

South African is canoe world champ

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The delighted East Rand star, who announced his arrival on the marathon world stage by winning a bronze medal in the 2004 World Marathon champs, was locked in a ferocious tussle with two Spanish boats, Emilio Merchan Alonso, and Busto, in the final kilometre.

First Busto challenged for the lead, several hundred metres from the line, but could not subdue Rubenstein and fell back. Then Alonso challenged and failed, allowing Rubenstein to cruise across the line with more than a boat length to spare.

But it was Rubenstein's superior sprint speed in the dying stages that won him the most prized medal in world marathon canoeing, despite the odds stacked against him.

The exhilarated youngster threw his arms into the air in celebration, before heading to shore to collect a South African flag, and paddled back to the packed grandstand flying his national flag proudly from his paddle.

His brother Cedric, and five relatives who had driven from Scotland to France to watch him race watched the thrilling finish, and shared in the emotional moment with him afterwards.

"The pain is not as sore as it usually is at this stage!" said a delighted Rubenstein shortly afterwards. "It really hasn't sunk in properly. Perhaps after the awards ceremony it will hit me. Actually all I am thinking about is recovering properly so that I can do well in the K2 race tomorrow."

“It was a classic race. A clean, very hard race,” he added. “It was fantastic to have Busto and Merchan Alonso paddle up to me afterwards and congratulate me so warmly, so sincerely. We all had our chances and it just seemed to work out perfectly for me on the day.”

Rubenstein was part of a four boat bunch that broke away at the end of the first lap, and jockeyed for position throughout the needle race. “My only mistake was getting stuck in the back of the diamond coming into the last portage,” said Rubenstein. “That meant that I had to wait for the others to get out, and had to run like crazy to catch up.”

“They tried to drop me by putting in a very strong interval, but I managed to catch them. Then they gave me the pull about five hundred metres from the finish. I actually slowed it right down, and then when I hit the 500 metre mark, which I know so well from sprinting, I cranked it up.”

“They both challenged me, and I just kept concentrating on my technique and pacing, and they couldn’t get past me. I tried so hard not to get distracted them, even though there was so much cheering and screaming from the crowd. I just stayed focused my my stroke till I got to the line.”

Rubenstein regards himself primary as a sprinter, committed to qualifying a K1 for South Africa at the Beijing Olympics. He enjoyed a stellar sprint season in Europe earlier in the year, which reflected that he is on track to securing his status as an Olympian.

South Africa’s Hank McGregor, the 2003 world champion, finished in the third bunch, in ninth place.