



New Zealand Snow Sports Athletes Complete Most Successful Season Ever

LAKE WANAKA, New Zealand (April 2, 2008) - New Zealand's elite skiing and snowboarding athletes this week concluded their most successful Northern Hemisphere season in history, claiming more than fifteen medals at major international events in Europe and North America over the past three months.

The New Zealand National Freeskiing Team, led by Wanaka's Jossi Wells, emerged as one of the world's strongest teams during the 2007/08 season. Wells, 17, was not only named 2008 World Superpipe Champion, he was also the first Kiwi to pick up silver at the world's biggest freeski event, the Winter X Games. Wells said it was his life goal to win X Games gold in both slopestyle and superpipe.

"I plan to train really hard this year and come back and win it next year," said Wells.

Fellow team mates Lyndon Sheehan, 19, Byron Wells, 15, and Amy Sheehan, 21, all exceeded their personal best results with seven top-ten placements at international pinnacle events.

The New Zealand Snowboarding Team had its most successful season ever under the guidance of head coach Tom Willmott. Attaining a well deserved third-place podium in the World Cup Halfpipe Finals in Italy, James Hamilton (Auckland) became the first New Zealand male snowboarder in history to achieve a podium finish. Ben Stewart, 15, (Whangamata) also made his career debut at the World Cup with a result of ninth.

Following the World Cup season, the Snowboard team competed in the prestigious US Open in Vermont. The entire team made it through to the semi finals but it was Hamilton, again, who made the final round. Willmott said that the team did extremely well to make it through to the semi finals.

"James was the first Kiwi to crack the finals in the 26 year history of the event," said Willmott.

These results are part of a string of successes for snowboard team this season, with the climax of the season being the confirmation of six riders in the FIS top 30 giving three men's and three women's starts in the FIS World Cup to challenge for spots in the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Headlining the NZ Disabled Ski Team, Adam Hall, 20, from Wanaka, captured the largest number of medals of any snow sports team member this season, and as a result he moved up to second in the overall slalom world rankings from 14th in 2007.

Hall is also ranked seventh in Giant Slalom (GS), and top 20 in Super GS and Super Combined. He returned home with seven gold medals from the North American Cup series, a gold and two silvers in the World Cup circuit and gold at the Wells Fargo World Invitational, Winter Park.

Hall said his goal for the season was to move into the world's top 10. He has truly exceeded this goal.

“This has been my best season to date. I’m looking forward to the next year of World Cup circuit where my goal is to be ranked number one in slalom,” said Hall.

Ben Griffin, key member of the Volkswagen National Ski Racing Team won his first FIS Super G in Europe this season, the first man to do so since Simon Wi Rutene. Griffin earned 25 World Cup points for his efforts. Griffin also placed in the top twenty in over 5 FIS events, placed fifth at the National Championships in Italy and at the North American Cup Giant Slalom in the USA, Griffin scored 14.55 finishing sixth overall.

Skier Cross’s latest recruit, Mitchey Greig (Queenstown) has been rapidly progressing over the season and after only six skier cross races ever, she is already ranked 18th in the world. With Skier Cross being introduced to the 2010 Olympics, Mitchey is a key prospect for a podium finish.

Next month will see the snow sports teams back in Wanaka, participating in dry land training as they prepare for the New Zealand winter competition circuit. Snowboarders will compete in the NZ Burton Open and two World Cup events. Freeskiers are working towards the Freeski Open NZ which is held in August. The teams, who train under the New Zealand Winter Performance Programme are in the best form ever as they approach winter once again.

The teams are recognised as New Zealand’s biggest hopefuls for winning medals at the NZ Winter Games in 2009 and Winter Olympics in 2010.

07/08 Northern Hemisphere Result Highlights

James Hamilton, Auckland (snowboarding)

Bronze: World Cup Finals, Italy (Halfpipe)

17th: World Cup, Canada (Halfpipe)

Ben Stewart, Whangamatta (snowboarding)

9th: World Cup Finals, Italy (Halfpipe)

14th: World Cup, Canada (Halfpipe)

14th: World Cup, Italy (Halfpipe)

Kendall Brown, Mt Maunganui (snowboarding)

5th: World Cup, Italy (Halfpipe)

5th: World Cup, Canada (Halfpipe)

9th: World Cup, Canada (Halfpipe)

Adam Hall, Wanaka (Adaptive ski racing)

Overall World Ranking: 2nd Slalom, 7th Giant Slalom, 11th super combined, 16th Super G

7 x Gold: North American Cup Series

Gold: World Cup, France

2 x Silver: World Cup, France & Korea

Bronze: World Cup Final Ranking (Slalom)

Mitchey Greig, Queenstown (Skier Cross)

World Cup Standing: 18th (Skier Cross)

7th: World Cup, Switzerland (Skier Cross)

Jossi Wells, Wanaka (Freeskiing)

Silver: Winter X Games, Aspen (Slopestyle)

Gold: World Superpipe Championships, Park City (Halfpipe)

Gold: Nippon Freeskiing Open, (Slopestyle)

Gold: Jeep King of the Mountain, (Big air)

Silver: US Open (Big air)

Lyndon Sheehan, Wanaka (Freeskiing)

4th: Nippon Freeskiing Open (Halfpipe)

5th: Austrian Open (Slopestyle)

6th: US Open (Halfpipe)

Byron Wells, Wanaka (Freeskiing)

7th: World Superpipe Championships, Park City (Halfpipe)

10th: US Open (Halfpipe)

11th: World Cup, Japan (Halfpipe)

Amy Sheehan, Wanaka (Freeskiing)

6th: Nippon Freeskiing Open (Slopestyle)

10th: World Cup, Japan (Halfpipe)

12th US Open (Slopestyle)

Ben Griffin, Ohakune (Ski Racing)

1st: World Cup, Austria (Super G)

2nd: FIS Race, USA (Super G)

5th: National Championships, Italy

6th: North American Cup, USA (Giant Slalom)

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