**Ice Cross Downhill World Championship/ Season Opener/ Riders Cup/ Austria**

**Naasz grabs Ice Cross Downhill season opening win in Austrian Alps**

**American Cameron Naasz got his campaign to win a third straight Ice Cross Downhill World Championship off to a flying start on Saturday with a hard-fought victory in the 2017/18 season opening race in the Austrian Alps. Under heavy snowfall and difficult racing conditions, the two-time defending champion of the world’s fastest sport on skates won the Riders Cup in Wagrain-Kleinarl for the first time in front of an enthusiastic crowd of more than 3,000 spectators in the ski resort of Wagrain-Kleinarl, edging out Russia’s Denis Novozhilov and Swiss legend Kilian Braun.**

WAGRAIN-KLEINARL, Austria – In the fourth annual Riders Cup race at Wagrain-Kleinarl, Veronika Windisch of Austria won the women’s race for the second straight year at the winter wonderland ski resort at an altitude of 850 meters up in the Austrian Alps while Anais Morand of Switzerland took second place after finishing third here a year ago and Austrian veteran Alice Zenz, who was a disappointing fifth in 2016, grabbed third place to get a spot on the podium.

"It was really nice to start off the season with a win," said Naasz. "There were very snowy conditions out there. You couldn't see a lot on the track because of the snow. My goggles kept fogging up but I remembered the track pretty well from practice and just stuck with what I know. So I'm happy to come out with a win. I feel like I race well in the track even though my gate starts weren't as good as I would have liked. I did what I wanted to do in a tough situation."

Windisch used lightening quick starts to take the lead from the start of her races and win for a second straight time: "Winning is always great and it's not easy to defend the title," she said. "I wasn't always feeling confident though in the early rounds and the track was pretty rough. I just tried to get good starts and make the most of those."

There were 154 men and 19 women from a total of 21 nations taking part in the race on a frosty Austrian night under floodlights that lined the 300-meter long natural ice course carved into the side of a skiing slope. Last year’s winner, Marco Dallago of Austria, finished back in eighth place this year while his brother Luca, who also won an earlier edition of the race here, was not able to race due to illness.

Racers from Finland and Russia arrived in large numbers and put in a string of impressive performances in the eagerly awaited season-opening race. The Ice Cross World Championship moves next to Crans-Montana, Switzerland for the second Riders Cup beginning of January before the Red Bull Crashed Ice season opener in Saint Paul, Minnesota in the United States. In Ice Cross Downhill, four athletes at a time race down the obstacle-filled ice tracks at speeds of up to 80 km/h with the two fastest advancing to the next round. The winners of Riders Cup races collect 250 championship points while the winners of four major Red Bull Crashed Ice races earn 1,000 points.

The exceedingly well organized race in Wagrain-Kleinarl has become not only a fixture on the Ice Cross Downhill World Championship circuit, kicking off the last four straight seasons. But it has also earned honors in Austria and won the Zipfer Tourism Prize in Austria last year as the region’s best event. Dozens of volunteers spend four weeks preparing the track and venue.

Wagrain-Kleinarl Riders Cup results Men: 1. Cameron Naasz (USA), 2. Denis Novozhilov (RUS), 3. Kilian Braun (SUI), 4. Jim de Paoli (SUI), 5. Jack Schram (USA), 6. Joonas Kautto (FIN), 7. Mirko Lahti (FIN), 8. Marco Dallago (AUT), 9. Maxwell Dunne (USA), 10. Patrik Merz (SUI)

Women: 1. Veronika Windisch (AUT), 2. Anais Morand (SUI), 3. Alice Zenz (AUT), 4. Miisa Klemola (FIN), 5. Lou Pierrot (FRA), 6. Ester Blanc (FRA), 7. Mathilde Monneron (FRA), 8. Tara Hunt (CAN), 9. Amandine Condroyer (FRA), 10. Lelde Manila (LAT)

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