

# Palmer out of Olympic contention despite podium finish

By Lindsey Sine, USSA

STONEHAM, Quebec – And so, one chapter ended and another began for U.S. Snowboarding Thursday as Graham Watanabe (Sun Valley, ID) took second and Shaun Palmer (South Lake Tahoe, CA) third in their final shot for Olympic qualification during a snowboardcross World Cup in Stoneham. With his second place, Watanabe locked up a spot to compete on the largest athletic stage in the world – the Olympics.

“I don’t even really know how to summarize it,” Watanabe said. “It’s a confirmation of everything I have worked for. It’s not the end all be all, but making it to the Olympics is a difficult task, especially with a team like ours, and achieving that goal is a big step in achieving a bigger goal in my snowboarding, which is to be the best I can be.”

But, it was not all smooth sailing for Watanabe. In qualifications he went down on his first run. The pressure was on for the second run with Watanabe needing to qualify in order to be considered for the Olympics. With some heavy concentration and focus, Watanabe came through to not only qualify, but post the fastest qualifying time.

“That made it interesting for today because it added more pressure for myself. I wondered if I could continue it or if I had used up all my gusto in qualifiers,” Watanabe.

The gusto remained, though, with Watanabe advancing each heat with excellent riding.

Watanabe was also a member of the 2006 Olympic Team, but under

interesting circumstances. Sent to Italy as a wax tech after he failed to qualify, Watanabe was plugged into the Olympic lineup when a teammate was injured during training. Watanabe said he feels like this time he belongs in Vancouver.

“I felt like I was Olympic caliber in 2006. I had raced all season against all those same people. But I also felt like I had teammates who were better suited for that position and it took injuries for me to get in there,” Watanabe said. “But this time I feel like I belong there. I put in several years of progress and consistent riding in the top group.”

Palmer, a legend of the sport, marked the third World Cup podium of his career as he rounded out the top-three Thursday. He needed at least second to make the Olympic Team.

With the final event out of the way, the U.S. Olympic Team for snowboarding will be announced Monday.

## **Stoneham, Quebec Jan. 21, Snowboardcross**

### **Men**

1. Pierre Vaultier, France
2. Graham Watanabe, Sun Valley, ID
3. Shaun Palmer, South Lake Tahoe, CA
4. Drew Neilson, Canada
5. Mike Robertson, Canada
- 
9. Ross Powers, Okemo, VT
10. Alex Deibold,
11. Nick Baumgartner, Iron River, MI
19. Nate Holland, Squaw Valley, CA

23. Jonathan Cheever, Saugus, MA
30. Mick Deirdorff,
32. Jason Smith, Basalt, CO
35. Pat Holland, Squaw Valley, CA

**Women**

1. Maelle Ricker, Canada
2. Helene Olafsen, Norway
3. Dominique Maltais, Canada
4. Sandra Frei, Switzerland
5. Mellie Francon, Switzerland
- 
16. Faye Gulini, Salt Lake City
17. Callan Chythlook-Sifsof, Girdwood, AK