

Hight, Teter on podium in Mammoth

By Lindsey Sine, USSA

MAMMOTH – Olympic gold medalist Shaun White (Carlsbad, CA) can book a ticket to Vancouver now as he won his second Sprint U.S. Snowboarding Grand Prix competition to lock down his team spot for the Games. White was joined in the winners circle by Olympic Silver medalist Gretchen Bleiler (Aspen, CO) whose win, along with a second place in Copper, brought her a step closer to reaching her Olympic dreams.



Elena Hight

“I’m happy to be on the team and secure that spot. Now I can just work on my stuff and get dialed,” White said. “I was feeling great because I had a second and a first, and that’s pretty strong hold on getting on the team. But a first and a first is guaranteed, so I’m really excited.”

White was followed in second by Louie Vito (Sandy, UT) and JJ Thomas (Golden, CO) in third.

The legend solidified his win in the first run, but when it came to his victory lap he decided it was time to throw something fresh out and nearly landed.

“It’s a double cork McTwist 1080, but that last one I went 1260, so I’m going to have to pick and chose if I want to take it 12 or keep it 10,” White said. “It’s been a trick that’s

been messing with me for a while, but I'm excited to try to put it down in Park City and hopefully at the Games."

And with the pressure off to make the Olympic Team, White's plan is to dial in new tricks and try to have some fun with it.

"It's not that far away. I'm just trying to have fun this time, do my best, and put down heavy runs. Today was a good day, I put down some good stuff and I was holding my best back on that last run," White said. "I feel like if I hang tight and keep riding the way I am, I'm just going to keep getting better and better."

For Vito, two second-place finishes have him closing in on an Olympic spot and, while not solidified yet, he's happy with where he's standing.

"I can't really do much more, I just have to keep riding strong and keep getting better. I hope two seconds get me through, I have another contest and I could get a first, but I'm just going to try to be consistent," Vito said.

Vito put down a double cork, cab double cork, air, backside 9, frontside air for his spot on the podium and he plans to keep upping the ante to make it to the Games.

"I landed, I got a top three. That's all I really wanted and all I could hope for. Everyone's riding well and I have to keep stepping it up and I'm hoping for the best and what gets me to Vancouver," Vito said.

For Bleiler, the win was a breath of fresh air, especially as she accomplished it by landing a run that was new to her competition repertoire.

"I feel awesome. This whole season I've just been trying to figure out a run for myself, and today I switched it up completely and figured out a run that I've never done before,

and it worked for me," Bleiler said. "It feels really good to win today and I feel so much more confident."

The frontside 9, backside 5, crippler 720, cab 7, straight air also helps edge Bleiler closer to Vancouver, which has the rider feeling solid.

"With a win today and a second in Copper, I'm pretty good right now. I'm excited to go back to the Olympics and represent our country in women's snowboarding," Bleiler said.

As for her game plan to get there, it involves grabbing and air.

"I am looking to just improve on that run and make sure the 9 is grabbed all the way around. I'm also going to keep working on my amplitude and the cab 7," Bleiler said.

Following Bleiler up in the second spot was 2006 Olympian Elena Hight (South Lake Tahoe, CA), who said the Olympics seem closer now that she's made her mark on the podium.

"I'm really happy about today. Making the podium makes the Olympics seem much more real. There's a lot of pressure on this year, but I'm just stoked to be doing well, having fun, and I'm looking forward to Park City," Hight said.

Hight threw out back to back 9s, which she says sets her apart in her riding style.

"The judges are always looking for amplitude and people stepping it up in different ways. Amplitude has never been my strongest point, but I've been spinning 9s for a long time," Hight said. "I learned them when I was pretty young, so they're a really solid easy trick for me. It's something no one else does and it's nice to go out there and land a run no one has."

Hight was followed in third by 2006 Olympic gold medalist Hannah Teter (South Lake Tahoe, CA).

The Sprint U.S. Snowboarding Grand Prix continues Sunday with a slopestyle competition before heading to the final two events at Park City Mountain Resort Jan. 22 and 23.

Mammoth Mountain, Jan. 9, Halfpipe

Men

1. Shaun White, Carlsbad, CA, 47.00
2. Louie Vito, Sandy, UT, 45.60
3. JJ Thomas, Golden, CO, 45.00
4. Luke Mitrani, Mammoth Mountain, CA, 44.20
5. Zack Black, Breckenridge, CO, 43.30
6. Steve Fisher, Breckenridge, CO, 41.90
7. Scotty Lago, Seabrook, NH, 39.40
8. Matt Ladley, Steamboat Springs, CO, 39.30
9. Elijah Teter, South Lake Tahoe, CA, 37.90
10. Dylan Bidez, Minturn, CO, 30.40

Women

1. Gretchen Bleiler, Aspen, CO, 44.10
2. Elena Hight, South Lake Tahoe, CA, 43.30
3. Hannah Teter, South Lake Tahoe, CA, 42.80
4. Kelly Clark, Mt. Snow, VT, 41.80
5. Ellery Hollingsworth, Stratton, VT, 41.60
6. Holly Crawford, Australia, 33.30
7. Clair Bidez, Minturn, CO, 26.50

8. Maddy Schaffrick, Steamboat Springs, CO