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UCT's Klopper not intimidated by the big guys at world canoeing championships



Jordan Klopper

Photo: Supplied

University of Cape Town (UCT) first-year student and under-23 canoe sprint world championships contender, Jordan Klopper, is not intimidated by competing against seniors at the 2025 International Canoeing Federation's (ICF) junior and U23 canoe sprint world championships, scheduled for 23–27 July 2025 in Portugal.

The 18-year-old BCom student will be up against fierce competition, in his sixth time representing South Africa.

"This year I'm in a new age group (U23); and I'm quite young, as I'm only 18, and will be racing against guys much older than me. And I know they'll be very strong, because the

European competition is fierce; but going in, I have nothing to lose and everything to gain. I've got all this experience, and I'm putting myself out there. And when you put yourself out there, you open yourself up to criticism as well; but for me, it's about giving it my best shot representing South Africa," he said.

"I've been canoeing for about nine years now. I was 10, in grade four, and it rubbed off on me from a friend who used to come to school and tell me about the training regimes. I went to my parents to ask if I could give it a try – and ever since then, I haven't looked back," Klopper said.

He started representing the country in 2021, when he was in grade nine. As a Gauteng resident, he had to travel to KwaZulu-Natal for trials. "I remember seeing it as an opportunity to represent the South African sports federation and go overseas; and I sat with my parents and coach and quizzed them about potentially giving it a shot and seeing where it would take me."

When he went to the trials event, he went there "with no expectations". He participated in two categories: K1, which refers to a kayak with a single paddler, and K2, designed for two paddlers. He came first in the K2 500m and 200m, and second in the K1 5 000m, 500m and 200m. "I was chuffed about that," he said.

Klopper has managed to qualify for and represent the South African sprint team every year since then.

"The aspect I enjoy the most about canoeing is that it gets a person to be outdoors; it's a brilliant way for me to clear my mind. Because life got busy with schoolwork, and now it's even busier with university. I find it's a good way to get fresh air and improve your health and well-being.

"At the world champs, I'll be competing in the 200m and 500m K1 events. It's a lot about explosive energy, power and harnessing your technique. It also requires a strong mindset. Sport has both the physical and the mental aspect, which is just as big. So, as I think about my 500m, I know it's going to burn; I know it's going to hurt. But you learn to enjoy that, and to be very efficient by pacing yourself," Klopper said.

UCT student life

Klopper credits the support he has received from his parents which is why he's been able to keep his head above water for so long. He added: "They've given me the opportunity to go overseas and race. They are the backbone of this success." He also admitted that his first year at UCT has not hindered him from pursuing his "first love", although there have been adjustments to be made.

"UCT has been an adjustment and a half. Moving out of home has been big, and a challenge; however, it's one I've been willing to face. I've really enjoyed the student life at UCT. It's an amazing institution with lots of opportunities, and I've enjoyed my experience so far."

2025 results so far:

SA trials 2025: (first year U23)

K1 1 000m; K1 500m – 4th U23; K1 200m – 1st
K2 1 000m – 1st U23 (2nd overall in senior men)
K2 500m – 2nd U23 (8th overall senior men)

Auronzo regatta – Italy (June 2025)

K1 1 000m: 15th overall (senior men)
K1 500m: 15th overall (senior men)
K1 200m: Semi-final 7th (senior men)

Story by Kamva Somdyala, UCT News

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