

Wednesday morning saw the beginning of the 2026 Paddle Europe Freestyle Championships, greeting the competitors and organizers with sunshine. Scoring tricks required precision and strength to initiate the movements the right way and at the right place, forcing the extremely powerful feature to work with the athlete instead of against them. The place offered high risk of flushing but high reward of huge air, forcing the competitors to carefully strategize for their runs. The whole venue could be summarized with "high effort, great reward", since the athletes have had to travel over 500 kilometers through Finnish forests, usually taking up to 7 hours by car, just to reach the place. And this is only from Helsinki, where the participants have first had to travel from all over Europe. But the tranquility of the surrounding nature and the light nights that allow for a midnight set are well worth it.

In the women's category, favorites for the gold medal: Zofia Tula and Leah Hough took the first two places, with Finland's Taru Terni pleasantly surprising the home crowd by taking the third spot. Zofia Tula has won silver at the latest Europeans, and Leah Hough won the junior women's by a great margin. Taru Terni has also recently transitioned from juniors into women's, and she has proven to have great potential for high scores. The rest of the semi-finalists are UK's Isabella Wormall, Poland's Agata Sobieraj Jakubiec – who came fifth in the latest Europeans –, Austria's Jasmin Stangl-Brachnik, Germany's Naya Daruwala, Spain's Mireia Serres Segarra, Finland's Outi Lahti and Spain's Nuria Fontane i Maso. The hosting country Finland getting two women into semi finals is historical, both of the athletes being excited about advancing in the competition and hoping to score even better in the semis.

Junior men's results were slightly more surprising, the sheer level of skill and high scoring runs amazing at least the crowd, possibly even the athletes themselves. Still, frontrunner Jamie Rowland – who came fifth in last World Championships – did not unfortunately make it to semis this time. The first six places went to Germany's Lukas Ramsayer, UK's Sam Worgan and Math Cradock, France's Arthur Genovese and Manyh Hammacha and Norway's Noah Pedersen, who all scored over 1000 points on their combined best two runs. The rest of the semi finalists are UK's Jack Purcell, Ireland's Henri Kearney, Germany's Felix Ramsayer and UK's Michael Rose.

Tomorrow we will see how K1 men will perform on this challenging place, and the C1 category will open with the women's semi finals. The junior men will take the best half of them to finals and leave the other half to wait for their next change.