

Zina Kocher and Brendan Green Crack Top-15 at Final Biathlon World Cup before 2010 Olympic Winter Games

—Green posts career-best finish with 14th-place result in pursuit competition—

ANTHOLZ, Ita.—Canada's men's and women's biathletes will be rolling into the 2010 Olympic Winter Games on a high note after posting some of their strongest results of the season.

Zina Kocher and Brendan Green finished 14th in the final men's and women's World Cup pursuit competitions prior to heading to Vancouver-Whistler.

The 27-year-old Kocher is firing her way back into the elite form she displayed while winning a bronze medal for Canada on the World Cup three years ago. The Red Deer, Alta. native was hunting down a top-10 finish, but missed her final two shots in standing, to finish 14th at 33 minutes 53.4 seconds.

"It was another good day and I was really close to finishing in the top-10, which is the key to get within striking distance of the podium," said Kocher. "I am really confident now and that is a good feeling heading into the Games."

In the pursuit competition, the winner of the sprint event starts first, with the remainder of the field up to the top-60 starting in the order and time they finished behind that leader. The pursuit is one of the most exciting and spectator friendly events on the Biathlon World Cup, highlighted with lead changes and athletes clinging on for survival.

After taking a season off with mono, Kocher's climb back to the top of the international standings has been enduring. Kocher credits her breakthrough to a World Cup race last month in Austria where she shot nine-for-10 in a sprint competition. The following week she narrowly missed the podium with a fourth-place finish in Slovenia where she shot perfect in an individual competition.

"I really felt it coming together in Hochfilzen and I just kept feeding off each race and getting better every week," said Kocher. "I dream about the Olympics and visualize everyday. I am going to take a break for three days and not even think about biathlon, and get ready for my final preparations."

Germany's Andrea Henkel won her first pursuit competition after posting a time of 30:59.8. Magdalena Neuner, also of Germany, finished second at 31:23.1, while Ann Kristin Aefedt Flatland, of Norway, missed just one shot while claiming the bronze at 31:44.7.

Megan Imrie, of Falcon Lake, Man., was the only other Canadian in the field who qualified for the women's pursuit, and held onto 42nd spot at 36:17.3.

Meanwhile, Canada's Brendan Green capped off a dream week on the World Cup by posting his personal best finish with a 14th-place result after stopping the clock at 33:06.1.

The 23-year-old Green, of Hay River, N.W.T., was on a mission Sunday to get into the top-15 for the first time of his career. Starting 33 spots behind the leaders, Green gained momentum throughout the competition while passing many of the world's elite biathletes.

"Everything seemed to come together today. The skis were really strong and I felt really relaxed on the range," said Green. "I steadily worked my way through the field and just felt great on my skis. The wax techs did an amazing job."

Green gained a boatload of confidence earlier in the week when he finished 19th in an individual event.

"That was a great result for me and gave me the confidence to help me mentally to know that I can compete with the big names," said Green. "This was the best way to end off the World Cup before the Olympics and I am looking forward to going to race some IBU Cups over the next couple of weeks."

Jean-Philippe Le Guellec, of Shannon, Que., was 33rd at 34:36.1, while Marc-Andre Bedard, of Valcartier, Que., was 43rd (35:11.7).

Austria's Daniel Mesotitsch set the time to beat at 31:50.4. Germany's Arnd Peiffer finished in second place with a time of 31:52.1, while Austria's Dominik Landertinger won the bronze medal with a time of 32:10.1.

The Canadian Biathlon Team will now head home to Canada to prepare for the Olympic Winter Games. Biathlon Canada will hold a media availability on Thursday, January 28 around the team's training session between 9 and 10:30 a.m. to announce its Olympic roster.

Biathlon Canada, the governing body for biathlon in the country, oversees the Canadian Championships, Eastern and Western Canadian Championships, and North American Cups held in Canada. The organization's mandate is to provide national level programs for the continuous development of biathlon athletes from the grassroots to the elite level. For more information on Biathlon Canada, please visit their Web site at www.biathloncanada.ca on the Internet.

Complete Results and Live Race Action Can Be Viewed at www.biathlonworld.com

Women's Top-Five Results:

1. Andrea Henkel, GER, (1+0+0+0), 30:59.8; 2. Magdalena Neuner, GER, (1+0+2+1), 31:23.1; 3. Ann Kristin Aefedt Flatland, NOR, (1+0+0+0), 31:44.7; 4. Simone Hauswald, GER, (1+0+1+1), 32:12.0; 5. Olga Zaitseva, RUS, (0+0+0+2), 32:31.6.

Canadian Results:

14. Zina Kocher, Red Deer, Alta., (0+1+1+2), 33:53.4; 42. Megan Imrie, Falcon Lake, Man., (0+1+1+3), 36:17.3.

Men's Top-Five Results:

1. Daniel Mesotitsch, AUT (0+0+0+1), 31:50.4; 2. Arnd Peiffer, GER, (0+1+0+0), 31:52.1; 3. Dominik Landertinger, AUT, (1+1+1+0), 32:10.1; 4. Martin Fourcade, FRA, (0+0+2+0), 32:19.2; 5. Christoph Stephan, GER, (1+0+0+1), 32:24.0.

Canadian Results:

14. Brendan Green, Hay River, N.W.T., (0+0+1+1), 33:06.1; 33. Jean-Philippe Le Guellec, Shannon, Que., (2+0+0+1), 34:36.1; 43. Marc-Andre Bedard, Valcartier, Que., (4+0+0+1), 35:11.7.

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