

LAST LAP DRAMA THRILLS BELGIAN CROWD AS MALHEIRO SUÑE WINS IN KZ, HOME VICTORY FOR GOLDSTEIN IN KZZ

24 May 2026



The FIA Karting season opener for gearbox karting lived up to all expectations as the experience, physicality and elite karting skill offered by the premier KZ and KZZ categories put on an epic racing spectacle for the packed Belgian grandstands this afternoon.

This morning's running saw the KZZ and Academy Junior polesitters reclaim their positions at the front of the grids and Gustafsson ahead in KZ as the scorching Karting Genk circuit hosted three memorable finals this afternoon.

In KZ, elbows were out with opportunistic moves and exceptional defending treating us to a thrilling show from a cast of European and World Champions who make up this year's KZ grid. An electric final was marked by dramatic contact between the CRG teammates of Malheiro Suñe and Gustafsson. Malheiro Suñe went on to take the chequered flag and the first race win of the 2026 Mondokart.com FIA Karting European Championship for KZ.

KZZ delivered a close final race which ended in home hero Elie Goldstein crossing the line with just half a second to spare to the joy of the Genk crowd. Adding great significance to his emotional win today, Elie is grandson of François Goldstein, who held the all-time record for CIK-FIA World Karting titles for many years, having won the supreme title five times between 1969 and 1975. With the top three drivers in the table now separated by just four points, the KZZ championship is wide open as we head to round 2 in Sarno, Italy.

Meanwhile, in Academy Junior, the young drivers showed promising signs of development and progress over the weekend as they grew accustomed to the track and warm conditions. After Coigny put Switzerland back on the front row for the start of this afternoon's final he sped to the chequered flag without facing any challenge leaving Switzerland on top of both the junior and senior FIA Karting Academy Trophy standings.

KZ

A final shuffle of the pack during the single super heat saw Gustafsson defending his 21-point lead in the standings and off the line the Swedish driver initially did well to race into a lead and leave Albanese behind him to defend against a rapid Stan Pex. Gustafsson soon felt the pressure as Pex made his move on Albanese, overtaking him into second position in both the heat and the final intermediate classification.

In the closing stages Pex couldn't mount a strong enough challenge for the lead, leaving Gustafsson to claim pole position for this afternoon's final with Pex and Albanese starting close behind.

Elsewhere in the super heat, Van Walstijn made up over 10 spots in the first couple of laps as he chased the leading pack but after contact with Palomba the World Champion dropped out of the race to continue his bad run of luck in the European Championship.

Gustafsson was handed a 5-second time penalty following his super heat for a jump start but retained his lead in the classification and took pole position on the grid for the final race. As the KZ engines revved and eyes turned to the lights a pack of immense talent and experience lined up behind Gustafsson ready to pounce and pounce they did.

Gustafsson had a nightmare start off the line with Pex quickly capitalising to take the race lead metres into the race. Gustafsson slipped down further into third with Malheiro Suñe separating him from the lead as Hiltbrand sat in fourth spot waiting to pick up any spoils from the frontrunners. Malheiro Suñe challenged Pex by the third lap to snatch the lead as the race intensity began to build.

Van Walstijn started well following his heat and super heat setbacks to gain nine spots in the opening laps after beginning the final in 23rd position. He ended the race in 11th place, a respectable comeback but not the weekend he would have hoped for. Emilien Denner also started well overtaking Albanese into sixth spot after starting in 14th.

Following the initial intensity, the race settled towards its midpoint as Malheiro Suñe led by half a second with Stan Pex and Gustafsson holding position behind choosing their moment to strike which they did on lap 14 of 23. Gustafsson won out in the battle for second which then brought Denner and Hiltbrand into play in a widening battle for the top five positions.

Gustafsson used this momentum to launch an attempt to retake the race lead from his CRG teammate as we awaited whether any move between them would be clean. Gustafsson sat steady behind Malheiro, managing tyres and looking for his opportunity to strike as the karts of Denner and Pex drew ever closer.

By the penultimate lap, the top four formed a close pack with all podium places up for grabs. Gustafsson finally showed his cards as he moved on his teammate who duly defended resulting in contact between the two, ending Gustafsson's race as he went spinning. Dramatic scenes unfolded on track to the audible gasp of the crowd as Malheiro Suñe continued his race to take the chequered flag.

Denner and Pex both crossed the line all within a second of Malheiro Suñe, a mighty effort from Denner to gain 12 spots into second position. However, as he drove his kart into parc fermé Denner was handed a front fairing penalty, a painful end to his otherwise successful race – all of which resulted in Danilo Albanese being promoted to the podium.

