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**FESTIVAL OPENING WEEKEND GOES BIG WITH BIG AIR, BIG CROWDS AND BIG MOMENTUM:** Winners crowned at Big Air and Orage Masters, amidst record breaking crowds in Whistler

WHISTLER, BC, April 13, 2008 - Whistler's thirteenth TELUS World Ski and Snowboard Festival launched with an auspicious start this weekend with two hugely successful competitions, the Orage Masters, and the Big Air.

The Big Air saw \$44,000 in cash prizes awarded to the top skiers and snowboarders, who truly lit up the night sky, before a record-sized crowd that packed Whistler's Skiers Plaza, launching and spinning over a massive 65 foot step over gap jump.

The snowboard competition was won by fifteen year old rising star Sebastien Toutant of L'Assomption, Quebec, ahead of Norway's Kim Andre Eliassen in second, and last year's Big Air Champion, Matt Belzile in third.

The women's snowboard competition was won by Megan Whiteside of Boulder, Colorado.

In the two-planked world, many of the skiers were coming off a busy day on the Orage Masters slopestyle course competition. The Big Air winner was JF Houle, of Drummondville Quebec, (improving on his 2007 third place performance), followed by seventeen year old Ian Williams of Boise, Idaho in his first major competition, and Austin Ross of Pemberton, BC in third.

The women's ski Big Air competition was won by Ashley Battersby, of Park City, Utah.

The Orage Masters, a unique team event featuring a specially constructed terrain park, was won by Team K2, made up of 15 year old superstar Sean Pettit, Frank Raymond, Sean Decker and Ana Segal.

Team Dynastar (Mike Riddle, Justin Dorey, Banks Gillberti, Sarah Burke) came second, followed by Team Armada (Sean Logan, Phil Casabon, Cam Schuster, Kim Lamarre.)

The events showcased the latest and most innovative progressions in the skiing and snowboarding world, from the young guns and the industry legends, as well as the incredible engineering and snow-sculpting skills of Whistler Blackcomb's Parks building team.

Saturday also offered a taste of things to come, with still another 8 days and nights of non-stop events and entertainment ahead.

\$25,000 is on the line, as well as the title of Queen of the Mountain in the original If Ullr Was a Girl competition for female skiers and snowboarders.

The Superpipe competition will take place April 16-19, bringing the total prize money for athletes at this year's TELUS World Ski and Snowboard Festival to almost \$150,000.

The Diamir World Backcountry Freeride Jam will round out the Festival's competitive side, with the Canadian Ski Mountaineering Championships, April 18-20.

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