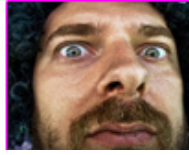




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Skiers race for the gut-wrenching finish

By Ted CLARKE Citizen staff tclarke@pgcitizen.ca

As soon as they crossed the finish line, Canmore skiers Paul Dupuis and Sebastien Dandurand collapsed in motionless heaps, wheezing, coughing and sputtering.

The pair fought to catch their breath after an intense half-hour at race speed Thursday at Otway in the senior men's classic 10-kilometre race at Otway in the Haywood NorAm Western Canadian championships.

And they weren't alone in the agony department. About every third racer had the same reaction once the clock stopped ticking, their straining leg muscles sending surges of pain to the brain.

It was all for a good cause, however. With podium positions at stake, Colin Ferrie of Kimberley earned one of those medal spots, finishing third in the open men's race. That added to his list of top-10 positions on the Nor-Am tour this season, his first year in the open men's category. The 20-year-old Black Jack Ski Club member is considered a favourite to make Team B.C. for next year's Canada Winter Games in Prince George.

"It was pretty tough, this is my third weekend in a row racing and I'm starting to feel my shape go down a bit, but it was pretty strong," said Ferrie. "When I looked at the course profile I noticed the total climb for the 5K [loop] is fairly close to the limit of a NorAm race, so it's definitely a tough course, but I liked it a lot. If you can put down a good result it does feel good, but at the same time the pain in the lungs and the legs is tough."

Ferrie finished in 30 minutes 51.9 seconds, 1:17 off the winning pace of his Black Jack clubmate Geoffrey Richards, who clocked 29:34.3. Martin Schrama of Whistler was second in 30:10.5.

In the open women's 7.5 km event, Maya Maclsaac-Jones of Canmore started four minutes after the first of eight in her category left the start gate but was first across the line, winning gold in 26:12.3, 1:04 ahead of Ember Lodge of Edmonton and 2:55 in front of the third-place Alexandra Myshak-Davis of Kelowna.

Like most of the skiers on the course Friday morning, Maclsaac-Jones struggled to find the perfect wax combination and was slipping in the tracks, especially on the lower slopes, which became a lot more slick with every skier that passed by. The air temperature at race time was -2.7 C. A light dusting of snow just before the races got underway, combined with high humidity and rising temperatures, complicated life for the wax technicians.

"I had very fast skis, I was slipping a bit on the hills but it was good because I wasn't sticking on the downhill and corners," said Maclsaac-Jones, a native of Athabasca, Alta. "The course was amazing, I can't wait for Canada Games next year, I'm so impressed with the facilities and the trails. They're tough climbs but there's a really nice flow to the course."

Hometown favourite Pippa Roots, 16, of the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club, was 19th out of 23 junior girls racers, 4:03 behind Emmy Phillips of Canmore Nordic, who won gold in 27:45.6. Lauren Turcot of Canmore (27:57.5) and Katie Weaver of North Vancouver (28:10.5) were second and third. Roots's familiarity with the trails worked to her advantage and also helped Caledonia skier Emily Dickson (14th in 30:29.4).

"There aren't many flats on the course, you go straight up and straight down, so the downhills are fairly long," said Roots. "I've skied the course a lot so I know it was probably a personal best for me. There are a lot of really tight corners, so the extra time we get to practice those is really useful."

Other category winners with their club affiliations were: Junior men (10 km) -- Colin Foley, Nakkertok (Ont.), 31:23.0; Senior women (7.5 km) -- Emma Camicioli, Edmonton Nordic, 29:39.0; Junior boys (10 km) -- Gareth Williams, Telemark, 31:40.9; Juvenile girls (5 km) -- Hannah Mehain, Sovereign Lake, 18:43.1; Juvenile boys (5km), Kieran Lamb, Hollyburn, 15:38.3; Midget boys (5 km) -- Remi Drolet, Black Jack, 17:16.4; Midget Girls (5 km) -- Molly Miller, Kimberley, 18:55.7.

In other Caledonia club results, Jacqui Pettersen of Prince George, 42, won the masters women's 7.5 km race in 29:53, the fifth-best time of the day in the 7.5 km race, while in the masters men's 10 km, John Hagen took first in 38:08.9 ahead of Caledonia clubmate Scott Forrest, who was second in 47:36.8. In the juvenile girls 5 km, Kaia Andal was ninth (20:27.1) and Claire Lapointe was 21st (21:38.6). In the midget girls 5km, Sadie Bialuski was seventh (26:30.8), Danika Fiala was eighth (26:40.8) and Mackenzie Cannon was 10 (32:21.5).

Racing continues today at 9 a.m. with the classic sprints.

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