

CU Skiers Third After First Day Of Utah Invitational

PARK CITY, Utah—The University of Colorado ski team opened its 2011 collegiate season here Saturday with the giant slalom races of the Utah Invitational, ending in third after the day's pair of races with the top four teams within 23 points of each other. The Buffs finished the day with six top 11 finishes in men's and women's action.

Denver leads after the giant slalom races with 232 points, with host Utah (216), the Buffs (213) and New Mexico (209.5) are all within seven points in second, third and fourth respectively. Alaska Anchorage is currently in fifth place with 159.5 points, followed by Montana State (134) and Westminster College (100).

The Rocky Mountain Intercollegiate Ski Association remains at seven alpine members this season after Nevada dropped its program while the league picked up Westminster College as an associate member. Westminster is an NAIA school based in Salt Lake City and while they will compete in RMISA races, they will not be able to qualify for the NCAA Championships.

"College racing is all about measuring strengths and weaknesses and assessing our competition," CU head coach **Richard Rokos** said. "Because we had quite a few skiers fall in the first runs today, we had to proceed cautiously in the second run on both sides. Both teams were limited in their second runs and we had to play it somewhat conservatively."

Even playing it conservatively, the CU women won the giant slalom race on the strength of a second place finish from junior **Sara Hjertman**, who finished in 1:59.74, giving her the best finish in collegiate career. She was followed closely by sophomore **Erika Ghent**, who took fourth place in 2:000.58, her seventh career top five finish with five of those seven finishes coming in giant slalom action. Senior **Carolina Nordh** used the sixth-fastest second run in the field to move up from 23rd after the first run to finish 11th with a time of 2:02.94.

"Our women did a super job," Rokos said. "They all skied well but they didn't all finish their run. They stepped up under pressure and kept us in the mix."

CU captain and senior **Katie Hartman** crashed near the end of her first run, injuring her shoulder. She finished the run but didn't ski in the second run. She will not compete in the slalom races Sunday but Rokos believes she may be able to participate in the Montana State Invitational next weekend.

"Katie took a hard tumble," Rokos said. "She was probably having the fastest run in the field. It's a setback for us, she has had such a busy schedule recently with her Nor-Am races, she will rest up tomorrow and hopefully she can get back next weekend in Montana."

Freshman **Kirsten Cooper** finished 16th in her first race as a collegian, coming in with a two-run time of 2:04.15 and senior **Ashley Babcock**, racing for the first time since the 2009 season, took home 22nd with a time of 2:10.93. Junior **Jenny Allen** was in sixth place after the first run, but did not finish her second run, as did **Khyla Burrows**, who was in 31st after the first run and did not finish the second.

On the men's side, the Buffs placed three skiers in the top 10 but finished fourth in the race, scoring 96 points for the Buffaloes. After the first run, the Buffs were down to four skiers, three who didn't fall in the first run, all knowing they had to finish to score points for the Buffs. CU was led by senior **Gabriel Rivas** was in second place after the first run but dropped to finish seventh with a total time of 1:57.47.

Freshman **Andreas Haug** took home ninth place in his first race as a collegian with a time of 1:57.78 and right on his heels was junior **Taggart Spenst**, who finished 10th just five-one hundredths behind at 1:57.83. Spenst's performance was clutch for the Buffs given his starting position of 28th. He was able to move up into the top 15 after the first run and then into his top 10 finish after the second run.

Sophomore transfer **Max Lamb**, who skied and trained on this course as a member of the Utah ski team last year, fell near the bottom of his first run, essentially taking him out of contention. He didn't finish the second run. Junior **Eric Davis**, back after injuring his shoulder during the RMISA Championships last season, fell and did not finish the first run, as did freshman **Fletcher McDonald**.

"We trained here for two days and the guys had some good runs in training," Rokos said. "I thought the way Eric was skiing that he could easily be in the top 10. Max crashed right before the finish line, which is the easiest part of the course. Those are things that just happen in skiing; hopefully we can get some runs finished and gain some confidence here soon.

"For skiing cautiously, I think we did pretty well," he added. "Right now our focus is not only to win this invitational, but more importantly to pick up points to qualify for the NCAA championships. With World University Games coming up, every race is that much more important. The ultimate goal is to be a full strength for the NCAA Championships in March."

