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Gutierrez, Ortiz win at Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team selection race

VAIL, Colorado-Not that there was any doubt, but Simon Gutierrez and Anita Ortiz proved once again on Sunday they're two of the top mountain runners in the U.S. Each recorded a dominating victory at the Teva Vail Hill Climb, the third and final selection race for the 2002 Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team.

Under blue skies and temperatures in the 80s, Gutierrez, 36, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, motored up the 7.5-mile dirt trail on Vail Mountain (with a 2,230-foot climb) in 50 minutes, 9 seconds, outrunning Paul Low, 28, of Amherst, Massachusetts (50:31). Mark Werner, 30, of Boulder, Colorado (52:06), Andy Bupp, 30, of Littleton, Colorado (52:53), and Art Siemers, 29, of Arvada, Colorado, rounded out the top five places. Gutierrez, who took charge early in the race, has twice represented the U.S. at the World Cross Country Championships (including once at the junior level) and has competed at various other trail and cross country races in Europe. The finish line of Sunday's race was at 10,350 feet, but he said the high altitude didn't hinder him a bit.

"I think I can do well and help the team," said Gutierrez, who also has an eye on qualifying for the 2004 U.S. Olympic Trials Marathon. "I've been trying to get up to 8,000 or 10,000 feet once a week to train, but I didn't know how I'd feel racing at this altitude. But I really felt fine once we got up high, so I'm really happy about that."

Ortiz, 38, the local favorite from nearby Eagle, Colorado, was the first woman to the top of the mountain, finishing 31st overall in 1:00:44. Despite running with a sore hamstring, Ortiz ran strong and was never challenged in the second half of the race.

Finishing a solid second (34th overall, 1:02:10) was Kari DiStefano, 42, of Telluride, Colorado, the women's 2001 USATF Mountain Runner of the Year. Kelly Ryan, 33, of Littleton, Colorado (38th overall, 1:02:41), past U.S. Mountain Running Team members Lisa Goldsmith, 37, of Nederland, Colorado (40th overall, 1:03:12) and Laura Bruess, 41, of Boulder, Colorado (44th overall, 1:04:11), also turned in strong efforts. Gutierrez, Ortiz, and Vermont's Eric Morse had previously earned automatic berths for the U.S. team. Morse at the June 9 Wolverine Hill Climb in Anchorage, Alaska and Gutierrez at the June 15 Mt. Washington Hill Climb in Gorham, New Hampshire. Ortiz was the first U.S. female finisher at each of this year's selection races.

The Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team will compete in the WMRA World Mountain Running Trophy Championships in Innsbruck, Austria, on September 14 (juniors and senior women) and September 15 (senior men and open race). This year's WMRT races will be held on uphill-only courses (12k for men, 9.2k for women and junior men, and 3.3k for junior women).

The six-member junior squad was named on June 2. The remainder of the senior team-four men and three women-will be announced on July 15 by the USATF Mountain/Ultra/Trail Running Council. The final selection is based on results at the three selection races; mountain, road, track, and cross country race credentials; and previous U.S. Mountain Running Team experience.

"Being part of the team is a huge honor," Ortiz said. "It's what I've been hoping for since last year, and I'm really looking forward to it."

Sunday's race was in stark contrast to the second Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team selection race, the June 15 Mt. Washington Hill Climb. Gutierrez won that event to earn an automatic bid to the U.S. squad, but the race was shortened from 7.6 miles to 3.8 miles because of near-freezing temperatures and high winds at the summit, coupled with slippery conditions on the road.

Ortiz, the women's 2002 U.S. snowshoe racing champion, earned an automatic bid at the June 9 Wolverine Run near Anchorage, Alaska and followed that up by finishing second at the June 15 Mt. Washington Hill Climb. Morse, who did not run on Sunday, earned his automatic bid by winning the Alaska event.

Any runner interested in being considered for the remaining positions should contact Nancy Hobbs or Dave Dunham before July 9.

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Vail Hill Climb, Sunday, July 7, 2002

Top Female Finishers

- 1 - Ortiz, 1:00:44
- 2 - DiStefano, 1:02:10 (US Mountain Running Team member '01)
- 3 - Ryan, 1:02:41
- 4 - Goldsmith, 1:03:12 (US Mountain Running Team member '97)
- 5 - Bruess, 1:04:11 (US Mountain Running Team member '97, '98)
- 6 - Lisa Mills, Aurora, 40, 1:05:14
- 7 - Julie Bryan, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, 34, 1:05:38 (US Mountain Running Team member '01)

Top Male Finishers

- 1 - Gutierrez, 50:09
- 2 - Low, 50:31 (US Mountain Running Team member '99)
- 3 - Werner, 52:06
- 4 - Bupp, 52:53
- 5 - Siemers, 53:51
- 6 - Andy Dimmen, Colorado Springs, 19, 54:07

Related Web Sites

www.alaskamountainrunners.org - Wolverine Mountain Run

www.gsrs.com - Mount Washington Hill Climb

www.vailrec.com - Vail Hill Climb

www.tlv.at/worldtrophy2002 - World Mountain Running Trophy 2002

www.usatf.org - USA Track and Field

www.wmra.info - World Mountain Running Association