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Sports

Scotties action comes to Prince George
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Lapointe skis to win



John Hagen skis up one of the climbs in the 10km classic race in the Teck BC Cup No. 1 cross country ski race held at the Orway Nordic Centre on Sunday.

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Biathlon comes first for Claire Lapointe, but her love of cross-country skiing led her to a lofty perch among her peers in B.C. biathlon's top class.

You can't shoot on the range unless you arrive on skis. So it was no real surprise to see the 15-year-old Caledonia Nordic Ski Club racer climb to the highest spot on the Teck BC Cup cross-country medal podium Sunday after a 14-minute 20.4-second tour of the trails of Orway Nordic Centre.

On a near-perfect day for ski racing for 190 skiers from 14 provincial clubs, Lapointe won the juvenile girls classic event by two minutes and 15 seconds over second-place Annika Richardson of North Vancouver. Lapointe's familiarity with the sharp corners and steep trails that spilled skiers into the widened expanse of the Orway stadium area paid off in a satisfying race.

She was third in Saturday's Home Hardware sprint event, an all-out 0.6-kilometre assault on the time clock won by Hannah Mehan of Vernon.

"The glide was amazing coming down the hills and the grip was perfect going up," said Lapointe.

"The course takes a lot of getting used to, it's harder for people coming in from out of town and you have to really pay attention on those corners because there's a good chance you'll fall. We raced on it last year so I've had a lot more practice than some people."

"The highlight of the weekend was the sprints. I had so much fun racing with the athletes from out of town and people I hadn't seen for a while."

Lapointe skied Nor-Am biathlon events last month in Canmore and is considered a likely candidate for the B.C. biathlon team for the

2015 Canada Winter Games in Prince George.

Erika Kreitz, 16, was also a hometown champion Sunday. She won the junior girls 1 classic race, clocking 55:46.3 in the two-lap 7.5km race, 7.9 seconds ahead of Eliza-Jane Kitchen of North Vancouver (25:54.2), and 1:08 ahead of bronze medalist Emily Dickson of Caledonia (26:54.9), who won the junior sprint on Saturday.

"I was the last starter in my category but as soon as I started picking them off I knew I was close to the front," said Kreitz, who was fourth in the sprints.

If she stays in the top three in three BC Cup series events, Kreitz will qualify for funding to get to the national cross-country championships in Newfoundland in March.

Other Caledonia medal results in Sunday's classic event were as follows: Isha Cadell, gold, atom girls 1 (13 km), 11:16.6; Payton Sinclair, gold, atom girls 3, 1 km, 6:33.4; Iona Cadell, silver, atom girls 3, 6:44.2; Chloe Blakuski, bronze, atom girls 3, 7:34.3; Connel Foster, silver, atom boys 3 (1 km), 7:35.9; Mya Blackburn, gold, peewee girls 1 (1 km), 5:29.2; Aramis Douglas, silver, peewee girls 1, 6:02.7; Cara Nesset, bronze, peewee girls 1, 6:49.4; Stephanie Horning, bronze, peewee girls 2 (1 km), 5:40.9; Liam Williamson, silver, peewee boys 1 (1 km), 4:52.0; Matthew Rice, silver, peewee boys 1, 6:05.3; Joshua Fiala, bronze, peewee boys 2 (1 km), 4:44.3; Damian Georgiev, silver, bantam boys 1 (2.3 km), 9:36.6; Jacqui Benson, gold, open women (7.5 km), 24:27.9; Jacqui Pettersen, gold, 40-49 women's masters (7.5 km), 28:10.6; Will Andel, gold, junior men's (10 km), 30:42.9; John Hagen, gold, 40-49 masters men's (10 km), 36:13.2; and Scott Forrest, bronze, 50-59

masters men's (10 km), 38:09.4.

The -11 C start temperature and sunny skies Sunday made it a snap for coaches to choose the right waxes and there was plenty of snow for groomers to make solid tracks for the classic races.

"The track was perfectly set, almost like World Cup conditions, so today was really a competition of fitness, not necessarily wax or skis and equipment," said Caledonia club head coach Andrew Casey. "This is not an easy course from what I saw, the local kids skied super smooth and looked really efficient all around."

The BC Cup races will serve as a test event for the Nor-Am Haywood Western Canadian cross-country championships in February, which will be hosted at Orway. Race conditions were fair both days and race officials heard nothing but positive comments from visiting teams on the weekend about the facilities.

Pippa Roots of Prince George, who was seventh in both junior races, predicts skiers will like the improvements the Caledonia club has made in advance of the Canada Games.

"The courses are really fun, they're more straight up and straight down," said Roots. "Compared to other places in B.C., they're quite challenging courses. It's also quite fun from a spectator's point of view, there are lots of places to watch the racers at different points in the race."

The weekend races christened the new 1,060-square-foot timing building, which puts race officials right overtop the start/finish line in the stadium.

Built with donations of labour and equipment from mostly local businesses, the building houses photo finish equipment, an announcer's booth, meeting rooms for teams, and wheelchair-accessible washrooms.

Cougars sweep Blazers for first back-to-back wins since October

Ted CLARKE Citizen staff

One is the loneliest number. Especially when it's the sum of a hockey team's winning streaks four months into the season.

