

## VISA team targets podium for Nordic World Championships

*PARK CITY, Utah* – Five members of the Visa Women's Ski Jumping Team will compete Friday, Feb. 25, in the 2011 Nordic World Ski Championships in Oslo, Norway — which marks only the second time in history that women have been allowed to jump at Worlds.

Current World Champion Lindsey Van, Jessica Jerome, Alissa Johnson, Abby Hughes and Sarah Hendrickson will be competing for the U.S. in Oslo. Because Van is the defending champion, five athletes from the U.S. are allowed to compete versus the max of four per country. There is no team event for women jumpers at World Championships.

“Not only are the women jumping farther every day, but new women from different countries are constantly rising to the top,” said Jerome, who's currently ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the world. She placed 6<sup>th</sup> in the 2009 World Championships. “I think going into Liberec, not many of us knew what to expect and it was slightly overwhelming at times. Now, we're even more prepared.”

The Oslo World Championships will take place in one of the sport's most significant venues, the Holmenkollen Ski Stadium. The women will be jumping on the Midtstubakken hill (K-spot of 90). All the jumps were recently rebuilt in anticipation of the Worlds and hundreds of thousands of spectators are expected to attend.

Norwegian Kjell Magnussen has coached the Visa Team for four years and said he's looking forward to leading one of the best teams in the world on his home turf. One of the challenges, he said, to jumping the Midtstubakken hill is the ever-changing wind that sets in during the afternoons. The women will be jumping at 3 p.m. Oslo time.

New to the World Ski Jumping Championships is the FIS-approved wind and gate compensation system, which monitors wind conditions and compensates for headwind (advantage) and tailwind (disadvantage) in a jumper's final score. The FIS also says the system helps ensure the safety of the athletes so that they will not out-jump the hill. It has been tested at the COC and WC levels.

“The skill level of jumpers from most countries has improved quite a bit since Liberec,” Magnussen said. “This is because countries have focused more on jumping after the International Ski Federation approved a World Cup circuit for women beginning in 2011/2012.”

The International Olympic Committee will be paying close attention to this year's Worlds. In October, the IOC Executive Board announced that it was “looking favorably” at adding a women's ski jumping event to the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games program, but said it needed more time to consider the outcome of the sport's World Championships. IOC President Jacques Rogge will make the final decision by the end of April.

Veteran and reigning World Champion Lindsey Van is aiming this time for a pressure-free competition. Bottom line – she just wants to jump well and have fun. “A lot of pressure comes from inside and I've taken that off myself and I don't expect anything. Of course, if it goes well I'll be psyched.”

As for the IOC pending decision, “Honestly, if the IOC is looking for a good competition in Oslo, I think our sport is going to be just

fine," Van said.