



# AROUND THE RINGS

VANCOUVER VIEW - No.2

Vancouver: Isolated Showers 8°C / 4°C - Whistler: Partly Cloudy 6°C / 2°C

FEBRUARY 15, 2010

## Cypress Mountain: Brown Venue Wins Gold

Conditions at Cypress Mountain were wet, windy and yet wonderful for the athletes competing Saturday in women's freestyle moguls at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics.

"I thought it was awesome!" said bronze medalist Shannon Bahrke of the United States. "Kind of tough for the fans."

A crowd of more than 7,500 waiting at the bottom of the course got soggy as intermittent rain fell, the temperature dropped and the wind whipped the VANOC flags into almost constant motion.

"I feel horrible for the fans," said gold medalist Hannah Kearney of the U.S. "I'm still pretty dry, thanks to my uniform and the tent at the top. We had coaches wiping our goggles down, holding umbrellas over us. This is the Olympics, so we get the best treatment possible."

Added silver medalist Jennifer Heil of Canada, "I've never been on a chairlift with an umbrella before."

It wasn't a problem for us. We had great visibility; the course was in amazing shape. It's so incredible what these volunteers did to make this event happen."

Donna Weinbrecht of the U.S., who won the first Olympic gold medal in women's moguls in Albertville 18 years ago, tells Around the Rings the venue was well-prepared despite the rain and warm temperature the last few weeks

"There's six feet of snow, three lines to pick from, and the jumps are not falling apart because they have dry ice in them," said Weinbrecht, who is reporting for Yahoo! Sports in Vancouver. "We ski in all kinds of conditions. This is easy, actually,

*On the podium at Cypress Mountain, where warm weather and no snow has presented a challenge for the venue. (Getty Images)*



PHOTO OF THE DAY

there's really no ice. It's slushy. We always summer train on glaciers (where it's slushy)."

And Weinbrecht believed the timing of the event helped hide any cosmetic problems, such as the ground cover made of hay and the lack of a photogenic dusting of snow.

"I think at night it makes it better that it's all under the lights so you don't really focus on the dirt on the side," Weinbrecht said.

Instead, the audience -- short of the 9,400 capacity despite the event being sold out -- focused on history.

Kearney won the first gold medal for the United States at the 2010 Winter Games four years after she entered the Turin Games as the favorite -- but failed to make the final. (cont. page 4)

## The View From Here: Tragedy Demands Legacy from Vancouver

**There's no way anybody could speculate that grief, not joy, would be the first emotion to sweep over the Vancouver Olympics.**

While I mused last week in my first column from Vancouver about what gripping stories might emerge from the 2010 Olympics, the death of an athlete was not one of them.

Minutes after my column went to print, news came of the crash of Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili. His death made my thoughts trivial, irrelevant.

Who could have the cold nerve to speculate that tragedy would be a story

line from the Games?

Leaders of the International Luge Federation could barely contain themselves as they faced the media -- unaccustomed, unprepared to talk about the tragedy.

The same could be said for IOC President Jacques Rogge, who switched from a red tie to a black one for his pre-Games press conference last Friday. Somber, Rogge and VANOC chief John Furlong could only convey regret at a news conference that ordinarily would have allowed the two men to wax with enthusiasm about the days ahead for Vancouver. (cont. page 6)

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## Whistler Blog

# Lugers Look Past Tragedy

**Heavy snowfall and a somber mood after the death of a Georgian luger didn't diminish the intensity of crowds that came in full force for the men's singles luge events this weekend.**

Nodar Kumaritashvili's death just before the opening ceremony Friday -- the first in 35 years for the International Luge Federation -- cast a pall over the competition. But while sliders expressed concern heading into much-needed training runs, they also say they could use some support from fans and media.

"What I want people to know about the luge is that it's not that scary," said the 23-year-old American champion Erin Hamlin, who was the fastest over Saturday's two training runs.

"We're all paying our respects and we all know what happened. It's a small community, we lost a fellow athlete. But people need to realize that we're still here, we're still racing on this track and when they dwell on

the tragedy and they keep showing the coverage, they're making it harder for us. People need to be positive."

IOC President Jacques Rogge attended the first runs of the men's single event Saturday.

The men's single competition, which finished Sunday, will be followed by the women, who compete Monday and Tuesday. The men's doubles event comes later in the week.

Officials shortened the track at the ultra-fast Whistler Sliding Centre for both the men and women's events. The length of the track was reduced by 176 meters for the men's singles, and the number of curves reduced from 16 to 15. The original men's single track length was 1374 meters, and has been shortened by 176 meters.

