

# THE STORIES

## EUROPE/EURASIA



### TEAM AUSTRIA

**By: Albin Verzonik, athlete & Vinzenz Haertel, partner**

Cross country skiing is a very popular sport in Austria as it also is here in Japan, the host country of the 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games. Sending one of the biggest delegations to compete in this sport is Austria and we had the chance to sit down with an athlete and coach in between competition.

The sun was out yesterday morning and we had the opportunity to interview Hans Prutti, competing in the 1K and 500M cross country events, as well as his coach, Marianne Spreitzer, who has been coaching him for the past four years.

This morning Prutti won the silver medal in the 1K event and did much better than he thought he would be able. Unfortunately for him, he had to compete in the 500M classic style only five minutes later.

"The silver medal was the first medal for me at the World Games and now I want to get more," said Prutti.

Before he started to train with Special Olympics, he lived at a farmhouse in the Alps, working very hard and sleeping in the stablehouse. Four years ago he sensed the need for change and he was given the opportunity to work in a community and leave the farmhouse. At the same time he met his future coach, Spreitzer, who motivated him to start practicing cross country skiing.

While it is his first World Games, his performance sure wouldn't lend you to believe as much.

"I am enjoying attending the World Winter Games in Nagano and my favorite part so far has been the Opening Ceremony," said Prutti. "It was very exciting to see the dancers and ice-skaters!"

"Special Olympics facilitates my own personal situation, gives me the chance to take part in this great venues and to follow the tracks of Alois Stadlober, a former Austrian world champion in cross country skiing, my biggest idol," said Prutti.

He took to the course and on the heels of the 1K classic race and swept the competition away, winning the gold.

### Spotlight of the Austrian Special Olympics skier

Name: Hans Prutti

Age: 44

Sister: 1

City: Knittelfeld/Austria

Involved in Special Olympics for: 4 years

World Games Participation: first time

Medals: 2

Favorite Food: Spaghetti

Favorite Drink: Cola

Favorite color: Red

Favorite animal: Cat

Hobbies: reading, cross country skiing, cooking

Favorite movie: Heidi

Best decision of his/her life: Competing in cross country skiing in Special Olympics Games



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## TEAM AUSTRIA

**By: Vinzenz Haertel, athlete & Albin Verzonik, partner**

While snowshoeing is still a relatively unknown sport in Austria, a large number of Special Olympics Austria athletes are competing this week at the 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games in the event.

We had the opportunity to get know one of the Special Olympics Germany athletes, Anita Ramsauer, who competed in the snowshoeing relay and 200M snowshoeing race.

Yesterday she won two silver medals and now wears them proudly.

"This is the best thing of my life," Ramsauer said. Eva, her coach told us that two years ago Ramsauer was sitting in a wheelchair because she had been afflicted by a motor control breakdown.

With time, Ramsauer became more and more involved until she started training in snowshoeing a year ago. According to her coach, she has shown steady improvement in her balance and her fitness.

"My parents will be very proud," Ramsauer said. "They encouraged me to keep on training and gave me the self-confidence to leave the wheelchair."

While taking care of business, Ramsauer is loving her stay in Japan. "This is my first stay in Japan and I have a lot of fun," she said.

"Special Olympics changed my life very much. I got the possibility to train in snowshoeing and furthermore I'm allowed to take part in competition. Through this I got to know lots of people, make friends and I even have some fans. It makes me feel a bit independent and somehow I have the feeling that I'm doing something useful."

### Spotlight on Anita Ramsauer

Date of birth: 25.06.1987

Brother/Sister: 1 brother, 1 sister

City: Steinerkirchen/Austria

Involved in Special Olympics for: 2 years

Participation in World Games: First time

Medals: 2 silver medals in snowshoeing

Favorite Food: Pizza

Favorite Drink: Apple juice

Favorite colour: Blue

Favorite animal: Cats

Hobbies: Running, Biking, Painting

Favorite movie: Full House

Idol: Her Sister

Best decision of his/her life: To take part in Special Olympics



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## **SPECIAL OLYMPICS ROMANIA**

### **MEETING A NATIONAL HERO**

**By: Nicoleta Florentina Stan, athlete & Andreea Tincea**

If you meet someone famous, you feel excited, but if you meet a nation's hero, you are honored.