Six women and one men's skier will miss the New Mexico Invitational due to their anticipated participation in the World University Games, which will take place in Erzurum, Turkey, from Jan. 27-Feb. 6. Because of special circumstances, the UNM Invitational will host two slalom races instead of one slalom and one giant slalom race, so to equal the season out, both extra RMISA Qualifier races will be giant slalom races.

All that means is that for the skiers from CU and other RMISA schools who participate in the World University Games, those skiers will essentially have two fewer slalom races to qualify for NCAA Championships in March.

The alpine portion of the meet concludes Sunday with the slalom races; the Utah Invitational will conclude Jan. 21-22 with the Nordic races at Soldier Hollow. In the interim, the teams will head northeast to Bozeman to participate in the Montana State Invitational this Friday through Sunday (Jan. 14-16).

"The slalom is the great equalizer," Rokos concluded. "It's obviously very unpredictable. We have done well here in slalom the last few years, usually picking up our deficit gained from giant slalom races and I expect that we will do that tomorrow. With the exception of Katie Hartman, we are healthy and ready to get to it tomorrow."

OTHER SKI TEAM NEWS

RUMFORD, Maine—CU's Nordic skiers took part in the freestyle sprint races at the United States Cross Country National Championships, concluding a week of action in Rumford, Maine. CU junior **Eliska Hajkova** took home fourth place in the women's 1.4K freestyle sprint national championship. She took sixth in the qualifier, second in her quarterfinal race, third in her semifinal race and fourth in the finals.

Hajkova had the sixth best time in the qualifier race to move on to the quarterfinals. The Buffs' **Joanne Reid** placed 43rd in the qualifier and advanced to the junior heats where she did not race in the semifinals and officially was awarded 12th place.

Alexa Turzian placed 52nd in the qualifier and **Briana Perkins** 81st and both advanced to the U-23 heats. Turzian took seventh in the U-23 semifinals and then won the “B” finals race to officially take home seventh place while Perkins took fifth in her semifinal race and took fourth in the “B” finals race to take home 10th place.

On the men’s side, junior **Reid Pletcher** took 12th place in the 1.6K freestyle sprint national championship. After placing an impressive sixth place in the qualifier, he took third in his quarterfinal heat, fifth in his semifinal heat and sixth in his finals races to finish 12th overall.

Utah Invitational Team Scores (2 events)—1. Denver 232; 2. Utah 216; 3. Colorado 213; 4. New Mexico 209.5; 5. Alaska Anchorage 159.5; 6. Montana State 134; 7. Westminster College 100.

Women’s Giant Slalom (29 finishers)—1. Eva Huckova, UU, 1:58.34; 2. **Sara Hjertman**, CU, 1:59.74; 3. Jennie VanWagner, DU, 2:00.10; 4. **Erika Ghent**, CU, 2:00.58; 5. Anne Cecilie Brusletto, UNM, 2:01.12; 6. Stefanie Demetz, UNM, 2:01.59; Ida Dillingoen, DU, 2:01.64; 8. Lindsay Cone, DU, 2:02.02; 9. Kate Williams, UNM, 2:02.47; 10. Maria Camilla Frascini, WMC, 2:02.51. Other CU Finishers: 11. **Carolina Nordh**, 2:02.94; 16. **Kirsten Cooper**, 2:04.15; 22. **Ashley Babcock**, 2:10.93. Did Not Start (2nd run): **Katie Hartman**. Did Not Finish (2nd run): **Jenny Allen, Khyla Burrows**.

Men’s Giant Slalom (26 finishers)—1. Andreas Kilde, DU, 1:55.76; 2. Petter Brenna, UNM, 1:55.91; Jeremy Elliot, UU, 1:56.11; 4. Ryan Wilson, UU, 1:56.78; 5. Andreas Adde, UAA, 1:57.05; 6. Seppi Stiegler, DU, 1:57.13; 7. **Gabriel Rivas**, CU, 1:57.47; 8. Kitt Flowers, DU, 1:57.69; 9. **Andreas Haug**, CU, 1:57.78; 10. **Taggart Spenst**, CU, 1:57.83. Other CU Finishers: Did Not Finish (1st run): **Eric Davis, Fletcher McDonald**. Did Not Finish (2nd run): **Max Lamb**.

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