

Holland 7th in snowboardercross

Tom Kelly, USSA

TELLURIDE -â€“ Ross Powers (Okemo, VT) rode to third at the Visa U.S. Snowboardcross World Cup at Telluride Resort in Colorado on Saturday afternoon, with the 2002 Olympic halfpipe gold medalistâ€™s finish leading a menâ€™s field crammed with American competitors.

Powers, owner of more halfpipe titles than any snowboarder in history, furthered his bid to medal in another discipline by making the podium in the second of five Olympic qualifications for the men.

“The first few rounds went great, I was getting good starts up top,” Powers said. “Final race, Iâ€™d been getting great starts all day, and got a bad start up top. I tried to catch up, landed flat on everything, but luckily the guys had a little mix-up on turn four and I came through and got on the podium.â€”

Powers was happy to prove that last yearâ€™s podium in Sunday River, Maine, was no fluke and that he was a viable contender for the Olympic Team.

He becomes the third U.S. rider to grab a top-four World Cup result in just two events, after Seth Wescott (Sugarloaf, ME) and Graham Watanabe (Sun Valley, ID) took second and third, respectively, in Argentina. A top four result is the lead qualifying criteria for the top spots on the Olympic Team.

The U.S. qualified 10 men and two women for Saturdayâ€™s finals on a challenging course designed by Olympic course builder Jeff Ihaksi.

Olympic gold medalist Wescott was sixth for the men, taking second in a small final that featured three Americans. Five-time X Games gold medalist Nate Holland (Squaw Valley, CA) finished seventh and Graham Watanabe (Hailey, ID) crashed early into eighth.

The knowledge that Watanabe was out and he had nothing to lose led to a nasty landing later in the race for Holland.

“That fifth was still pretty important to me, I really wanted that heat,” Holland said. “So I made a pass in turn three on Wescott and just went into turn four with Xavier de la Rue just head-to-head. I know he’s fast and in control, so I trusted him.”

Holland touched de la Rue’s board and lost balance before a jump on the fastest part of the course.

“It scared the crap out of me in the air,” he said. “I had time to think about how bad it was going to hurt. Luckily I had time enough to squirm a little bit and get the feet down first and take some of the compression.”

Torino silver medalist Lindsey Jacobellis (Stratton, VT) had her board clipped on the final set of jumps by eventual women’s winner Maelle Ricker (Canada), causing her to crash after a great start in her first heat.

Faye Gulini (Salt Lake City, UT) won the final qualifying spot for the women’s race Friday and took a career best eighth after getting second in the first heat with Jacobellis.

Three World Cup events remain for Olympic Team qualifying, Jan. 10-21 in Austria, Switzerland and Quebec.

Action wraps up in the Visa Snowboardcross Sunday with a Team SBX event.

Visa U.S. Snowboardcross Cup Telluride Dec. 19 Finals

Men

1. Pierre Vaultier, France
2. Robert Fagan, Canada
3. Ross Powers, Okemo, VT
4. David Bakes, Czech Republic
5. Xavier de le Rue, France
-
6. Seth Wescott, Sugarloaf, ME
7. Nate Holland, Squaw Valley, CA
8. Graham Watanabe, Sun Valley, ID
9. Nick Baumgartner, Iron River, MI
11. Alex Deibold, New Haven, CT
16. J.J. Tomlinson, Park City, UT
21. Shaun Palmer, South Lake Tahoe, CA
31. Robert Minghini, South Lake Tahoe, CA

Women

1. Maelle Ricker, Canada
2. Simona Meiler, Switzerland
3. Dominique Maltais, Canada
5. Mellie Francon, Switzerland
5. Helene Olafsen, Norway
-

8. Faye Gulini, Salt Lake City

11. Lindsey Jacobellis, Stratton, VT