All of the men sliders wore black tape on the left side of their helmets as a tribute to the young first-time Olympian. As a result of the Georgian sliders' death on corner 16, the ice was altered to direct competitors back



Crowds came from all nations in support of the men's luge qualifying runs. (ATR - T. Lawson)

onto the track and padding was placed around surrounding steel beams.

Australia's Hannah Campbell-Pegg voiced her regret that a death had to occur before the safety changes were made.

"The track is pushing the sport and I'm not the only one who is saying that, everyone is saying that," she said. "It's a shame that something like this had to happen in order for them to re-evaluate the safety issues. They had to (change the start) to make the best of a bad situation.

"They're trying to do the best they can and I think the track is doing a good job under tragic circumstance."

TODD LAWSON



Swiss luger Stefan Hoehener, qualifying run #1. (ATR - T. Lawson)

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#### AROUND THE RINGS

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www.aroundtherings.com  
World Football Insider  
www.worldfootballinsider.com

#### CONTACT

1776 Peachtree Street  
Suite 436 North  
Atlanta, GA 30309 USA

#### PHONE

+1 404 874 1603

#### FAX

+1 404 874 3248

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## Cypress Mountain: cont' from page 1

"I was embarrassed by my performance," she said. "I knew I had more in me."

Skiing last of 20 finalists, Kearney edged Heil, the defending champion, crushing the hopes of the face-painted, flag-waving, rambunctious Canadians who wanted to witness a milestone moment.

Heil was trying to become the first Canadian to win an Olympic medal at home as well as the first athlete to win back-to-back Olympic gold medals in moguls.

"I heard the roar of the crowd when Jenn got her score, so I knew I had to go for it," said Kearney, who raced



Wet weather may have kept some fans home, but it didn't dampen the enthusiasm. (ATR - K. Rosen)

immediately after Heil.

"That gold medal was in my sights," Heil said, but added that her team is so strong that "Canadians can be assured that a gold medal is coming on home soil." +

**KAREN ROSEN**



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United Kingdom  
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## The View: cont’ from page 1

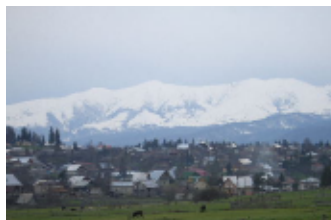
Vancouver responded with grace, making changes to the opening ceremony to include commemorations for Kumaritashvili.

The luge course has been shortened as a result of the high-speed crash. The move is both a safety measure and a psychological move.

Georgia President Mikheil Shaakashvili says a track will be built in Kumaritashvili’s name in his home town. It’s a place I visited three years ago to check out the short-lived bid from Georgia to host the 2014 Winter Games.

Bakuriani is a place of wild beauty in the Caucasus Mountains. It was undeveloped except for a few small hotels and what was then a brand-new ski lift that took 30 minutes to figure out how to get it moving.

Formerly the training site for winter



*Nodar Kumaritashvili will be buried this week in Bakuriani, his hometown in the Republic of Georgia (ATR)*

athletes from the Soviet Union, Bakuriani could become a new center of winter sport one day. A new track carrying the name of Nodar Kumaritashvili would help that to happen and perhaps create a place where the Winter Games might take place once day.

More importantly, maybe his death on the track will leave another legacy: renewed attention to the safety of athletes.

“No athlete should die because of a

sports accident,” said Shaakashvili.

The irrefutable logic of that statement needs to be adopted by the Olympic Movement -- not just unspoken, but as a public credo.

More grim details of the death of are about to emerge when the British Columbia coroner delivers an autopsy and other details of the investigation.

Whether those findings assign blame for the luger’s death to design of the track or pilot error, we can only hope the report will help keep all Olympians safe when they step onto the field of play. +

**ED HULA**



# The Great Vancouver Walk-Off Ed vs Sheila (She’s Winning)

**There’s one event that lasts the entire 17 day stretch of the Olympics: the Great Vancouver Walk-Off.**

A new competition, the event pits Around the Rings Editor Ed Hula against Publisher Sheila Hula in a heated contest for pedestrian superiority.

How far they will walk until the end of closing ceremony, Feb. 28, is the result that will make one of them a winner.

Both are wearing VANOC-branded pedometers contained in the kits for accredited press. The units were zeroed and strapped on at opening ceremony Feb. 12.

Sheila leads with 10.9 km since the lighting of the cauldron. Ed is lagging at 4.4 km.

Results updated throughout via [www.AroundTheRings.com](http://www.AroundTheRings.com), and via [@aroundtherings](https://twitter.com/aroundtherings) on twitter. +



(ATR)



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