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Japan Wins Overall Men's Title at 2011 World Rafting Championships in Costa Rica, Czech Republic Takes Women's Title

Turrialba, Costa Rica (October 12, 2011) Making amends for its second-place overall showing in Bosnia in 2009 and third-place finish in South Korea in 2007, Japan earned its place in paddling history on Oct. 10 by winning the World Rafting Championships on Costa Rica's Pacuare River. The Czech Republic took second for the men, with those spots reversed for the women's division, with Czech taking first and Japan second.

Competing against men's teams from 29 different countries, the Japanese men's team earned the title after an impressive win in the event's final, hour-long downriver race down the Class IV-V upper and Class III lower canyons. The downriver win came after a fifth-place finish in the sprint event, third in head-to-head and second in slalom.



"It feels really good, especially this year after the disaster from the earthquake," says Japan team captain Takuya Ikeda, whose team is sponsored by securities firm Teikei. "It was a great downriver course and a tough race."

Indeed, the final overall title was up for grabs until the last day for both the men and women, with seven men's teams and five women's still capable of winning the overall crown. Sitting in second place heading into the downriver event was the Czech Republic, which finished 8th in sprint, 7th in head-to-head and first in slalom. Taking 6th in the downriver race, the Czechs took second place overall, followed by Slovenia in third, who took third in the downriver and slalom. With its win in the sprint event and second-place showing in downriver, Brazil took fourth overall and Chile fifth, following its win in the head-to-head race.

"The water levels cooperated great," says event organizer Rafael Gallo, president of Rios Tropicales and sanctioning body International Rafting Federation. "Rains brought the water up for the slalom, and it dropped back down again in time for the downriver race."

For the women, while Japan won the downriver race, it settled for second overall behind the Czechs, who rode their first-place slalom and second-place downriver finish to secure the overall title. The Netherlands took third overall, with a win in the sprint and third-place showing in head-to-head and downriver, with New Zealand taking fourth and Great Britain fifth.

By all accounts the event was a huge success, with 48 teams — 29 men's and 19 women's — coming to Costa Rica from 34 countries to participate in the event. It also brought international recognition to one of the world's most pristine whitewater rivers, which is still facing threats from potential hydropower projects. The Project RAFT event in 1991 helped stop the Dos Montanas dam from going in downstream, and Gallo hopes that showcasing it to the world might again help curtail future potential projects. "There's still the possibility of a dam at the base of the upper section, which would be a travesty," says Gallo. "Events like this can go a long way toward preserving it by putting the Pacuare on the international map."

For complete results, visit www.intraftfed.com or more info on the event www.visitcostarica.com

About the IRF

The IRF, the trustee of the rafting tradition, is a non-government and non-profit international organization for the activity of rafting. The IRF maintains and promotes the conditions which encourages the practice and the development of rafting at all competition, commercial and recreational levels. The IRF aims to facilitate the growing demands of the rafting fraternity through a unified body that deals exclusively with rafting issues and factors which influence the development of rafting. www.internationalrafting.com

