

Molson World Cup wins future



Last Tuesday Lake Louise was setting for the decisive Molson World Cup. Racers whistled over upper flats and into S-turns.

photo Russ Sampson

by Karl Wilberg

Winning a World Cup downhill race is a complex task. Any person or piece of equipment is important. Consequently, as the parts of the process multiply, so do the chances for error. Still, the principles of consistent success are simple. Simply, everything must be the best.

At the Molson's World Cup last weekend, the winning process was critical for Canada. Ken Read could win the world title and a well-run race would ensure further Canadian-held events.

Last weekend at Lake Louise proved races are won when factors come together, often aided by chance. From start to finish, the best mix of equipment, course and racer was necessary to win. Yet preparation beforehand was just as vital.

For the Molson's World Cup, the race organization and course had to be first class. First

of all, according to Chief of Race Bill Wearmouth, North America does not have a reputation for holding good races. Consequently, for the first World Cup downhill in Canada, Wearmouth felt the race would have to be not just "as good" as a European event, "but better."

Success at Lake Louise, like success on the race course, involved the best assembly of resources. Volunteers wove crash nets and others drove buses. Molson's financed the race facilities and provided sponsorship along with provincial and federal governments. Many problems could have occurred, especially with the 30 days available for preparation. Still, the desire to provide a first-class event prevented most problems.

Although organization is vital, it exists to serve the racers. However, before the racers can begin to compete for titles, their equipment must be prepared. So far, no one ski make has a

photo Russ Sampson



photo russ sampson

Gateway reporter Wilberg asks Canadian team head coach John Ritchie if "the boys are ready to go."

complete hold on the race circuit. No one ski is fastest for all snow conditions or courses. Often, skis made to identical specifications will slide differently. In addition, different ski flexes and running surfaces are used. Consequently, evaluating skis is important.

For the younger members of the Canadian team, Martin Geofory prepares the team's Rossignol skis. Geofory learned his skill from instructing, selling skis, and taking courses from Rossignol. The racers themselves are on one- or two-year contracts with ski manufacturers.

Although each team's policy is different, a racer may have 8-12 pairs of skis and a serviceman for each racer. The servicemen must clean, scrape and wax the ski in addition to truing the edges. According to Geofory, the 223 cm-long ski's biggest problem is "They're long." Still, Geofory finds time to fire snowballs at the Canadian team coach being interviewed on TV.

Lengths are standard for skis, but little else is. Construction differs widely and waxing for race day is a secret process. For race day a number of skis are waxed, each with different mixtures. Shortly before the start snow temperatures are relayed to the start gate and the pair waxed for the current conditions is chosen.

Aside from the servicemen, racers and coaches are the most

concerned that all things must be the best in order to win. Atmosphere for training must be right. Racers, like anyone else, are affected by pressure, especially when much is expected. For example, after last Sunday's training runs, Ken Read said it was unfair for Canadians to expect an Olympic gold "because the sport is just not like that."

He explained, "Any race anybody can win," and said, "The luck of the draw," in receiving start numbers can place racers out of the medals before a race has begun.

Other factors — like weather — cannot be avoided. Sunday's two training runs were postponed because of fog. Some racers did not train because they participated Friday in a GS in Quebec. If Saturday's training was cancelled, and Sunday's too, the race would be in trouble because many racers had another GS in Europe after the downhill's March 4 race date. However, the fog lifted enough for training to begin in late afternoon and from a lower start on the mountain.

The postponement reduced the day's training to one run. The racers had been expecting two tries and had spent hours waiting for a minute-and-a-half run. Norway's Eric Haaker said, "waiting is always bad," but added, "It is something to get used to." Read turned in the

day's best time, but Haaker was not impressed. He believed Read was overrated. He quipped, "It's difficult to win a race on a training run."

The U.S.'s Phil Mahre, after a second place in the Mont Ste. Anne GS, entered the Molson World Cup for two reasons. First, Mahre is trying for an overall title and second, he believes downhill improves his skiing. Mahre is successful and is the best all-around U.S. skier. Still, the eight months he spends on the road make him question racing next year. In spite of his recent success, he claims racing "doesn't have the pizzazz it used to." So much for the rewards of being a national hero.

In fact, much of the attention that surrounds success can be damaging. Canada's Dave Murray says his team's recent popularity is "taking up more time" and allowing "less private

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Martin Geofory repairs damaged ski bases on one of racers' many pairs.