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Finland takes thin lead in Nordic combined team



Well done, Gen Tomii!

The Finnish Nordic combined team surged with three 90-meter-plus jumps in the second round and took a narrow midway lead over Austria on Thursday, while Japan struggled in its quest for a third straight Olympic team title.

Finland will go into Friday's 4x5-kilometer cross country leg with a mere four-second time advantage over Austria. Norway will begin the race eight seconds back followed by the Czechs another second behind.

With Finland in fifth place after the first round, leadoff jumper Jari Mantila sparked his team's climb to the top with a 91-meter leap under near-windless, sunny skies at the Olympic ski jumping stadium in Hakuba.

Hannu Manninen followed by landing on the 90-meter critical point of the normal hill before World Cup champion Samppa Lajunen sailed for 94.5 meters and the overall lead in the team's final jump.

Austria's Mario Stecher guided his team to second place in the standings with jumps of 90 and 96.5 meters, the longest of the day.

Norway's Bjarte Engen Vik, winner of the individual Olympic title last week, posted the highest two-jump total among the 44 competitors as he leaped for 94.5 and 95.5 meters.

The Japanese team finished in fifth place and 21 seconds behind Finland and failed to keep its pledge of dominating the jumping leg. Only one of its eight jumps surpassed the critical point, a 90.5-meter effort by Satoshi Mori.

"Neither of my jumps were satisfying, and I feel miserable about it," said Kenji Ogiwara, a member of Japan's victorious team at both the 1992 Albertville and 1994 Lillehammer Olympics.

Ogiwara, cheered on by tens of thousands of fans around the landing area, jumped 89 and 86 meters.

A three-man team format was used at the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics but the teams have increased by one man for Nagano. Under a new formula, the points gained from jumping translate into a smaller time advantage in the cross country leg. (Kyodo News)



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