



For Immediate Release

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Inje, Korea: As the first day of World Rafting Championships action came to a close at the International Rafting Federation's (IRF) 10th anniversary, held on Inje, Korea's Naerinchon River, Brazil edged out Japan 2:38:21 to 2:41:72 for top honors for the men, and Canada out-paddled New Zealand 2:47:36 to 2:50:38 for the women after a heated head-to-head sprint event between a record 30 international countries.

"Sprint is our strong point, so we wanted a top finish," says Brazil coach Jean Claude Razel, whose team picked up 300 points for the win. "It was a very long run and tiring—I was afraid we would tire out, but our paddlers were able to finish strong." Adds Canada Women's Team Captain Valerie Pilote: "We've worked hard on our power since the last World Championships, and we had a nice start and a good line and were able to keep to our plan. New Zealand is a very strong team to beat."

There were a lot of strong teams to beat in the 10th anniversary of the IRF, with more entrants than ever before. "It's great to see so many countries here," says IRF President Rafael Gallo. "New countries like Japan, Brazil and Indonesia are giving the traditional powerhouses a run for their money." Indeed, Japan used the low water levels to surge to a semi-finals showing, with Indonesia making it into the top 16 after the Time Trials.

Local organizers ensured the event received the fanfare it deserves with an Olympic-style Opening Ceremony celebration at the Inje soccer stadium, complete with fireworks, folk dancers and Korea's top taekwondo demonstration. With sponsorship from UniOne Communications, Inje County and the Gangwon Province, the event has 20 cameras on hand from ESPN Asia to televise the event worldwide, wireless solar-powered speakers lining the course for spectators and a remote-controlled blimp flying a camera over the event site.

For the competitors, however, it was all business, adapting strategies to take advantage of the technical, low flows. "There are always winners and losers, and one tiny error is all it took to separate them on this course," says Gallo, adding that rains are forecasted to descend upon the area to bring river levels up for the slalom and downriver events the next two days.