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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Strong Start for Yukoners at BC Norams

Graham Nishikawa once again proved that he's a force to be reckoned with among the elite of North American skiers as he took a podium position in the open men's 20 km free technique race on Thursday at Sovereign Lake.

Nishikawa, who finished third in the race, was narrowly outspurred by Dave Nighbor of North Bay, Ontario as the pair stopped the clock in just over 50 minutes. Alex Harvey, of the National Ski Team, was first across the line, just six seconds ahead of the pair.

Nishikawa wasn't the only Yukoner on the podium. Bryn Knight, on the comeback trail after a season off last year due to an injury, picked up a silver medal in the junior women's 15 km race, while Heidi Brook picked up the bronze, half a minute back from Knight.

Conditions were almost perfect for the athletes, with fresh snow, warm conditions and sunny skies.

It was a tough race for Nishikawa, as the pack of over 90 men slowly dwindled on the hills. "We kept trying to drop the rest of the field, but you'd look back and they were still there."

With only 5 km to go, the pack had thinned to a hardy dozen or so, but then Harvey put the hammer down and the bunch just couldn't stay with him.

Yukon has a strong contingent at these races, with over 16 skiers representing competing in the three race series. This first race day was especially rough on the Yukoners as they were coming in from all over the continent and only arrived late on the night before the race.

Head Coach Alain Masson noted that "racing so soon after traveling and then trying to adapt to the altitude here (the race courses are over 1700 metres in altitude) is really hard. When you die at altitude, you really die badly."

Hosting the races poses a real challenge for the Sovereign Lakes Club, who put the series together with just a few days notice. They had originally been scheduled to be run at the Whistler Olympic site, but were moved due to a lack of snow there. The schedule then had to be juggled to fit in with other activities already planned at the club, advancing the race schedule by a day.

Despite the last minute scramble, the organizers pulled together a superb group of volunteers from across the country and everything went without a hitch.

The races continue with a pair of classic races; a sprint race on Friday and an individual start distance race on Saturday night.

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