

Tahoe snowboarder cross competitors in middle of pack

Tom Kelly, USSA

TELLURIDE – A dynamic, never let you rest snowboardcross course courtesy of Olympic course builder Jeff Ihaksi tested the world's best SBX athletes Friday as men and women competed in qualifications for the Visa U.S. Snowboardcross World Cup at Telluride Resort in Colorado. The U.S. qualified nine men and two women into the competition, which is set for Saturday afternoon.

The U.S. men were led by none other than Olympic gold medalist Seth Wescott (Sugarloaf, ME) who was second. Three other U.S. men marked top 10 speeds with World Championship bronze medalist Nick Baumgartner (Iron River, MI) in third, 2002 Olympic halfpipe gold medalist Ross Powers (Okemo, VT) in sixth and five-time X Games gold medalist Nate Holland (Squaw Valley, CA) in ninth.

"It's great. The speed is really good across the board and I'm pretty excited to see how the pack races go," U.S. Snowboarding Head Coach Peter Foley said.

In the women's race the sun started to sink in the sky, throwing shadows across what most are calling an inventive and relentless course, and making the women's race a challenge to make the top 16. The one and only Lindsey Jacobellis (Stratton, VT) marked one of two U.S. women's spots, finishing eighth.

"Last week she trained a lot faster, especially in comparison to the boys, than what she did today. It's fine where she's qualified, but it seemed like she wasn't riding at her top speed," Foley said.

Following Jacobellis was Salt Lake City's Faye Gulini who rounded off the women's field in 16th.

If the day left spectators with anything, it's that Saturday's World Cup, the second of five Olympic qualification events for the U.S., will be competed on a course that never gives the athletes a moment's rest.

"It's a super challenging course in a lot of ways. The features are sharp and kinky at first, then it goes into high speed sections. The jumps are varying in length, so you can't just ride off of each one, you have to suck it up or pop it to get to the landing," Foley said. "Then there are turns and you have to be a great turner in those. After that you have another set of big jumps. There's really a wide variety of skills involved and all kinds of different challenges."

Qualifications (Top 5 plus U.S. in top 32)

Men

1. David Bakes, Czech Republic
2. Seth Wescott, Sugarloaf, ME
3. Nick Baumgartner, Iron River, MI
4. Tom Velisek, Canada
5. Robert Fagan, Canada
6. Ross Powers, Londonderry, VT
9. Nate Holland, Squaw Valley, CA
12. Shaun Palmer, South Lake Tahoe, CA
13. Graham Watanabe, Sun Valley, ID
18. Alex Deibold, Manchester Center, VT
27. Jayson Hale, Sierraville, CA

31. Bobby Minghini, South Lake Tahoe, CA

Women

1. Maelle Ricker, Canada

2. Helene Olafsen, Norway

3. Simona Meiler, Switzerland

4. Dominique Maltais, Canada

5. Sandra Frei, Switzerland

8. Lindsey Jacobellis, Stratton, VT

16. Faye Gulini, Salt Lake City