

## Two unforgettable weeks



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The last two weeks have been very exciting. Two speed events have taken place, in Lake Louise and Aspen, and my teammates and I are off to a great start. Jan Hudec started the men's downhill in Lake Louise with his first World Cup win ever. The following Saturday in Lake Louise I had a third place finish, and then just last weekend had my first World Cup win ever in Aspen.

Wow, pretty amazing. Let me share with you all that goes on around the results and a little bit about what it has felt like.

Two weeks ago at Lake Louise I stepped onto the podium for my first time with a third place finish. It was amazing. I have been on the Canadian Alpine Ski Team for 10 years now, I've had ups and downs, and it has all been worth it. My run down the course in Lake Louise was so much fun — I had come off my training run from the day before feeling pretty confident about how I was skiing the course and had just a few things that I wanted to touch up on for the race day. Most important on race day is trusting what you know of the course and sticking with the game plan. The morning of the race I woke up and was excited, even though it was -28 degrees outside.

I was in the start gate and all I could think was "let me onto the course". I felt relaxed, but at the same time energized and ready to push out of the gate.

In the downhill I have been working a lot on keeping my feet relaxed in my boots. I find this really helps me to keep my skis running, which in turn lets you go faster. It is important to be over your downhill ski, but you don't want to be too hard on your edges because the skis need to be running smooth on the snow. I can do this by relaxing my feet. On colder days it's even more important to get your skis running because the snow has that much more grip to it.

My run was going well and I felt that I was executing the line just as I had seen it in my mind, while at the same time focusing on letting my skis run. Towards the bottom of the course, however, all I could think about was how cold my face was. I was going numb. The last stretch to the finish was flat, sitting in a tuck, and I just wanted to put my hands over my face to protect it.

When I crossed the line and looked up and saw that I was in third place, and had a pretty good feeling that this could be a podium finish. I ran in 24<sup>th</sup> so there were just a few more girls to come down in the top-30.

The crowd in Lake Louise was amazing. My parents were there, as well as a group of my close friends — the same friends that were present when my brother stepped onto the podium last year in Beaver Creek. I'll have to ask them now if they would like to travel with us full time.

After the races in Lake Louise we jumped on the plane to Denver, Colorado and headed to Aspen for a downhill, super G and slalom. It was gorgeous there — fresh snow had fallen the day before, Christmas lights were up everywhere, and it really looked like a winter wonderland.

On the way there we also got to stop at the outlet stores in Silverthorne — if you haven't been there you're definitely missing out even if your Visa card is better off. They have everything, and I got all my Christmas shopping done. One less thing to worry about heading into the races.

The hill in Aspen is quite different than Lake Louise. It's technical for one thing, which means racing speeds are not as high, and there are lots of terrain and direction changes that come at you. To stay on your line you need to be thinking well ahead — it feels pretty fast, even if the top speeds are much slower than Lake Louise. We had two training runs and Emily Brydon, Kelly Vanderbeek and I were right in there with the top girls in both runs. But as we neared the race day on Friday the clouds started to roll in and the snow started to fall. It was not looking good.

On Friday morning Kelly and I woke up to find the ground covered in snow, and soon after breakfast we got word that the downhill was delayed until Saturday. Just the night before Kelly and I had been talking about wanting sunshine for the race day, or for enough snow to cancel the race — not a dusting of snow that can be slipped off, but powder.

The girls on the speed team went back to our hotel, rented some powder skis from the shop, and made our way to the lift before it opened. We had to go up for a few hours, there was just too much snow. We also had to do things a little Aspen-style and bought a few lattes for the line and gondola.

We skied powder for two hours, literally choking on the snow. It was quite amazing. Afterwards we changed into our bathrobes and spent some time at the hotel pool and hot tub to relax, followed by shopping after lunch. Then we began to rest up for the following day's race.

On Saturday it was still snowing, but not much had accumulated. The race was on. The snow on the track was still quite soft, which meant that I could really take advantage of my early start number. As I was inspecting and got a good look at the track I started to realize that it looked a lot like Whistler conditions. That brought me back to the nationals events that I had won in similar conditions, and I tried to relate those experiences to what I was seeing on the course in Aspen. I didn't think that I would win, but all of a sudden I started to feel quite relaxed because I knew I could ski the conditions well and fast. As a team we try to train when conditions are tough so that we can overcome them when we're faced with them on race day.

That race in Aspen became the first World Cup win of my career. It was a wonderful and amazing day, one I will never forget. It was also a very proud day — I couldn't have done it without the support of my coaches and of my teammates. People who read this column know that I've been through many downs in the past few years as well as ups. A World Cup win has been my dream for many years, and to have attained my goal has made absolutely everything leading up to that moment worth it.

I want to thank everyone who e-mailed or called me — your support means the world. I'm also very proud to win as a local Whistler racer, for a town with a passion for skiing.