

On the penultimate day of 2026 Paddle Europe Freestyle Championships the contestants competed in semi-finals, the scores deciding who will continue the competition tomorrow and who will settle on continuing the night in the loser's party. The wave seemed a bit more flushy, resulting in slightly lower points than yesterday. Nevertheless, the semi-finals got extremely intense and kept everyone waiting until the confirmation of the very last points of each category to see who made the cut to the finals. The hosting country Finland got a kayaker in the finals in three different categories, which has never happened before. Unlike in the preliminaries, the wave was deemed attainable, giving athletes the chance to paddle back into the feature after flushing. Because of the strength of the current, this can still take a while and flushing on the wrong side of the river can make it almost impossible to reach the wave within those 45 seconds, as only the right side can be used for kayaking into the wave from downstream.

C1M category opened the competition, finally letting these kayakers to show their skills. The category began straight from semi-finals with a full set of 10 contestants. The men's category had more contestants participating only on C1 category, and this dedication to a single discipline was reflected on their scores. The current European champion in C1, France's Tom Dolle secured the last ride of the finals for himself by getting the first place in the semis, followed by his fellow countryman Abel Thenevet, who got 8th place in the latest world championships. Great Britain's Matthew Stephenson paddled himself into finals in third place, while unluckily getting cut out of the K1 finals by 26,66 points, which seemed to be a magical number today. The second to last place in the finals went to Germany's Sebastian Kurt Rudolf Nelle, who was third in the latest Europeans and fourth in the Worlds. France's Jean-Yves Moustrou, who was second in the latest Europeans and seventh in the Worlds, secured his place in the finals on his last ride, dropping Ireland's Eoghan Kelly, who came fourth in Graz's Europeans.

Junior Women's K1 category also saw some quite tight cuts, with Germany's Marie Dimke taking the crown. Finland's Nea Rautio made it into finals on the second place, making a great highlight for her final junior year. Mea Minchin from Ireland got her McNastys to work and get the third final place, just 6,66 points ahead of Poland's Linn Schaefer, who showed just how much a creek boating background can help in tackling bigger waves. The last kayaker to be seen in this category tomorrow is Poland's Maja Kawczyniska, keeping that strong polish representation up in the finals. There were also three kayakers from Switzerland, which could mean a new start for a country that been lying low in freestyle for a while.

Some new kayakers were possibly being made in the morning as well as Norway's active kayaker, the leader of the cadets' event and a contestant herself, Valerie Bertrand invited young paddlers of 6-18 years to join her in an introduction to whitewater kayaking. The children came from the campsite or local kayaking clubs, and Anni Mykkänen from the Finnish team helped to translate to those that did not speak English. With the cadets' event,

this will hopefully start to grow the seeds of love of the waves into those little hearts, and a new generation of freestyle kayakers can keep the discipline evolving.



Valerie Bertrand, 12.06.2026

In the Women's category a young promise of Ireland, Leah Hough made it into finals with a score over 1000 points for her combined two best runs. She won the latest Europeans in the junior's category with a supreme score of 890 points and is one of the most promising young athletes in the scene. Another one could be Finland's Taru Terni, who gained the second place over current European vice champion Zofia Tula, even if only by 26,67 points. Austria's Jasmin Stangl-Brachnik kept the spectators in anticipation as she lifted herself into the top five from 8th place by her very last run, dropping Finland's Outi Lahti from the top five by those same 26,67 points. The last but not least one of the finalists is Isabella Wormall from Great Britain.

The men's K1 semi-finals were no less exciting. The current European Champion from Poland, Tomasz Czaplicki, kayaked himself into finals in the first place with an amazing last run, having a bit slower start to the competition. Visa Rahkola of Finland also secured his place in the finals in his very last ride, which was also the final ride of the day, after having dropped to the sixth place. Ireland's David McLure showed off his wave kayaking expertise and France's Tom Dolle – the current world champion – demonstrated his quick, snappy tricks, both men getting into finals. Poland's Bartosz Czauderna, who can be spotted talking to someone on the shore almost all the time, for he has coached so many kayakers, showed that his knowledge is not only theoretical but also practical by getting into finals in the fifth place.

After an intense day the athletes can enjoy themselves a well-earned round in the common sauna by the lake, or perhaps the one in their cabin, and have a refreshing plunge into murky waters. Maybe they will opt for a late-night shift in the competition wave instead, or just chill out with their friends, whatever helps them to prepare for the finals tomorrow.