Elsewhere in the race, Hiltbrand, who was at one point in hot contention fell victim to a track incident which ended his race early, the only consolation being that he was facing investigation for a jump start as the lights went out. Spigel struggled again during the final, dropping eight spots at one point during the race only to recover slightly to cross the line in 16th position.

Adrian Malheiro Suñe, CRG Racing Team, said: "It was a difficult 26 laps. On the final lap I have a little contact with my teammate, but he doesn't leave me space and it wasn't possible for me to do anything. I like Sarno and I think I am fast there."

Result of the KZ final

1. Adrian Malheiro Suñe (ESP, CRG Racing Team)
2. Stan Pex (NED, SP Motorsport)
3. Danilo Albanese (ITA, KR Motorsport)
4. Daniel Vasile (ROU, Maranello Kart)
5. Emilien Denner (FRA, Formula K)

Provisional driver standings of the 2026 Mondokart.com FIA Karting European Championship (KZ) after Round 1

1. Adrian Malheiro Suñe (ESP, CRG Racing Team) 89 points
2. Stan Pex (NED, SP Motorsport) 88 points
3. Danilo Albanese (ITA, KR Motorsport) 85 points
4. Daniel Vasile (ROU, Maranello Kart) 52 points
5. Maksim Orlov (Sodikart) 48 points

Provisional team standings of the 2026 Mondokart.com FIA Karting European Championship (KZ) after Round 1

1. CRG Racing Team – 128 points
2. SP Motorsport – 103 points
3. KR Motorsport – 82 points
4. Sodikart – 57 points
5. Tony Kart Racing Team – 51 points

KZ2

This morning's super heats began with Teo Blin defending his advantage from an on-form Schleimer who had demonstrated yesterday his potential to clinically overtake around the Genk circuit. Schleimer made his move early in the super heat to take the lead from Blin before Morgatto came into play to overtake firstly Blin and then Schleimer into the lead. Blin dramatically retired at the midpoint of the super heat leaving him sliding down the classification into third position with Schleimer and Morgatto benefitting.

When Lehouck began the second super heat he faced a 58-point gap to overturn, with the French driver knowing fifth place or above would secure him pole for this afternoon's final. Lehouck far surpassed this bar during the second heat, quickly building a considerable gap out front that extended to over six seconds when he crossed the line in a less eventful super heat which reclaimed pole position for him ahead of this afternoon's final.

When the lights went out for the KZ2 final, Lehouck, alongside Schleimer, looked to take the inside line into turn one with Schleimer immediately looking to make an advantage which didn't work out as Morgatto, Goldstein and Tani all overtook into the top positions.

A poor race start for Blin abruptly spelled the end of his weekend and before he was able to build upon his great form this weekend as he started the day atop the classification. Heartbreak for the driver who'll be looking to bounce back for the second round in Sarno.

As the grandstands roared the home hero on, Goldstein ended the second lap with one of the moves of the weekend to slip straight through into second position and close behind the rear bumper of Lehouck who looked to be in danger as a close pack of four formed behind him.

Goldstein, who started in fifth, quickly made his move out of turn one and took the race lead, building a gap and displaying his potential across this track in his KZ2 machine. The drama at the front didn't end there as Morgatto and then Tani followed in the slip stream of Goldstein to push Lehouck into third position as the polesitter struggled in the early stages of the final.

Fellow French drivers Girardet and Broggio also suffered a poor start, losing spots to Macia and Civico Espona who found pace in the heat of Belgium. KZ2 newcomer James Anagnostiadis initially climbed seven spots by the midpoint of the race, his first FIA Karting gearbox final. However, a 5-second time penalty for causing a collision left him in 23rd position in the race classification and 21st place in the championship.

By lap 15 of 23, Lehouck led a pack of three and was forced into defending again as the race leaders sped away to build a five second gap. The karts of Schleimer and Macia were behind Lehouck and hungry for a piece of the action at the front, counting down the laps until they could catch the bumper of Tani who was holding third spot. Macia finally made his move, firstly on Schleimer and then on Lehouck to push into fourth and chase down the race leaders but facing a large seven second gap to close.

As Macia broke free, Schleimer ended up being dragged into a battle for sixth, seventh and eighth, a nightmare scenario for the driver who started on the front row. The German not only managed to cling on to the sixth spot but found some late pace to challenge Lehouck in fifth, a track battle we were expecting at the front of the race but enjoyed nonetheless as the race neared its conclusion.

As the final lap approached, Goldstein protected his half second gap to Morgatto and crossed the line to the elation of the home crowd who were treated to a memorable race from talented drivers who showed the very best of the KZ2 class.

Goldstein ends his weekend atop the standings, but a close field of entries leaves the championship wide open and if this weekend's unpredictability is anything to go by, the second and final round will shape up to be an unmissable thriller.

