Warwick Wright’s (RSA) explosive backside gave him the lead in the two heats he entered today. South Africa is now sharing the first place with Peru on the team standings. Photo: ISA/Marotta

A Gigantic Tribal Gathering at the Billabong ISA World Surfing Games Presented by Amarok of Volkswagen
Host Peru and Latin Americans Are Still Contenders As Big Waves Continue with Ladies, Open Men and Longboarders in Nail-biting Elimination Heats

Punta Hermosa, Peru
October 24, 2010

Day five of the Billabong ISA World Surfing Games presented by Amarok in Peru saw a number of nail-biting heats for the ladies, longboarders and open men’s divisions at the long and section-marked right-hander at Caballeros.

With the swell dropping ever-so-slightly to just overhead, the quest for gold medals and national pride is in full swing. And while it’s still early in the event, there are a few countries emerging as definite contenders - and a lot of them are Hispanic. Going into the fifth day of competition, in the team standings there was a four-way tie for first between Costa Rica, Peru, South African and the United States. And giving chase was Brazil in fifth place and Australia and Spain tied for sixth.

But beyond some of the predictable players, it’s been amazing to watch the emergence of Central and South American countries as viable medalists. You could call it a Latin Uprising. As far as the preliminary rankings go, you’ll find Chile, Venezuela and Mexico in the top ten, all vying for podium position, with Puerto Rico and Argentina hot on their heels.
Yet if any of them might disrupt the establishment and win gold it may be the host country of Peru. And With Matias and Sofia Mulanovich fronting the team, with multitalented Gabriel Villaran, up-coming Cristobal Del Col, and young Anali Gomez serving as lethal support, they’re boasting a stacked squad. The wildcard on the team may be their longboarders Benoit Clemente and Juan Jose Corzo. Corzo has been relegated to the repercharge, but otherwise it’s “all systems go” for Team Peru. When Villaran exploded with a 9-point performance early this afternoon, the large Peruvian weekend crowd nearly levitated off the beach. The thunderous jubilation was deafening all the way from the other side of the bay.

The most anticipated heat of the day however, was the clash of the titans- Australian Pro’s Mick Campbell and Drew Courtney versus American heavyweights Micah Byrne and Mike Losness. Although the heat was called a draw, it was a bit anti-climactic, as neither Campbell nor Losness was really able to exhibit their true arsenal.

The South Africans made a massive comeback today, advancing out of all of their repercharge heats to stay extremely strong in the points position. Team captain Greg Emslie absolutely destroyed his heat, and teammates Warwick Wright and Chad du Toit took 1st and 2nd in a heat both were in.

After watching the rest of the international surfing teams cut through the rippable Peruvian peaks for the past three days, the longboarders finally got back to the water today.

Front-lining the action, Australia’s Harley Ingleby once again stood in fine form at the ISA Games. Last year, in one of the closest heats of the event, Harley narrowly lost out on the gold medal. Ready for redemption, Harley threw down a phenomenal performance today and advanced with one of the day’s highest scores at 15.67 points.

Other standout performers today in the longboarding rounds included last year’s gold-medal winner Antoine Delpero (FRA) who proved just why he’s the surfer to beat with his characteristic power and finesse. Surfing in the Men’s Open as well as this longboard heat, he admitted to feeling the pressure doing double duty. “I was trying to save myself a little to be ready for this heat,” Delpero said after decisively winning his heat. It obviously paid off.

Ireland’s John Coady was the lone Irish representative to the Games this year, but he rode with commitment and abandon. The global economic downturn really hurt the Irish team Cody explained before his heat: “We lost our sponsor and most the guys couldn’t get their needed money together.” His own story of how he got to Peru is a fairy tale story itself: “I had some friends call me up and ask ‘If
we find the support for you will you go?’ My response was ‘Absolutely!’ Three weeks later I was fully funded to make the trip. It was fantastic Irish luck!” Even though he wasn’t able to advance taking a tough 3rd in his heat, the Irishman represented Ireland with great gusto.