You cannot speak about Romania and sports without mentioning Nadia Comaneci. Comaneci is the first gymnast in the world to be awarded a perfect score of 10 for her outstanding performance in an Olympic Gymnastic Event – Montreal 1976. She is considered to be one of the greatest athletes in the 20th century and one of the greatest gymnasts of all time – the first gymnast in history to know what it's like to be perfect. Comaneci is now a Member of the International Board of Directors of Special Olympics and is actively involved in Special Olympics events.

The Special Olympics Romania team present in Nagano for the Special Olympics World Winter Games had the opportunity to meet Comaneci and her husband, Bart Conner — one of the greatest American gymnasts ever. Conner met Nicoleta Stan — athlete, Andreea Tincea — partner and Emilia Serbanica — chaperone at the Global Youth Forum on 27 February. Both Comaneci and Conner were happy to see them again and to talk about their experience with the Global Youth Summit and Japan. Our athletes — Andrei Nita, Alina Feurdea and Albinel Onea — have proudly presented their medals in Alpine skiing. You could easily see their emotions and how impressed they were to sit near the two great gymnasts. Both Comaneci and Conner encouraged the athletes to keep improving their abilities in skiing and they were impressed to find out that the athletes learned how to ski in only 10 days in a ski camp in Austria.

"I am very proud of the Special Olympics Romania team and of the Special Olympics athletes," said Comaneci at the end of a meeting which was an inspiring and emotional moment for everyone.



## **INTERVIEW WITH SPECIAL OLYMPICS LIECHTENSTEIN**

**By: Nicoleta Florentina Stan, athlete & Andreea Tincea, partner**

Viel Glueck Stephanie Ritter!

At Hakuba Venue the first thing you see is a large white platform crossed by a yellow fence, and a sea of people walking around, some of them on skis and others encouraging their team. We walk on the platform and here we are watching all these people and not knowing where to start. But the chance is following us and we meet Stephanie Ritter, an 18-year-old young lady from Special Olympics Liechtenstein. Ritter is a participant in the 3K cross country skiing race; she won one medal as a fifth place finisher. In order to compete in the 1K race she and other athletes competed in a divisioning contest, simulating the real competition that is going to take place tomorrow. The race consists in skiing for 1 kilometer as a member of a team made up of four athletes helping each other to get to the finish line as rapidly as possible.

Liechtenstein is a small country situated in the western part of Europe. In order to arrive to Tokyo, Ritter and her team drove to Zurich and from there the road took them to Frankfurt and all the way to the Japanese capital. Total flight time: 12 hours.

Like other teams, Ritter's enjoyed the staying with a traditional Japanese family. What was the impact of the traditional culture? Japanese food and taiko (traditional drums) and the company of a Japanese volunteer — Tatsuki Hayashi — helping her team to pass the barrier of language.

This being her first visit to Japan, everything is received as a new and exciting experience because of the exposure to a totally different cultural environment.

Planning to come back to Japan one day, Ritter will surely say goodbye to her Japanese friends in a traditional manner that she learned here: bowing.



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## MARIANA NITA, FAMILY MEMBER, SPECIAL OLYMPICS ROMANIA

By: Nicoleta Florentina Stan, athlete & Andreea Tincea, partner

Mariana Nita is the mother of Special Olympics Romania athlete Andrei Nita, 19, who represents Special Olympics Romania in the Alpine skiing competition at Yamanouchi. When we met Mariana she was very proud and excited to talk with us, the Global Youth Summit representatives from her home country. She told us her story in a few words and shared with us how her involvement and experiences from Special Olympics have changed her life.

