

Rivas Wins Slalom, CU Skiers Take Lead At Utah Invite

PARK CITY, Utah – On the strength of a slalom victory for senior **Gabriel Rivas** and two top-four performances in the women's race, the University of Colorado ski team won both races as a team Sunday to move from third into the lead after the conclusion of the alpine events here at the Utah Invitational.

The Buffs racked up 116 points in the men's race and 115 in the women's race and sits atop the leader board with 444 points. Host Utah is in second just nine points back with 435 while New Mexico is third with 421.5 and Denver fourth with 412.5. Alaska Anchorage sits in fifth with 318.5 while Montana State (281) and Westminster College (254) round out the team scoring.

"Slalom has been our better event for some reason for the last few years," CU head coach **Richard Rokos** said. "We had all around good performances from both our men and women today. This is especially good because this is a hard hill and it's hard to ski consistently on it, so it gives us a lot of confidence to ski well. This is also the hill where we will ski for the RMISA Championships in six weeks or so, so doing well gives us a lot of confidence when we return here, as well."

Rivas won his fifth race skiing for Colorado (fourth slalom victory) and it was his first slalom win since he won the individual NCAA Championships two seasons ago. He had a two-run combined time of 1:39.25 after skiing the second fastest time in both the first and second runs. The Buffs placed five of their six skiers in the top 13, as juniors **Eric Davis** (seventh, 1:41.58) and **Taggart Spenst** (ninth, 1:42.24) finished in the top 10 while freshmen **Andreas Haug** (11th, 1:42.35) and **Fletcher McDonald** (13th, 1:42.76) also had solid races.

"Gabriel showed us why he's one of the superior skiers on the hill," Rokos said. "He put two solid runs together. I had him ski a little conservatively on the first run so he would get a second run, and he went after it and got a win. To have five guys in the top 13 on a hill like this means we skied solidly and consistently all day."

For Davis, it is his career best finish in a collegiate race and his third top 10 performance, all coming in slalom races. It bettered his eighth place finish in the slalom race at the Nevada Invitational last season. For Spenst, it marked his fourth collegiate top 10 finish, matching his career best slalom finish of ninth he took last year here and was just one spot off his career-best finish of eighth he got in the giant slalom race at Montana State last season.

"Eric, Taggart, Fletcher and Andreas all had a good days today," Rokos said. "Eric especially after yesterday when he bruised his shin a little bit, so he was coming back to get back confidence. I have high hopes that he will start putting things together, because I've seen him do it in our training runs."

Sophomore transfer **Max Lamb** was also in the mix after the first run as he had the 15th fastest time but he had to hike and ended up finishing 24th in a time of 1:57.71.

"Max has been skiing and pushing (Rivas) in practice, so I know he will show that this season," Rokos said. "This is his home hill after training on it all last season. When we have people who haven't skied this hill, we tell them to finish so they can gain confidence on it. He won't lose any confidence after this weekend, but I think it will motivate him even more when we come back for (RMISA Championships) next month."

On the women's side, CU's **Sara Hjertman** took second in a time of 1:28.55, moving up from seventh after the first run on the strength of the second fastest time in the second run. She also took second place in Saturday's giant slalom race, her first two podium appearances as a CU skier. She was followed

closely by **Carolina Nordh**, who finished fourth in a time of 1:28.77 as the top six finishers were within seven-tenths of a second in the 1:28 range.

Junior **Jenny Allen** finished 13th and was able to move up three spots after running in 16th after the first run. Sophomore **Erika Ghent** was in eighth place after the first run but after some confusion, she had to rush to the starting gate and ended up straddling her first gate in her second run. She recovered and finished 31st in a time of 2:06.02. Senior **Ashley Babcock** improved her second run by 10 spots and finished 21st in a time of 1:34.77 while freshman **Kirsten Cooper** took home 24th in a time of 1:36.13.

“Sara put to great runs together,” Rokos said. “All of the women skied very well today. Erika had a great first run and then there was some confusion and she had to rush to the start of her race and straddled the first gate and essentially put herself out of the race. It’s a shame because she was in position to make a run at it.”