Elie Goldstein, TBKart, said: "It means a lot to me this race. It was one of the toughest races of my life. It means a lot to me because my family was here today to support me. I tried to pass in the beginning of the race and escape from the field but it was like timed qualifying for 23 laps! I would like to thank TBKart for the great material and the work we have done so far since now 3 years."

Result of the KZ2 final

1. Elie Goldstein (BEL, TBKart)
2. Matheus Morgatto (BRA, CPB Sport)
3. Kimi Tani (FIN, La Motorsport di Nordera Luca)
4. Daniel Maciá (ESP, CRG Racing Team)
5. Arthur Lehouck (FRA, KR)

Provisional driver standings of the 2026 Mondokart.com FIA Karting European Championship (KZ2) after Round 1

1. Elie Goldstein (BEL, TBKart) 80 points
2. Arthur Lehouck (FRA, KR) 77 points
3. Matheus Morgatto (BRA, CPB Sport) 76 points
4. Maximilian Schleimer (GER, Tony Kart) 67 points
5. Kimi Tani (FIN, La Motorsport di Nordera Luca) 61 points

Provisional team standings of the 2026 Mondokart.com FIA Karting European Championship (KZ2) after Round 1

1. CPB Sport – 125 points
2. Tony Kart Racing Team – 111 points
3. CRG Racing Team – 95 points
4. KR Motorsport – 86 points
5. TBKart Racing Team – 81 points

Academy Junior

This morning's final heats started with Zoltan Coigny attempting to recover his polesitter lead after ending Saturday in third position in the standings. The Swiss driver made a real statement during his final qualifying heat, breaking away from the pack and quickly building a considerable lead of over 3 seconds, crossing the line to reclaim his lead as his nearest rival John Han prepared to hit the track.

John Han made up places into third position by the closing stages of his final heat which left him one point behind Coigny in the standings, leaving the driver from Hong Kong with two laps to overtake Juozaitis and secure position one for this afternoon's final. Han ultimately couldn't make up the half second gap handing Zoltan Coigny his lead back and pole position for this afternoon's final race with Han starting alongside him on the front row as the lights went out.

Coigny got away well and by the mid-point of the first lap he had built a gap in a replication of the start from fellow Swiss driver Genolet in the Academy Senior two weeks ago. In the podium positions Psaroudakis slipped into second position at the expense of John Han who fell to third spot before the Hong Kong entry recovered second position by lap seven.

Shimbashi, who had a positive run of heats yesterday, continued his form into the final making up positions to fourth by the midpoint of the race as he closed in on a podium spot. As Coigny had built a 2.3-second gap to second position this left Han and Psaroudakis turning to defensive mode.

Psaroudakis clung on as we entered the closing stages of the race with the interval falling to just 0.2 seconds to the Japanese driver behind. The battle brought Pentell into play, challenging Shimbashi and Psaroudakis for the final podium spot. The two drivers exchanged third spot multiple times as a hugely entertaining track battle unfolded. Right until the final lap the third-place position was in play until Kevin Pentell gave it everything to secure the spot by just 0.057 seconds, a total of five place gains during the final.

While that race for third spot unfolded, Coigny continued his cruise towards the chequered flag at the front, easing his kart around the track to cross the line 2.7 seconds ahead of John Han who couldn't ultimately mount a challenge to the Swiss driver.

The last 2 laps didn't just see action at the front of the race, right across the pack we were treated to some of the best racing of the weekend with overtakes the junior drivers can be proud of. Other big gainers during the final included Pizarro Gorela who made up 19 spots and Rentka who made up 12 spots.

Nielsen also made up ground following a bumpy weekend to finish 16th and Gringet ended his weekend with an eighth place finish in a mixed weekend for the Belgian entry on home soil.

The first rounds of the 2026 FIA Karting Academy Trophy ended with Switzerland leading both junior and senior categories as we head to Mülsen next month to see if Genolet can hold onto his lead in the senior class.

Zoltan Coigny, said: "The start of the week was hard as we were not really fast but then we found the right setup so qualifying went really good, obviously pole now putting it on pole again for the final is really good and having the final win is just a bonus on top of all of that."

Driver standings after Round 1 of the 2026 FIA Karting Academy Trophy Junior:

1. Zoltan Coigny (SUI) 75 points
2. John Han (HKG) 67 points
3. Georgios Psaroudakis (GRE) 53 points

The 2026 Mondokart.com FIA Karting European Championship (KZ, KZ2 and Academy Junior) continues in July as we travel to Sarno, Italy over 2-5 July 2026. The third round of the European Championship for OK, Junior and Academy Senior drivers continues next month in Mülsen, Germany where Noah Baglin could clinch the European title during the penultimate round.

All rounds of the Mondokart.com FIA Karting European Championship are LIVE and FREE on the FIA Karting YouTube channel.