The Prince George Cougars mazed out at one all too often in 2013 and were sick and tired of it. So on Saturday they did something about. They beat the Blazers of Kamloops 3-1 to sweep the two-game weekend set at CN Centre, only the second time all season they've gone back-to-back in the win department.

After a disastrous three-game roadtrip last weekend tarnished by a pair of lopsided losses in Victoria and an equally uninspiring defeat in Vancouver Cougars coach Mark Holick challenged his veteran forwards to start showing their leadership qualities and for the most part they responded.

Zach Pochino, stripped of his assistant captaincy earlier in the week along with Alex Forsberg, responded with a solid weekend effort centring a line with Wilson and Fiddler and they deminated the Blazers in both games. After combining for 12 points Friday, including a five-point night for Fiddler, the high-octane trio's production tallied off in the rematch.

But they left no doubt about their game-breaking abilities Saturday, factoring in all three of their team's goals.

"I'm happy how the boys bounced back this weekend, it was a tough week for everyone and we did some team exercises and I think it helped a few guys and it showed," said Wilson, who collected four goals in the two games.

"Hopefully we can string a few more wins together and get us into a playoff spot. Our line just works well together, we each bring a different piece to the line and it's just kind of works."

With the win, the Cougars improved to 16-21-2-3, ninth in the Western Conference, while Kamloops (10-27-2-2) dropped further into the basement.

Coaches on both sides had to be breathing sighs of relief that Saturday's rematch in no way resembled Friday's relentless pyrotechnics display of offence that



Prince George Cougar Tanner Lishchynsky keeps his eye on the puck after a hit by a Kamloops defenceman Saturday night.

"We were pretty short-staffed and I was pretty happy with the way the guys skated and thought we deserved better after one but they stayed the course and the power-play goal was big with Jordan Tkatch, who had won the face-off in Kamloops territory."

"The Blazers' goal came on a power play early in the third period, a superb individual effort from Cole Uilly, who went ring-length with the puck, beating Josh Smith with an inside move and finishing with a deke through the legs of Ty Edmonds. But less than two minutes later, Pochino snuck the dagger in, coralling a loose puck behind the net and wrapping it into the short side of the net."

Fiddler assisted on that goal, his second point of the game, giving him a total of 12 points in the last three games against Kamloops.

"I just want to thank my linemates for that. Wilson puts in a lot of work in the corners and may not get the goals all the time and Pochino does the same thing - he's really upped his game since we got back from Christmas and you can see why he was drafted," said

"The boys came out a little flat in the first three games on the road when we got back and if you want to win games your key guys have to be going each and every night, you can't expect your young guys to lead the way and I'm glad everybody on the first two lines picked up their games."

Edmonds made 19 saves to even his season record at 13-13-1-2. The 17-year-old rookie wasn't all that busy but was sharp when he had to be, coming out to challenge shooters, playing his angles well and using his stick to break up scoring chances. His stick save off Uilly with nine minutes left in the third period was probably his best of the night. The Cougars put 40 shots in Kozun, who was much better after being yanked after allowing five goals in the first period Friday.

LOOSE PUCKS: Cougar forwards Jason Jankins and Brad Morrison and their Team Pacific teammates are silver medalists after they lost 4-0 Saturday to the United States in the final at the World Under-17 Hockey Challenge in Nova Scotia. With defenceman Tate Olson

WHL SUMMARY

Blazers 1 at Cougars 3

First Period
No scoring
Penalties - Rehill Kam (tripping) 17:33; Sterzer Kam (double butt-ending) 18:47.

Second Period
1. Prince George, Wilson 15 (McNulty, Pochiro) 8:04
2. Prince George, McNulty 7 (Fiddler, Tkatch) 12:08 (pp)
Penalties - Kornelsen Kam (embellishment), Wilson PG (slashing) 11:29; Connolly Kam (tripping) 11:50; Kienke Kam (delay of game) 15:43.

Third Period
3. Kamloops, Uilly 18 (Connolly) 3:45 (pp)
4. Prince George, Pochiro 14 (Fiddler, Wilson) 5:21
Penalties - Sterzer Kam (fighting), Tkatch PG (fighting) 1:02, McDonald PG (goaltender interference) 3:16, Lishchynsky PG (interference) 7:32, Rehill Kam (slashing), Pochiro PG (slashing) 11:11, Bourke PG (roughing) 13:47, Smith PG (check to the head) 17:30.

Shots on goal
Kamloops: 4-4-8 = 20
Prince George: 14-14-12 = 40
Goal - Kamloops: Kozun (L.S. 17-2-1)
Prince George: Edmonds (W. 13-13-2)
Power plays (goals-chances) - Kamloops: 1-4
Prince George: 1-4
Attendance - 1,553

left just 10 forwards and six defencemen in the Cats' lineup.
• Centre Alex Forsberg got pinnned between two Blazers in the third period Friday and suffered an upper-body injury that kept him out Saturday. Goalie Brett Zarosky, defenceman Peter Kosterman, and forwards Chase Witala, Jari Emerson, David Soltes, and Brett Roubison were also out with injuries.
• The Seattle Thunderbirds visit Prince George Tuesday and