

ISF World Schools Championships Scotland hold heads up high



About the World Schools Championships

The First World Schools Championships encapsulated eight sports but for the Scotland Team, the alpine races were the focus of the twenty strong team. With athletes pulled from across Scottish schools from the moment the Pipes of Scott Waitt opened up in the lead up to the Opening Ceremony, the Scotland Team performed with guile, tenacity and ended with the Category 2 girls team taking third place in the Giant Slalom. The pride of racing and competing for Scotland was evident throughout the event and beyond.



During five days in February, five hundred young athletes from nineteen countries participated in this multi winter sports event. Young people from Germany, England, Argentina, France, Hungary, Russia, Republic of Belarus, Austria, Belgium, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Scotland, Chile, Turkey, Spain, Estonia and Ukraine will meet during various educative and cultural activities while competing in 8 sports such as Alpine Skiing, Biathlon, Cross Country, Curling, Figure Skating, Ski Jumping, Ski freestyle, Snowboard.

Scottish athletes have always had a pride in their selection for sporting events and this year was no exception. The twenty athletes selected for the ISF World Schools event across the two age groups competing in Chamrousse, above Grenoble, France received great support from The Mintra Group, an Aberdeen based company and the pride the jackets provided by Rossignol gave the athletes helped to raise the determination of the athletes.

The Pipes are a world renown symbol of Scotland and marching out to tunes being played by Scott Waitt in the opening ceremony gave the team one of the loudest cheers of all the nations competing. You could feel the jealousy of other nations!



With Slalom and Giant Slalom on the programme for the athletes, a day of free skiing to acclimatise to the resort preceded the racing. With each team of five athletes having a coach to help, guide and support them, the coaching team of Ross Gardner (Category 2 Men), Louise Kochalski (Category 2 Women), Adam Piper (Category 1 Boys) and Alex Moran (Category 1 Girls) helped to gel the teams into working for each other. With each team housed in the same apartment for the duration of the event, the team ethic grew.

Ski racing can be a very singular sport. From the moment a racer leaves the start gate it is the racer against the clock. With day one of the racing seeing thick fog, the feeling of being alone was never stronger, it really was a pea souper.

Race Day 1



With the Category 2 Giant Slalom being abandoned, the younger age group went to battle against the best from some of the top full time academies in Europe. Students from Schladming, Saalfelden and the Bad Gastein Academy in Austria, The Gertrud-von-le-Fort Gymnasium in Oberstdorf, Werdenfels Gymnasium in Garmisch, Germany, LPO d'Altitude Briancon, France highlighted the talent on display from some of the leading alpine nations. Then there were also athletes from Turkey, Belgium, Chile, England, Spain and Switzerland. National pride from all was evident.

With the Category 1 teams racing in nationally seeded groups on the first run and then time order on the second Jonny Marshall posted the best of the Scottish boys in the opening run of the slalom with 11th best time, Ross Nesbitt sneaked into the elite top thirty in 27th. Fraser Hunter and Robbie Anderson just off the pace and out of the thirty. With the team element being important Thomas Ward, disqualified on the first run, still had a second run as it was the best three times on each run that would count.



In the girls slalom, Andrena Grant was first out on the second run for the Scotland team in 27th place just behind Iona Ross two racers later with Holly McKey heading out the start tenth in 21st spot. Isla Ward had produced a great run to place in sixth while Shona Rankin had struggled on the first run and abandoned. The thick fog had been no assistance to the racers let alone to those trying to capture images!

From course reports to support from the parents in the finish, despondent feelings soon gave way to hope and determination for the second runs. This was all about Scotland the team and personal glory was secondary.

Unsurprisingly the Austrian power team grabbed the win in the Category 1 Girls Slalom. The Austrians finishing just over seventeen-seconds ahead of the French with the Spanish girls in third who had edged out



the German team on the second run. A really strong second run by all the Scottish girls saw the team finish fifth overall and within touching distance of the Germans. With the best three times counting towards the team, this gave the opportunity for the early racers to really attack with the knowledge later racers could ski a little more conservatively should the need arise.

Isla Ward gave the team a really strong base from which the rest of the team were able to attack and her times compared strongly with the older racers from the leading nations. Ward's first run was fastest of all none Austrians!

The Scotland Boys Team in the Category 1 group did not fare quite as well as the girls finishing in seventh spot. The race saw Austria, Germany and France take the podium places team wise. With Jonny Marshall having set the pace for the team on the first run, his crashing on the second run meant the rest of the team needed to use their heads for a team result to happen. With this pressure on them, the gap to the English and Swiss team was just too great and seventh was the end result.



Race Day 2

Day two for the younger age group saw renewed hope with Shona Rankin starting 8, Isla Ward 17, Andrena Grant 22, Iona Ross 35 and Holly McKey 39. For the boys Robbie Anderson would go 2, Jonny Marshall 18, Frazer Hunter 27, Tom Ward 35 and Ross Nesbitt 48.

Day two dawned with increased hope, desire and determination and sadly more fog. A two run Giant Slalom for the younger age group was planned yet it soon became apparent that this was not going to happen and in the end the Giant Slalom was cancelled with just one run of girls racing possible. The decision was taken pretty promptly that would see the boys race the following day, again with a one run shoot out down the Olympic Men's Downhill slope.

