ATSX Ice Cross Downhill World Championship/ Riders Cup/ Russia

**Merz takes top honors at first Riders Cup race in Saint Petersburg**

SAINT PETERSBURG, Russia – Switzerland’s Patrik Merz won the third Riders Cup race of the 2017/18 Ice Cross Downhill World Championship season on Saturday in the Russian city of Saint Petersburg after sprinting away from a three-way battle with Russia’s Dimitry Murlychkin and American Jack Schram early in the race on an unusually warm winter afternoon. After losing the fight with Merz to the first corner of the 240-meter long track with a 20-meter vertical drop, Murychkin took second place with Schram finishing third in the first-ever race in Saint Petersburg. German Titov, who won last year’s Riders Cup race in Moscow, taking fourth place.

A total of 58 men and 9 women from 17 countries took part in race with about half of the participants from Russia while many of the rest of the field traveled from Finland and Latvia. There have been a total of five Ice Cross Downhill races in Russia now with Moscow the venue for two Red Bull Crashed Ice races and two Riders Cup races in previous years.

Russia’s Elena Ivanova grabbed first place in the women’s race in front of Virginie Schneider of Belgium in second place and Victoria Senotrusova of Russia in third place as the world’s fastest sport on skates moved back to Europe following last Saturday’s race in Saint Paul, Minnesota in the United States.

"I was a bit scared,” said Merz, happy to collect 250 points for the win in third of six Riders Cup races this season in the 10-race Ice Cross Downhill World Championship. “I had a really hard battle at the first jump. It was hard from top to the bottom. I had a good start and the inside gate was the best gate. The hardest part is the start. Then I just tried to stay on my feet because the ice is so soft. But I made it to the finish and that’s great.”

Ivanova was thrilled to get her first win even though the warm weather and rain in recent days had made training and qualifying difficult: “Winning just feels amazing,” she said. “The track was too soft but we can’t do anything about that so we just tried our based under the conditions. It was possible to ride and that’s all you need.”

With his first win, Merz climbed to 8th place in the Ice Cross Downhill Championship standings with 465 points, Schram rose to 12th with 338.5 points and Murlychkyn climbed to 16th place with 275 points. The overall championship leader Marco Dallago (AUT) did not race in Saint Petersburg ahead of the second of four Red Bull Crashed Ice races to be run next weekend in Jyväskylä, Finland. Dallago has 1,290 points – largely on the strength of his 1,000-point victory at the Red Bull Crashed Ice Race in Saint Paul last week, with Michael “Iggy” Iulianello (USA) second on 925 points and defending champion Cameron Naasz, who won the first Riders Cup race of the season in Austria, in third place with 750 points.

**Riders Cup Results Saint Petersburg, men:** 1. Patrik Merz (SUI), 2. Dmitriy Murlychkin (RUS), 3. Jack Schram (USA), 4. German Titov (RUS), 5. Nikolay Zakharov (RUS), 6. Petri Kääriäinen (FIN), 7. Michael Urban (CZE), 8. Juho Oinonen (FIN), 9. Oliver Larouche (CAN), 10. Manfred Margreiter (AUT)

**Women:** 1. Elena Ivanova (RUS), 2. Virginie Schneider (BEL), 3. Victoria Senotrusova (RUS), 4. Lou Pierrot (FRA), 5. Anna Cheremnykh (RUS)

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