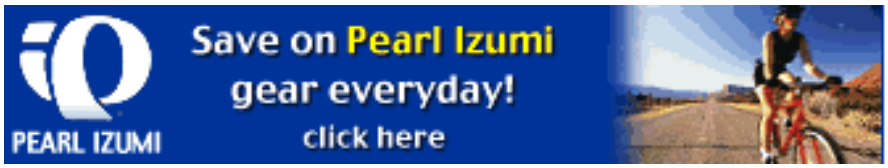

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Nash, Wadsworth Take Relay Gold

LAKE PLACID, NY (Feb. 20) -- The U.S. Ski Team's Marcus Nash (Fryeburg, ME) and Justin Wadsworth (Bend, OR) made history Sun. taking gold in the men's cross country relay at the Goodwill Games in Lake Placid. Nash clinched the win with a stunning sprint to the finish, edging both Norwegian teams by one and two-tenths-of-a-second.

Wadsworth started strong, going somewhat against the planned tactic of staying a few positions back. Even a quick fall didn't keep Wadsworth far away from the lead as he and Nash traded 1.5-km laps five times each over the 15-km course.

"Justin and I had a pretty good game plan -- just stay near the front, not in the lead, and stay out of trouble," said Nash. "When Justin tagged me the first time he said, 'sorry I'm in the lead but my skis were too fast.'"

Wadsworth averted near disaster with a crash on the seventh of ten laps. "There was a patch of ice, maybe 3-4 inches long, and I hit it just at the right time," said Wadsworth. "Just like alpine skiing I was down -- I didn't know what hit me. For me, I just wanted to stay out of trouble, keep us in second or third, and leave it to Marcus."

Going into the final lap, the U.S. duo was swapping the lead back-and-forth. With a kilometer to go, Nash took the lead on an uphill and held it to the finish, despite a photo finish.

"I thought once I rounded the corner (coming into the finish) it was over," said Nash. "I didn't realize it would be so tight. I think one of the Norwegians had the lead with 25 meters to go. I just dug deeper and said, 'let's go.'

The new sprint relay is one of two sprint events recently added to the 2002 Olympics. "It's a lot more tactical," said Nash. "It's a 15-k sprint so you can't do it all at once. You have to be in good shape. The guys who do well are the guys who do well in the longer races, too.

"This was a real important win for us, added Nash. "We're known as one of the best sprint teams in the world, but we've had a lot of bad luck. It's great to get a win under our belt and go back to Europe with stronger confidence. In every one of the World Cups we've been in the lead at least once."

"Hopefully this will get enough air time on TNT to show the USA how exciting cross country skiing can be, especially going into the Olympics in Salt Lake City," said Wadsworth. "We have a chance in Salt Lake City to medal in the sprints, we showed that today.

Russia won the women's sprint relay as Yelena Burukina and Natalya Baranova each skied the 1.5-km course in 24:45.2 with Germany-1 in second place and Finland-1 taking the bronze. USA-1 (Tessa Benoit/Rebecca Dussault) was ninth and USA-2 (Kristina Joder/Kikkan Randall) 11th.

Winter Goodwill Games
Men's Cross Country Relay
Sun. Feb. 20
Lake Placid, NY

1. USA-1 (Justin Wadsworth, Marcus Nash), 37:15.9
2. NOR-2 (B. Skjaerli/O. Rigg), 37:16.1
3. NOR-1 (J. Egil Anderson/F. Jermstad), 37:16.2
8. USA-2 (Rob Whitney/Kris Freeman), 38:07.6

Women's Cross Country Relay
1. RUS-1 (Yelena Burukhina/Natalya Baranova), 24:45.2
2. GER-1 (Viola Bauer/Anke Reschwamm), 24:54.8
3. FIN-1 (Riikka Sirvioe/Aino Kaisa Saarinen), 25:02.2
9. USA-1 (Tessa Benoit, Rebecca Dussault), 25:58.3
11. USA-2 (Kristina Joder/Kikkan Randall), 26:55.2

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