Competitors locked in for U.S. Grand Prix ski-snowboard events

By USSA

PARK CITY – One of the longest-standing and celebrated tours in action sports history, the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix series, is back, and bigger for its 16th season. This year snowboarding and freeskiing events will be front and center at three of North America's premier winter resorts.

For the fourth year running, Colorado's Copper Mountain will play host to the kickoff to the action sports winter competition season as the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix touches down Dec. 7-10.

Copper will give the world its first glimpse at new tricks and progression the athletes have made in their riding over the summer months as they boost their freshest moves in a 22-foot halfpipe.

It all starts with halfpipe skiing in the Visa U.S. Halfpipe Grand Prix on Dec. 9. with U.S. champs Devin Logan (West Dover, Vt.) and David Wise (Reno). Pros like X Games champion Jen Hudak (Salt Lake City) also bring their brand of halfpipe stylings to Colorado.

Then, on Dec. 10, laying out the best of their best will be top riders like Olympic bronze medalist Kelly Clark (Mt. Snow, Vt.) who crushed the women's field last season as the only woman landing 1080s in competition. Also watch for Olympic bronze medalist Scotty Lago (Seabrook, N.H.), Olympic silver medalist Hannah Teter (South Lake Tahoe), and many more.

Known for being the first superpipe open for riding each

season in North America, Copper's Olympic-regulation U-tube is one of the best conditioned spots to ride halfpipe in the world, not to mention completely visible from the Village at Copper and Burning Stones Plaza, making it easy for spectators to catch all of the weekend's competitions.

Immediately following the halfpipe snowboarding competition will be the North Face Junior Jam, an event for local groms to come out and display their riding prowess to the world. Adding to the excitement of the event for the 2012 season is Woodward at Copper's involvement in the development of the Paul Mitchell Progression Session venue, an event that will feature innovative riding on a unique course setup under the lights on Dec. 10.

Marking the halfway point of the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix series for the second year in a row is Canyons Resort in Utah where snowboardcross and, new to the tour in 2012, skicross will be front-and-center for action packed, first man to the finish, racing Feb. 11-12.

After a successful snowboardcross debut at the resort in 2011, Canyons is gearing up to make things bigger and better this season as they make operational changes to the hill that include cutting trees, moving snowmaking and widening trails that will ensure a world-class cross sport venue.

It kicks off with SBX on Feb. 11 featuring world-class athletes like Lindsey Jacobellis (Stratton, Vt.), Nate Holland (Squaw Valley), Seth Wescott (Sugarloaf, Maine) and Canyons Resort rider Jonathan Cheever (Saugus, Mass.).

Then, on Feb. 12, athletes like World Cup winner John Teller (Mammoth Lakes) will help kick off skicross' inaugural appearance on the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix series.

Also adding to the excitement at Canyons is The North Face Junior Jam, a competition that will showcase young talent from the Park City area in a slopestyle infused competition layout.

Rounding out the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix is Mammoth Mountain hosting for its third consecutive year. The resort is once again taking things to the next level with the addition of halfpipe and slopestyle skiing to its competition agenda, which already includes the 22-foot halfpipe and slopestyle snowboarding events.

The action gets underway March 2 when athletes compete at the second stop of the Visa U.S. Grand Prix halfpipe. The day's action will continue as slopestyle snowboarding takes over in the afternoon. After being voted as the riders as the best slopestyle event of the year in 2011, Mammoth's slopestyle course will feature all things bigger and better in 2012, challenging snowboarders and skiers alike to nail their best runs.

On March 3, the halfpipe opens again where reigning U.S. Grand Prix tour champ Kelly Clark will be looking to reclaim her title, going head-to-head with the likes of Teter, Gretchen Bleiler (Breckenridge) and Kaitlyn Farrington (Sun Valley). Things aren't any less competitive on the men's side with Lago riding it out against competitors like Mammoth native Greg Bretz (Mammoth Lakes) and Matt Ladley (Steamboat Springs).

The halfpipe competition will be followed up with the inaugural slopestyle competition, where freeskiing athletes look to make a splash in the sport's Grand Prix debut.