Switzerland’s Steve Vogel surfed elegantly on the few waves he was able to keep his speed under control. He didn’t make the cut but what an effort from the team in red & white.

Meanwhile Mexico’s Patricio Gonzalez, Ecuador’s Leonardo Merchand, Argentina’s Martin Perez all moved ahead with wins. Remember that Latin observation? It isn’t just about the Open Men’s; Spanish-speaking longboarders and women, both racked up points today as well.

Speaking of the Ladies, Ecuador’s Dominic Barona, Puerto Rico’s Idalis Alvarado, Costa Rica’s Lizbeth Vindas and Nataly Bernold, Spain’s Garazi Sanchez, and Panama’s Enilda Alonso all advanced in their repercharge. And Silvana Lima, Brazil’s top Women’s Pro crushed her heat today. Can you see a pattern emerging here?

The afternoon saw the men’s open shortboard surfers return to the lineup and put on one of the most progressive and inspirational performances of the event so far. In the fourth round of competition, every heat proved jaw-dropping. At the
forefront of the shortboard highlights, Peruvian surfer Matias Mulanovich once again looked downright lethal as he advanced with an arsenal of seamless maneuvers. With every high-speed float and rail-gouge laid out by Mulanovich, the Peruvian crowd screamed their approval from the beach.

Showcasing the progressive, aerial approach that has come to define the modern surfer, Brazil’s Peterson Crisanto threw down one of the most technical moves of the event with a massive frontside air reverse. Unfortunately, it wasn’t enough to move the Brazilian through the heat, but nevertheless the goliath punt earned him the respect of all onlookers.

But let’s put aside the gold medals or team standings, for a moment. A big part of the ISA Games is the cultural exchange that goes on between surfers. Consider teams like the Sweden, Israel, Germany or Switzerland. None of those countries ranks among the planet’s surfing hotbeds, and chances of them walking away from this thing with medals dangling from their necks was always slim. But the energy and camaraderie they bring is totally infectious.

Here’s an example of just how international the field really is: Sweden’s Freddie Meadows who narrowly missed advancing yesterday is half British (so his English is perfect.) He’s a native of Sweden where he lives in the warm months (so he qualifies for his country.) And he lives half the year in his family’s home in Costa Rica (so he rips like a pro.)

To borrow a phrase from the surfing industry, this is how you “grow the pond.” The representative surfers from these emerging wave-riding countries will have garnered some much-needed international competitive experience, but more importantly, they’ll have participated in one of the biggest surf contests in the world and will be taking lessons learned regarding event infrastructure, judging, webcasting, and all that goes hand-in-hand with running a successful contest back to their homes. They will likely share it with their local population, and hopefully use that knowledge as a platform to continue building and strengthening surfing in their home countries. Victory doesn’t necessarily mean bringing home a gold medal. In the grand scheme of things, it’s all about how you define success, and countries like Israel or Jamaica are winners just for paddling out in Peru and being part in this United Nations of Surfing...

The contest will be webcast LIVE everyday at www.BillabongISAgworldsurfinggames.com 
There will be new video, stories and images uploaded on this site daily, with separate, nation specific folders for every team competing in the event. Simply open the site and look for the folder with the nation you wish to cover.

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About the International Surfing Association (ISA)
The International Surfing Association (ISA) is recognized by the International
Olympic Committee (IOC) as the World Governing Authority for Surfing. It was
originally founded as the International Surfing Federation in 1964 and has been
running world championships since 1964 and the Junior World Championships
since 1980.
ISA membership includes the surfing National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of over
60 countries on six continents. Its headquarters are located in San
Diego, California. It is presided by Fernando Aguerre, first elected in 1994 in Rio,
and re-elected six times since. The ISA's four Vice Presidents are Alan Atkins
(Australia), Robin de Kock (South Africa), Mike Gerard (USA) and Karín Sierralta
(Peru).