



SA Barefoot Skiers

put best foot forward at World Games

Words and pictures by Eugene Sam

The highly rated South African barefoot skiing team brought home some well-earned silverware from the recent World Games in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Leisure Boating brings you all the thrills and spills from the 2009 World Games.



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The South African skiers, sponsored by Lotto and South Africa's sports governing body SASCOC, recently returned from the World Games that was held recently in the city of Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

About 81 athletes from 29 countries gathered at the Lotus Lake in Kaohsiung for the World Games' waterski category. This included 25 barefoot skiers, 26 tournament skiers and 30 wakeboard riders.

The South African waterski team was represented by barefooters Heinrich Sam, Andre de Villiers, tournament skier Samantha Martin and wakeboarder Shaun Faccio.

The World Games are held every four years and all the sports featured at the event are in line to be selected for London's 2012 summer Olympics.



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Ready for action

Upon arrival, the South African waterski team, almost immediately had to jump onto a bullet train to Taipei where a bit of training time was scheduled for the next couple of days before the event commenced.

Despite hot and humid conditions, all the skiers managed to get some good practice time on the water and acclimatised pretty well after only two days in the scenic, yet previously heavy polluted city of Taipei.

After all the skiers experienced good practice and conditioning, they travelled back to Kaohsiung to attend the opening ceremony – attended by more than 55 000 spectators. After concluding the formalities, it was down to serious business on the water.

The competition featured three reliable Correct Craft boats including a 2009Ski-Nautique196andSki-Nautique Super Air 210 with 5.7-litre 343HP Excalibur engine. Both Ski-Nautiques, together with the barefoot jump ramp, will remain in Taiwan after the event.

Barefoot success!

First up was Andre de Villiers in the barefoot slalom tournament. The course and conditions proved tough, but Pretoria boys Andre (21) and Heinrich Sam (17), being world-class performers,



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skied very well and finished in 2nd and 3rd places respectively.

However, top podium spot went to Keith St. Onge from the USA who proved to be in sensational form throughout the competition.

After the slalom, the barefooters lined up for the trick skiing tournament. The front-runners for this title were David Small (Great Britain), Andre de Villiers (RSA), Heinrich Sam (RSA), Keith St. Onge (USA), Pete O’Neil (Australia) and Paul McDonald (Canada).

With so many quality skiers competing, everyone knew that it was going to be a tough battle for the top position.

Both Heinrich and Andre made it through to the finals and finished 2nd and 4th respectively. It was a close shave for Andre, who narrowly missed out on a podium spot after Paul McDonald (3rd) and star skier Keith St. Onge, who eventually took the gold.

The final event, the much-anticipated barefoot jump, which would



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ultimately decide the overall barefoot champion, was well received by the spectators. Most of the skiers jumped the ramp at around 72 km/h (barefoot!), performed all kinds of inverted tricks and landed on their feet, 23 to 28 m further.

After the two events, the overall standing going into the jump event was as follow: 1st Keith St. Onge 2nd Heinrich Sam 3rd David Small and 4th Andre de Villiers.

David Small set the benchmark first up in the jump event when he landed a massive jump of 26.7 m. Andre was up next and landed a huge distance of 25.5 m.

With Heinrich jumping 23.7 m in his first round, he knew he had to produce some magic to secure the overall title. He knew he'd have to get close to that 27 m mark to win the gold.

Everyone, including the South African supporters, was on the edge of their seat when a pumped-up Heinrich took the run up to the jump. He hit the jump hard and got a lot of pop of the ramp. Heinrich landed past the world record buoy (27.4 m), but unfortunately, couldn't hold the jump and bailed.

Despite being a little disappointed, the 17-year old put in a massive performance and is still classified as a junior skier, even though he competed in the senior division.

SA tournament skier Samantha Martin skied really well and even scored a personal best in all three events. Shaun Faccio started well and secured 1st place after the prelims, but was a bit unlucky in the finals, and finished in a respectable 6th place.

Overall, it was a great performance from the South African skiers. ■

Overall barefoot results	
1 st	Keith St. Onge (USA)
2 nd	Heinrich Sam (RSA)
3 rd	David Small (GB)
4 th	Andre de Villiers (RSA)