

sports winter roundup

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Victory marks Kershaw's 'arrival'

PERSEVERANCE FINALLY PAYS OFF FOR CANMORE SKIER

WICKI HALL
CALGARY HERALD

Devon Kershaw figures his World Cup victory celebration needs a little work.

"I just went, 'yeah,' and punched the air," the pride of Canmore said Saturday via cellphone from Rybinsk, Russia. "Nothing too crazy. I guess I need more training from NCAA or NFL, football receivers to really do the finish-line antics."

Inside, Kershaw said he went crazy Saturday after crossing the finish line first in the men's 10-kilometre mass start skate-ski race.

Crafting in at a time of 36 minutes 47.5 seconds, Kershaw became only the second Canadian to ever win a full World Cup cross-country ski event.

"It only took to years but I got it," Kershaw said of his first gold medal.

"I can't explain it. The body is just feeling super good. I'm in good shape but I'm just having a lot of fun."

Fun is winning two medals in a week and three in as many races all in the aftermath of finishing fourth in the torturous Tour de Ski in late-December and early-January.

At 39, Kershaw — with the confidence drawn from placing an agonizing fourth and fifth at the Vancouver Olympics — clearly realizes he can compete with the best in the world.

In fact, the Sudbury, Ont. native is one of the very best in the world.

"This is his first distance victory, and it's a big one," said Canadian coach Justin Wadsworth.

"It's really a sign he has arrived in the sport. "The physical body is there. He's just at the right age where has put all these hard years of training in, and they're really paying off."

Pierre Harvey is the only other Canadian to hit the top of the podium at a full World Cup event, winning three in 1987 and 1988.

His son Alex Harvey is a rising star on the cross-country team at age 22.

In fact, the St-Ferreol-les-Neiges, Que. product finished fifth Saturday with a time of 36:55.0.

Ivan Babikov of Canmore, placed 27th in 37:01.1.

Russia's Ilya Chernousov (36:48.4) captured silver and Germany's Tobias Angerer (36:49.1) seized bronze.

"I'm not a phenom like Alex, who just came out of the blue roaring right at the start of his career," Kershaw said. "It took me a long time."

"It just took a lot of work and having people believe in you. In the end, maybe it wasn't the straight path to the top. But you only get there if you learn from your mistakes and learn from life's experiences."

One of the major goals on his list of projected life experiences — to win gold at the 2014 Sochi Olympics in Russia.

The Games open two years from Tuesday.

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IT JUST TOOK A LOT OF WORK AND HAVING PEOPLE BELIEVE IN YOU
DEVON KERSHAW



Devon Kershaw of Canmore lets loose by the podium following his victory in a men's World Cup cross-country event in Rybinsk, Russia. Natalia Koleznikova, AP/Getty Images



Canadians Benjamin Thomsen, from left, Jan Hudec and Erik Guay celebrate historic result in Chamonix, France. Philippe Desmazes, AP/Getty Images

Canadian trio conquer setbacks, dominate in Chamonix downhill

Best World Cup result since 1994

WICKI HALL
CALGARY HERALD

Jan Hudec figures he deserves an honorary medical degree for all of his first-hand knowledge of the inner-workings of the human body.

Six knee surgeries — and debilitating back problems — have a way of educating the common man about the intricacies of biomechanics. All the turmoil — all those steep pitches on the climb up the mountain — turned into gold on a historic day for Canada in Chamonix, France.

Hudec, Erik Guay and Ben Thomsen, finished first, third and fifth Saturday in the men's World Cup downhill.

All three train here in Calgary. "Living a life of mostly rehab can get tedious after a while and frustrating," a jubilant

Hudec said on a conference call with Canadian reporters. "I never stopped believing I could be back. I obviously had no idea how long it would take or when it would happen. I could kind of smell it."

"To be on the podium after all these years — and all these injuries — is just an amazing feeling." This is the first time since 2007 that Canada placed two men on the World Cup podium in alpine skiing. It's also the best result for the men's team since 1994, when Edi Podivinsky and Gary Mallen were first and second, respectively, in Saalbach, Austria.

"For us to have a race like this with three guys in the top five, I mean, I think we blew everyone out of the water today," said the 30-year-old Hudec. "I think everyone who was up on the hill was either impressed or stoked for us, or both. It was incredible."

Starting 24th, Hudec ripped down the course in two minutes, 23.25 seconds Saturday to hit the podium for the third time in his career. The Calgary native's first victory came in 2007 on his home mountain in the Lake Louise downhill.

In spite of a medical chart in the office of the Toronto phone book, one of the greatest characters in Canadian amateur sport is back on top.

"This is one of the guys who has some of the best natural talent and incredible skill to carry speed on the skis — and he's determined," said Canadian head coach Dan Krstovic. "It's always special when you see a guy who's struggled with injury and other things to succeed and really sort of triumph on a day like today."

Battling a cranky back, Guay is closing in on the title of most successful male skier in Canadian history. He sits at 17 career World Cup podiums, second only to Steve Podborski, who has 20.

"The story today is that we have three Canadians in the

top five," said Guay, who is originally from Mont Tremblant, Que. "I think it speaks volumes about where the team is right now and where we're heading."

At 24, Thomsen is the baby of the bunch. Starting 50th in poor visibility, he shocked the crowd by finishing just off the podium in fifth.

"I still think I'm in a little bit of shock," said Thomsen, of Invermere, B.C. "It still hasn't hit me yet."

But the day truly belonged to Hudec, who refused to retire after the Vancouver Olympics in spite of all the whispers to the contrary: Why?

"The love of the sport, the passion in my heart, the faith that I knew I could come out on top at some point," Hudec said. "Just knowing that you can do it without having the tangible evidence to help you with that ..."

"I just had to keep going and I knew eventually it would happen."

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Kingsbury sees streak stopped with silver

POSTMEDIA NEWS

On Saturday, Mikael Kingsbury of Deux Montagnes, Que., fell short of setting a new freestyle moguls record when he took the silver medal at an event in Deer Valley, Utah.

After tying American Jeremy Bloom's seven-year-old record with his sixth-straight 20-22 moguls win Thursday night, Kingsbury was looking to break the record Saturday. However, he finished second to Russia's Sergei Volkov and had to settle for silver.

Bobsledders take third

Lynsey Dorsch gave Canada's weekend medal count another push Saturday night, finishing third in a World Cup bobsled event at the Whistler Sliding Centre.

Rush, of Humboldt, Sask., with Burlington, Ont. native and ex-CFL fullback Jesse Lumsden on his brake and Cody Sorensen of Ottawa and Neville Wright of Edmonton also aboard, finished with a two-run time of one minute, 42.6 seconds. Aleksandr Zubov drove Russia to the gold Saturday night in 1:42.46 with Russia 2 driver Alexander Kasjanov getting the silver in 1:42.60.

Vonn notches win no. 50

Lindsey Vonn of the United States dominated another downhill race on Saturday to claim her 50th career victory in the sliding World Cup.

Vonn, 27, conquered the 2,090 metres Kandahar piste in 1 minute 44.86 seconds in sunny but freezing conditions in the German Alps to win over Swiss Nadja Kamer (1:45:27) and Tina Weirather (1:46:28).