



PRESS RELEASE
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Thailand's Wanraya Wannapong (age 11!) wins 2018 China Drone Racing Open

Shenzhen, China, 13 May 2018 – Eleven-year-old Wanraya Wannapong won the 2018 China Drone Racing Open on Sunday 13 May, beating off a strong field of 61 other pilots from China and beyond – most much older than her.

The drone pilot from Thailand, who is still in junior school, was very happy with her win, which came after three days of competition in Shenzhen, the city known as a global drones hub.

"I am very happy," she said afterwards. "I was nervous going into the final, especially as in the last minute my battery power died on my controller, so I had to plug in to a mains supply, that was nerve-racking. But now I have won I am very happy."

The 2018 China Drone Open in Shenzhen Universiade stadium was a test event for the first FAI World Drone Racing Championships, which are being held in the same venue later this year, 1-4 November 2018.

The racing started on Friday 11 May 2018, with four Qualification rounds featuring 62 pilots. On the Saturday the field was split, with the top 32 pilots heading into the Elimination rounds.

South Korea's MinChan Kim, 14, who had topped Qualifying with an average lap-time speed of 25.575 seconds also won the first Elimination round. However, as pilots moved into the quarter-finals, he crashed out, leaving the field open for other pilots to move through.

In drone racing four pilots race against each other in each race, with the two fastest pilots moving through to the next round and the two slowest being cut.

By Sunday afternoon the scene was set for a nail biting semi-final and final, with 11-year-old Wanraya Wannapong from Thailand staying cool to win her place in the final among three Korean pilots.

One of only two girls in the competition, she flew strongly to earn her place in the final. FAI Jury President Bruno Delor said: "She flew consistently with no mistakes. Not going too fast, but steady."

At 4.45pm on Sunday the final four pilots took their places for their final round.

Wannapong, Junwhi Rhee (KOR), Beomjin Choi (KOR) and SangHan Lee (KOR) donned their headsets and armed their drones, ready to fly three laps as quickly as they could.

As the buzzer sounded for the race start all four drones leapt out of their launch pads and onto the course. However, two pilots crashed almost immediately, within the first six seconds, wiping them out of the contest.

Wannapong was then in the lead and held it, despite Choi from Korea putting on an impressive display of flying as he raced to catch up. Closing in he almost pulled it off, but hit a gate and crashed out in the final seconds. Moments later Wannapong landed her drone with a flourish after completing a clean three rounds.

As the first-person view goggles came off the Korean pilots talked excitedly between each other, as Wannapong composed herself amid a barrage of cameras and applause. Later she said she was “very happy” with her win.

The competition closed with a medal ceremony in the middle of Shenzhen Universiade stadium, before the 62 pilots headed home.

The venue, Shenzhen Universiade Sports Centre is a 30,000-capacity stadium and featured a purpose-built drone-racing track, specially built for the China Drone Racing Open.

Bengt Lindgren, Executive Director of the FAI, said he had been “really impressed” with the track. “There are fast parts and there are slow parts ... so they really have to fly it accurately otherwise they lose.”

FAI Jury President Delor said it had been a good competition. “All the competitors seemed happy. Looking ahead to the World Championships later this year we will have up to 120 competitors, which is double compared with today, and we will have 30-35 countries. So it will be a much bigger event.”

FAI Secretary General Susanne Schoedel said the 2018 China Drone Racing Open paved the way for a successful and exciting FAI Drone Racing World Championships in November.

She said: “FAI is looking forward to welcoming many more pilots from across the world to the FAI World Drone Racing Championships to China in November.”

She added: “Thanks to our national member federation the Aero Sports Federation of China, the city of Shenzhen and Kasai Group.” Kasai Group are owners of the Shenzhen Universiade stadium.

The FAI World Drone Racing Championships will take place at the Shenzhen Universiade Sports Centre in Shenzhen, China, 1-4 November 2018.

Editor’s note

Competition website: faiworldcupshenzhen2018.aero

Pictures (free for editorial purpose): http://bit.ly/China_Open2018

About FAI:

FAI, the World Air Sports Federation (www.fai.org), is the world governing body for air sports and for certifying world aviation and space records. The FAI was founded in 1905 and is a non-governmental and non-profit-making organisation recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

FAI activities include Aerobatics, Aeromodelling, Airships, Amateur-Built and Experimental Aircraft, Balloons, Drones, Gliding, Hang Gliding, Helicopters, Manpowered Flying, Microlights, Parachuting, Paragliding, Paramotors, Power Flying and all other Aeronautic activities and Space records.

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