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A Podium Finish

The last two weeks have been very exciting. Two speed events have taken place, both 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 3rd 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 the World Cup events in Lake Louise I stepped onto the podium for my first time with a 3rd place finish in the Downhill. 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 – all of it. My run that day 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 though on race day is trusting what you know in the course and sticking with the game plan. The morning of the race I woke up and was excited, even though it was -28C out! It was really cold.

I was in the start gate and all I could think about was, let me onto the course! I felt relaxed while at the same time being energized and ready to push out of the gate. In 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 means you are going faster. In speed it is important to be over your downhill ski but you do not want to be too hard on the skis. The skis need to be running smooth on the snow and for me I think about relaxing my feet. On colder days it is especially important to let the skis run 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, at the same time I was constantly thinking about letting my skis run. Towards the bottom of the course all I could think

about was how cold my face was – I couldn't feel a thing. The last stretch to the finish was flat and you are just sitting in your tuck and did I ever just want to pull my hand over my face to protect it!

I looked up and saw 3rd place and had a pretty good feeling that this could be the podium finish. I ran 24th so there were just a few more girls to come down before the end of the top 30, and then I was probably safely in 3rd. And I was.

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

After the races in Lake Louise we jumped on the plane to Denver, Colorado and headed to Aspen. On the schedule in Aspen were a Downhill, Super G and then a Slalom race on the Sunday. We got to Aspen and it was gorgeous there. Fresh snow had fallen the day before, the Christmas lights were up everywhere and it really looked like a winter wonderland. Oh, I forgot to mention that on our way to Aspen we of course stopped at the outlets stores in Silverthorne. Now if you haven't been to Silverthorne before then you are definitely missing out, but your Visa isn't so that most likely is a good thing. They have everything, and now my Christmas shopping is done!

The hill in Aspen is quite different from the hill in Lake Louise. It is a very technical course, speeds aren't high but there is lots of terrain and direction changes so there is constantly something coming at you. This basically means that you need to be thinking well ahead of what's coming at you. The speeds feel pretty fast, even though the highest speed is much slower than those in Lake Louise. We had two training runs and Emily, Kelly and I were right in there 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 for the race.

On Friday morning Kelly and I woke up and the ground was covered in snow and soon after arriving to breakfast we got word that the race was cancelled. Just the night before Kelly and I had been talking about wanting sunshine for the race day or if that was not to be the case then at least let it snow enough to cancel the race – not just a dusting of snow that can be slipped off. We wanted POWDER!

So what do you know, it dumped! Kelly, Sherry, Emily and I quickly went back to our hotel, rented some powder skis from the shop below and made our way to the lift line to load at 9am. We had to go up, at least for a few hours; there was just so much snow. We also had to do things a little Aspen style and promptly purchased a few latte's to stand in line with and drink while riding the gondola! Such princesses, I know.

We powder skied for two hours and we were literally choking on the snow as we skied, quite amazing. After skiing we came down from the hill, changed into our hotel bathrobes and headed to the outdoor pool and hot tub to relax a little. Life in Aspen is rough! After lunch, we cruised around town, did a little shopping, (mostly window) and then began to rest up for the following days race.

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

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 could not have done it without the support of my coaches and of my teammates. You, my

readers have also read through many of my downs over the past years, as well as my 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 has written me emails or called me – your support means the world. I am also very proud to win as a local Whistler racer, a town with a passion for skiing!