The first time Mariana heard about Special Olympics was at a seminar organized to set up the Family Support Network in the Romanian cities of Medias and Deva. Andrei and Mariana were impressed and curious to find out more about the programs such as these that Special Olympics develops. They were invited to attend the Athlete Leadership Programs event organized in June in Bucharest. She remembers with great pleasure the moments that she shared together with 10 other families that were present at the seminar. It was then that Andrei learned how to speak publicly and share his experiences in front of others. Mariana noticed how important it was for her son to interact with people and how vital it was to let him become an independent person.

When asked about how Special Olympics changed their life, she says that since June 2004, Andrei is more self-confident, more willing to improve and more open to discuss his involvement with others, including large audiences.

Mariana has always encouraged her son, but she thinks that only through sports and Special Olympics has he become the courageous and brave person selected to represent Special Olympics Romania for the 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games.



## MEETING A SPECIAL PERSON

By: Nicoleta Florentina Stan & Andreea Tincea

Izuna Resort Ski Ground — Mure Village held these days the snowboarding competitions. In the spirit of Japanese temples the entrance to the venue is protected by a new figure that the volunteers have placed there almost as if they wanted to say to everyone that the place is entirely surrounded by love and friendship: a snowman carries with his smile a welcoming greeting.

The work begins, and no one imagined what an important day this would be.

To enter a white tent requires special area credentials. This is one of the decisive moments of your life: if you think twice you are not taking the step that would guide you to this new experience able to make you see more than yesterday. So here we are presenting the credentials and entering into the special area.

Having the chance to meet a Princess is not an experience that you live every day. Already knowing what an important role the royal family plays for the Japanese people you cannot help but be excited and extremel honored that you had the chance to shake hands and interview such an important personality of the Japanese world.

Preparing our Webinar session for tomorrow we ask Her Highness Princess Takamado Mia Denko to give the Global Youth Summit a message to transmit all around the world as a thought aimed to make a difference for the society we built now for the future generations.

"There are so many possibilities for the youth to correct the unstable situation in the world," said Princess Takamado, representative of the Japanese royal family, encouraging youth to develop better communication skills. Traveling from one country to another, meeting people, having the opportunity to know them better, to touch and talk with them, this is the real communication. Telephones and the Internet link people through technology, yet still direct human interaction must be the most important thing.

Referring to the Special Olympics snowboarding competition at Izuna Resort Ski Ground — Mure Village, Princess Takamado said, "If we could have this atmosphere all around the world, I think the world would be a better place!"

Princess Takamado Mia Denko, thank you for supporting the youth of this world in changing attitudes and improving communication, trying to build up a new world for those coming after us.

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## **ANDREI NITA, SPECIAL OLYMPICS ROMANIA ATHLETE**

**By: Nicoleta Florentina Stan, athlete & Andreea Tincea, partner**

Representing Special Olympics Romania in the Alpine skiing competition at the 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Nagano is athlete Andrei Nita.

As Nita completed his final run, his teammates waited anxiously at the finish, rooting him on and chanting, "Great Andrei, great!" The results weren't of any importance, his participation and flawless run that shaved six seconds off his previous time were reason enough to celebrate.

The Global Youth Summit team from Romania first met Nita in June 2004 at the Athlete Leadership seminar organized in Bucharest. Very shy and reserved, Nita hesitated speaking about himself, his family, his friends and even his achievements.

Following the seminar, Nita and his mother returned to their hometown and organized a camp for persons with Down syndrome. Athletes as well as one family member were invited to come and learn about Special Olympics and the Family Support Network.

At the same time, Nita started to train for table tennis and athletics. In September 2004 he attended the Special Olympics Romania National Games, where he won the bronze medal in the table tennis competition. Despite never having trained for winter sports before, Nita was selected by Special Olympics Romania to attend a ski camp in Austria which at first he was hesitant to attend.

Five months later, Nita has taken to the slopes of Yamanouchi not only as an athlete thriving in competition, but one who has been changed by the many experiences offered to him through Special Olympics.



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