men's double scull crew of Peter Taylor and Hayden Cohen were third in their heat behind Great Britain and the United States in the opening heat, with just the winners advancing to the semifinals and the rest heading to the repechages.

With the unbeaten men's pair of Hamish Bond and Eric Murray opting to attend just the final World Cup, Rowing NZ fielded a rookie men's crew of Paddy McInnes and Axel Dickinson. The duo were competitive in their first outing at the top level but fourth place in 6:54.83 consigned them to repechages later in the day.

The Kiwi men's quad of Jade Uru, John Storey, George Bridgewater and Karl Manson never recovered from a slow start and were fourth in 5:52.92, with just the winners advancing directly to the final while the NZ foursome joined nine other crews in the repechages.

George Howard, Alex Bardoul, Bobby Kells and Anthony Allen were fifth in their men's four heat and faced a repechage, as did the NZ women's quad of Sarah Gray, Georgia Perry, Erin-Monique O'Brien and Lucy Spoors after they were shut out of the top two places in their heat that made it straight into the final. Germany were dominant victors, with Poland equally well ahead of the Kiwis, who will still fancy their chances of making Sunday night's (NZ time) final.

Lightweight men's single sculler Adam Ling was third in his heat of the non-Olympic class event and also faced a repechage, while the men's double scull combination of Robbie Manson and Chris Harris withdrew from the regatta as both were suffering slight injuries.

New Zealand entered 15 boats at the three-day regatta - the second of three World Cups in Europe this season. The final World Cup of 2015 will be held in Lucerne next month, with the world champs in Aiguebelette, France from August 30-September 6, with the event doubling as the major qualifying regatta for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.
