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Vinter holds nerve to take GBR victory at Fir Park

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Zak Vinter had the advantage of going last on the second run to see how the two racers closest to him on the first run had got on down the Alain Baxter set course. Vinter had lead after the first run by one hundredth of a second from Declan Huppach with Callum Witts in third, just three hundredths back. It was tight at the top. By the time Vinter had crossed the line to win the race Robert Holmes had taken second and Owen Vinter was third with Ciaran Bradwell and Kieran Nesbitt rounding out the top five.

It was good to see some of the leading dry slope skiers from the south making the trip up. The two Pendle racers, Declan Huppach and Callum Witts both gave Vinter a tough challenge on the first run along with Oliver Weeks and Robert Holmes with Owen Vinter in sixth, all six racers separated by 0.27 seconds.

Come the Alain Baxter set second run course and the thoughts of another easy course were banished. This was in the words of Malcolm Erskine from the British Ski Academy, 'a proper course that would challenge the racers.'

Quick feet, the ability to think and still try and carry the speed was important and too many racers failed to adapt to the requirements. With such fine margins between the top racers meant that caution could not be thrown to the wind. Every hundredth counted.

Ciaran Bradwell sparked the second run into life with a much improved second run that saw him take the lead. Bradwell had been in 15th place after the first run, some 1.16 off the lead yet was one of the few racers to profit from taking a gamble on his line and speed on the second run. Kieran Nesbitt was the next to take the gamble and he edged out Robbie Anderson and held onto second when Adam Lee struggled down. William Dalziel and Josef Huppach then both came to grief in the tricky middle and end sections before Owen Vinter posted a stunning second run time to take the lead.

If Vinter thought that he had the win in his pocket, Robert Holmes, another of the strong Pendle team that made the trip north, had other ideas. Holmes was the leading Under 16 racer in the field yet wanted to show his older compatriots that he was in with a shout. Holmes posted a time two hundredths faster than Vinter to stay in front with four more racers to go.

Next down was Ollie Weeks. Weeks had been making a strong name for himself across the country this summer on the dry matt with three Club National level race wins going into the Fir Park GBR race. Looking to make up the two tenths that he trailed race leader Zak Vinter by, Weeks came to grief approaching the final technical section and dropped all the way down the leader board as he picked himself up off the matt.

Could the two remaining Pendle racers make it a Pendle clean sweep of the podium? First down was Callum Witts and then Declan Huppach would challenge. Both had spent a long time looking at the course on the second run yet first Witts and then Huppach saw their challenge disappear.

Vinter knew that he had a slender quarter of a second advantage on Holmes after the first run so still had to attack to make sure of a first GBR outdoor race win of his career. Solid was how he approached the course and crossed the line eleven hundredths slower than Holmes but with enough to stay in front of the pack. Holmes had to be content with second and Owen Vinter took third.

It was great to see some of the leading dry slope racers from the north and south all competing against each other. It is something that really needs to be looked at so that the best racers can push each other to better results. The competition was healthy down a pretty neutral slope. Had the race been held at Hillend, local knowledge and experience may have had more effect.

The announcement that the BSA are offering two week scholarships to the best Overall (from both indoor and outdoor series) racers from the summer, should spice up the rest of the series.

The age groups were won by Ryan Pye (Under 14, 14th Overall); Robert Holmes (Under 16, 2nd Overall); Owen Vinter (Under 16, 3rd Overall); Zak Vinter (Under 21, Race Winner) and Stuart Gillies (Masters, 23rd Overall)

Results

Action shots are on www.racerready.zenfolio.com