Chamrousse had held the alpine events at the 1968 Winter Olympics that had been hosted by Grenoble. This was the focus of the event being brought to Chamrousse. From having seen Jean Claude Killy opening the Games and the original flame being relit, for many athletes this was their Olympics. For some, they may not take part in a multi event sports event again. The whole experience for them was something that will stay with them for many years.

With no race on the opening day for the Category 2 racers, they opened their accounts with a FIS Slalom race on day two. This was a great opportunity for some of the aspiring FIS racers among the Scottish team to use their early start number for a strong race performance. Ciorstaidh Struthers drew 13, Tabby Allen 16, Katie Stuart 17, Victoria McKinley 20 and Eilidh Ryan 26.

From bib 20 McKinlay put in a great first run that saw her place best amongst the Scots in 12th with Struthers one place behind her. Katie Stuart sadly crashed on the second run after a promising first run. A misunderstanding of the rules saw both Ryan and Allan struggle lower down on the second run.

Calum Shepherd was the only Scottish racer to get down both runs in the Slalom as he fought his way into 14th place yet the Men's team. Tom Crockart came out on the first run with Scott's Waitt and Wylie plus Chris McLew all coming to grief on the second run in the fog.

While the fog was playing games with the racers on the race course, higher up above the clouds, the sun was giving off false images away from the racing.



Race Day 3

And so on to the final day of racing: One run of Category 1 Boys Giant Slalom racing followed by two runs of Category 2 racing for the Men and Women. While the Category 1 Girls had finished their programme, the Boys were subject to some of the best race conditions for their one run down the same course as the FIS race aged racers.



Jonny Marshall set the pace for the Scottish team, posting 11th fastest time. Marshall was three places slower than Rob Holmes of England. Frazer Hunter finished in 26th but sadly Anderson, Nesbitt and Ward all crashed out destroying the bravado of the team highlighted the night before with their determination to finish about another nation. The team spirit took a knock with this.

On to the Category 2 Women and Men and Scotland were still battling for pride and honour. Ciorstaidh Struthers lead the team from the front. The team posted places seven, eight, twelve and thirteen with Struthers, Ryan, Stuart and Allan

making sure that the team finished in a strong fashion to grab third best team in the race. A great way for an always positive and proud group of girls to finish on.

While the Austrian and German teams were head and shoulders above the rest of the field, a little more luck on the second run of the Slalom could have seen the Category 2 Scotland Team finish on the podium overall. Fourth place was a commendable performance.

Scott Waitt battled his way to take ninth place in the Giant Slalom as the best of the Scottish Men's team in the Category 2 race. As a team, none of the rest finished the second run and while Shepherd, McLew and Crockart all posted encouraging first run times, the need for three to finish each run did not seem to register as they went all out for glory. A final position of 8th was scant reward for the desire, determination and effort put in by each athlete.

With no team race due to the unrelenting fog earlier in the week, it was with a sense of sadness that the Team Spirit award was awarded to Chile after the Scottish team had won the prize in 2016. Nessie had been a magnificent host on the Scotland table for the Opening Night encouraging all to taste traditional Scottish fayre!



Conclusion

“This was my Olympics,” one member of the Scottish team explained.

“I am so proud to wear my Scotland Jacket,” explained another at the closing ceremony.

And yet maybe the comments of some of the proud parents should also be highlighted: ***“Why can we not have more Scottish team participation?”***

Another parent reflected ***“It has been so great seeing the team all supporting each other, all proudly wearing their jackets.”***



This was a proud Scotland team that went to Chamrousse. It may not have had the talent of the German, Austrian, French or Spanish teams but what it did have was an identity. This was the Scottish team and a very proud Scottish team.

If this point needed to be underlined then at the closing ceremony, it is customary for a jacket swap to take place. The Scotland Jacket was a highly sought after commodity. The art of bartering was learned by other nations as they sought to relieve the Scottish athletes of their jackets and obtain a Scotland Jacket! It is an educational event after all!



With Thanks



Many thanks to Patrick Erdal, Team Lead and Delegation Leader; Coaches Ross Gardner (Cat 2 Boys), Louise Kochalski (Cat 2 Girls), Alex Moran (Cat 1 Girls) and Adam Piper (Cat 1 Boys); Ange Ward and Gordon Ritchie for all the support with administration and logistics; the parents that provided on slope support and also The Scottish Schools Snowsport Association.

The support and sponsorship of the Mintra Group was invaluable in providing the athletes the opportunity to experience a major multi event sporting event.

The Scotland Team	Girls	Boys
Category 1	Isla Ward Shona Rankin Holly McKey Iona Ross Andrena Grant 	Tom Ward Frazer Hunter Ross Nesbitt Jonny Marshall Robbie Anderson 
Category 2	Ciorstaidh Struthers Tabby Allan Victoria McKinlay Eilidh Ryan Katie Stuart 	Calum Shepherd Scott Wylie Scott Waitt Tom Crockart Christopher McLew 

Pictures courtesy of Racer Ready with others provided by Dawn Waitt, Ange Ward and other parents.