Freshman **Khyla Burrows** did not finish the first run and senior **Katie Hartman** did not race Sunday after injuring her shoulder in Saturday’s giant slalom race. Rokos feels there’s a good chance she will race next weekend in the Montana State Invitational.

“Katie will have some more rehab early this week and we will get her on skies as soon as we can,” Rokos said. “Fortunately, there’s no permanent damage, so she is optimistic about skiing next weekend in Montana.”

The Utah Invitational will now conclude Jan. 21-22 with the Nordic races at Soldier Hollow. The Nordic portion of the meet was moved so skiers could participate in the U.S. National Championships this past week in Rumford, Maine. In the meantime, both alpine and Nordic squads will head to Bozeman for the Montana State Invitational, set for Jan. 14-16.

In Montana, there will be a RMISA Giant Slalom Qualifier race on Friday ahead of the Invitational, where the giant slalom races will take place on Saturday and the slalom races on Sunday at Big Sky. On the Nordic side, the collegiate season will kick off with the 5K women’s and 10K men’s freestyle races with interval starts on Saturday followed by the 15K women’s and 20K men’s classic races, both with a mass start, on Sunday at Bohart Ranch.

OTHER SKI TEAM NEWS

RUMFORD, Maine - CU’s **Reid Pletcher** was one of 13 skiers (seven men) named to the U-23 United States World Championship team by the United States Ski and Snowboard Association Sunday. Pletcher will compete for Team USA at the World U-23 Ski Championships in Otepea, Estonia from January 27-31.

The team is selected on the heels of the United States Nordic National Championships last week in Rumford, Maine, where Pletcher took 12th place in the 1.6K freestyle sprint race, 13th in the 1.6K classic sprint race and 33rd in the 15K classic race. He did not race in the 30K freestyle race.

Pletcher will join teammate **Joanne Reid**, who was named to the junior squad on Friday.

Utah Invitational Team Scores (4 events)—1. **Colorado** 444; 2. Utah 435; 3. New Mexico 421.5; 4. Denver 412; 5. Alaska Anchorage 318.5; 6. Montana State 281; 7. Westminster College 254.

Women’s Slalom (34 finishers)—1. Sterling Grant, DU, 1:28.16; 2. **Sara Hjertman**, CU, 1:28.55; 3. Anne Cecilie Brusletto, UNM, 1:28.76; 4. **Carolina Nordh**, CU, 1:28.77; (tie) 5. Anna Kocken, UU & Eva

Huckova, UU, 1:28.86; 7. Tii-Maria Romar, UU, 1:28.61; 8. Kate Williams, UNM, 1:29.78; 9. Jennie VanWagner, DU, 1:30.11; 10. Lindsay Cone, DU, 1:30.32. **Other CU Skiers:** 13. **Jenny Allen**, 1:31.20; 21. **Ashley Babcock**, 1:36.13; 24. **Kirsten Cooper**, 1:36.13; 31. **Erika Ghent**, 2:06.02. Did Not Finish (1st run): **Khyla Burrows**.

Men's Slalom (29 finishers)—1. **Gabriel Rivas**, CU, 1:39.25; 2. Petter Brenna, UNM, 1:39.49; 3. Andreas Adde, 1:40.59; 4. Torjus Krogdahl, UU, 1:40.82; 5. Juho-Pekka Penttinen, UNM, 1:41.04; 6. Ryan Wilson, UU, 1:41.55; 7. **Eric Davis**, CU, 1:41.58; 8. Chris Barber, MSU, 1:41.66; 9. **Taggart Spenst**, CU, 1:42.24; 10. Eian Sandvik, UU, 1:42.32. **Other CU Skiers:** 11. **Andreas Haug**, 1:42.35; 13. **Fletcher McDonald**, 1:42.76, 24. **Max Lamb**, 1:57.71.

Curtis C. Snyder

Associate Director of Sports Information
University of Colorado

curtis.snyder@colorado.edu

AIM - curtisnyder

(303) 492-3139 - w / (720) 218-4796 - c

<http://CUBuffs.com>