

Seven Skiers, Rokos Headed To World University Games

ERZURUM, Turkey – Seven University of Colorado skiers along with head coach **Richard Rokos** arrived in Erzurum, Turkey, Wednesday ahead of the 25th World University Games.

The equivalent of the Olympic Games for athletes enrolled in colleges and universities around the world held every other year, the games officially start Thursday and end on February 6. A total of 1,880 athletes and 850 officials from 22 sports are participating in the games from a record 57 countries.

“The World University Games gives athletes an opportunity for global competition in an Olympic or Pan-Am Games-type situation,” Rokos said. “It’s the perfect opportunity for all involved to measure mutual strengths and weaknesses. We will continue to train for our ultimate goal of the NCAA Championships while we are here, but this is both an athletic and social event on the level of the Pan-Am Games or the Olympic Games.”

Rokos is serving as team leader for the United States and will coach four of his athletes, **Kirsten Cooper**, **Erika Ghent** and **Katie Hartman** on the women’s side and **Taggart Spenst** on the men’s side. Additionally, CU’s **Gabriel Rivas** will be competing for France while **Sara Hjertman** and **Carolina Nordh** will compete for Sweden.

“I’m really excited, we all are,” Ghent said. “Nobody knows what exactly to expect and none of us has ever been to Turkey. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and we all feel fortunate to be able to go and compete. Some of us will represent the United States and others France and Sweden. But we are all going as CU skiers. We will be wearing CU gear.”

Rokos has led the U.S. alpine team six times previously; in 1995 (Jaca, Spain), 1997 (Mugo, Korea), 1999 (Zakopane, Poland), 2003 (Tarvisio, Italy), 2005 (Innsbruck, Austria) and 2007 (Tariviso). His athletes have brought home three gold medals, along with four silver and several bronze including one by a former Buffalo, Erika Hogan, in 2003. Rokos is the United States’ collegiate representative for the International Ski Federation and it is basically part of his job in that role to lead Team USA at the World University Games.

“I don’t think we’ve ever had such a strong team traveling, both from the perspective of the U.S. and for CU,” Rokos said. “Gabriel, Carolina and Sara are the top skiers for their countries. It’s kind of a two-way street. We want to do well as the United States, but we also want our athletes to do well overall even if they’re competing for a different nation.”

Each country fields a team of six skiers for each discipline. So the three CU women competing for the U.S. comprise half of the team.

The Buffs will all be competing in four events, the Super G, super combined, giant slalom and slalom races. The opening ceremonies take place at 7:30 p.m. local time on Thursday with races starting Saturday with the women’s Super G, followed by the men’s Super G on Sunday. On Monday, the super combined will be held for the women with the Super G races in the morning and the slalom races in the afternoon, followed Tuesday for the men’s super combined on a similar schedule.

After a training day on Wednesday, Feb. 2, the giant slalom races will take place Thursday, Feb. 3 and Friday, Feb. 4, first women and then men, followed by the women’s slalom races on Saturday, Feb. 5 and the men’s slalom races on Sunday, Feb. 6. The closing ceremonies will be the night of Feb. 6.

"It's a great format where we race one day and then the men race the next, so we should have some time to check out Turkey and some other events," Ghent said. "A lot of times when you travel with skiing, you don't have much of an opportunity to check out the culture, but we will do so this time as much as we can."

Cooper, a freshman from Eagle, Colo., has just five collegiate races to her credit and has already hit the podium with a third place finish in the RMISA Giant Slalom Qualifier and has two other finishes in the top 15. She also has three other top 10 finishes in non-collegiate competition this season, including a third place in giant slalom finish in Park City, Utah, earlier this month.

Ghent, a sophomore from Edwards, Colo., has been on a tear this fall with three top 10 finishes in collegiate races and nine top 10 finishes including non-collegiate races. She won the RMISA Giant Slalom Qualifier ahead of the Montana State Invitational at Big Sky earlier this month and most recently, took three podium appearances at Winter Park this past weekend, including a win in the Super Combined. She also took fourth in the giant slalom at the Utah Invitational to open the 2011 season.

Hartman, a senior from Breckenridge, Colo., has eight top 10 finishes overall this season and two in collegiate races. She injured her shoulder in the collegiate season opening race at Utah and did not compete in either race but made it back on the snow a week later at Montana State and took fourth and ninth in two giant slalom races there. She has two race victories in 2011, both in Super G races, one on the Nor-Am Cup tour in Panorama, British Columbia, and one in an FIS race at Winter Park.

Hjertman, a junior from Sundsvall, Sweden, has eight top 10 finishes this season with three of those coming in collegiate races and all three of those were podium appearances. She took second place in both the giant slalom and slalom races at the Utah Invitational and third in the giant slalom at the Montana State Invitational. Prior to returning to the United States for the spring semester, she took second in a pair of slalom races in Sweden at the end of December, as well.

Nordh, a senior from Sundryberg, Sweden, has been CU's most consistent women's alpine skier this season with five finishes in the top 11 in five collegiate races, including a fourth place in the slalom at the Utah Invitational and sixth in the giant slalom at the Montana State Invitational.

Rivas, a senior from St. Jean De Maurienne, France, has been on a tear this season for the CU men's team with three podium appearances in five collegiate races, including a win in the slalom at the Utah Invitational and a second place finish in the giant slalom at the Montana State Invitational. Prior to the start of the collegiate season, he had five race victories in FIS and Nor-Am Cup races with a giant slalom win in Vail, a slalom win in Steamboat Springs, a giant slalom win in Winter Park, a Super G win at Winter Park and a slalom win at Val St. Come, Quebec.

Spent, a junior from Frisco, Colo., has six top 10 finishes this season with two coming in collegiate races. He started off the collegiate season with a ninth and 10th place finish at the Utah Invitational in slalom and giant slalom races, respectively. He took 12th in the RMISA Giant Slalom Qualifier race ahead of the Montana State Invitational, as well. Outside of the college competitions, he took fourth in a slalom race at Steamboat Springs and fifth in a Super G race at Winter Park.

Erzurum is one of the biggest and most modern cities in Turkey with a population of approximately 1 million people with over 250,000 students. It has over 320 registered cultural landmarks basically making the city an open-air museum. Throughout its 6,000-year history, the city has been a local, economic and political center, serving as host to some of the world's most important civilizations including the Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Turks and Ottomans.

Other events at the Winter World University Games besides alpine skiing are the biathlon, cross country skiing, curling, figure skating, freestyle skiing, ice hockey, Nordic combined, ski jumping, snowboarding and short track speed skating.

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