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Norwegian skier climbs Otway podium

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FEBRUARY 14, 2014

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After seven days of Olympic competition in Sochi, Norway is tied with the United States atop the standings with 13 medals.

Of that medal total, Norwegian cross-country skiers have hauled in three gold, one silver and four bronze.

With the success of her country's top athletes to inspire her, 18-year-old Ingrid Tvetlen of Oslo tackled the trails of Otway Nordic Centre on Friday and did her part to keep those podium finishes coming.

The Norwegian exchange student won the junior girls 1 sprint event (athletes born in 1996) at the Haywood Nor-Am Western Canadian Championships, holding off a determined challenge from second-place finisher Kate Woods of the Bulkley Valley Ski Club of Burns Lake. Lauren Doak of Whistler shared the junior 1 podium with Tvetlen and Woods after a third-place finish in the B-final.

"It felt like it was a really good race for me, I was hoping to get a medal," said Tvetlen. "I really liked the atmosphere around sprints, it's a lot of people shouting and it's all really close to the stadium so there are a lot of people watching. The races are always close and that's the fun part."

Tvetlen considers herself a better classic skier than she is in freestyle. She'll be among 23 junior girls all starting at the same time in Sunday's mass start 10 km free technique race.

Tvetlen arrived in Canada in late August to begin Grade 11 classes in Athabasca, a town of about 3,000 located 145 kilometres north of Edmonton. She's living with the family of Anika Asfeldt, 17, who made the trip to Prince George with three other Athabasca Nordic Ski Club racers.

"It's very beautiful here, I really like the trails, they're hilly and tough and that's a good thing," said Tvetlen. "It's more like Norway than Athabasca is. There are mountains and it's more humid here, like Norway."

Last season at the junior national championships in Norway, Tvetlen finished as high as 18th and she got off to good start this season on the Alberta Cup circuit. Although three of the six race weekends were cancelled due to cold weather, she won her junior girls category in the other three events.

Her parents in Norway had her on skis at age two and by the time she was eight, she was racing.

"I guess there are more skiers in Norway than there are here, it's the biggest winter sport, hockey isn't very popular," she said. "Cross-country skiing is mostly where we get our [Olympic] medals and we have a couple of good downhill skiers. Norway often does well in both the men's and women's relays."

Like playing hockey against a Canadian team, racing a Norwegian skier brings an element of fun and an added challenge for Woods and Doak.

"It was intimidating racing her but it's pretty cool to see an athlete from Norway," said Woods. "It's fun racing people from other parts of the world and seeing how they compare," added Doak. "Norway is good at cross-country skiing and she proved it."

The short distances - either 600 or 800 metres - brought about plenty of exciting races, some of which were close enough to require photo finishes as skiers bolted for the line.

Katie Weaver, 16, of North Vancouver won the junior girls 1 category, with Avalon Wasteneys of Strathcona

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Hockey

39%

Curling

Nordic second and Chiako Yamamoto of Rossland third among the 1997-born junior girls.

Other age-class sprint winners with their club affiliations were: Maxine Forder, Hollyburn, midget girls 1, Molly Miller, Kimberley, midget girls 2; Remi Drolet, Black Jack, midget boys 1; Ian Oliphant, Sovereign Lake (Vernon), midget boys 2; Annika Richardson, Hollyburn, juvenile girls 1; Jenna Sim, Hollyburn, juvenile girls 2; Thomas Manktelow, Canmore Nordic, juvenile boys 1, Conor McGovern, Red River Nordic, juvenile boys 2; John Connor, Larch Hills (Salmon Arm), junior boys 1; David Walker, Telemark (Kelowna), junior boys 2.

The sprints continue today at 9 a.m. for the open men and open women categories. Heats begin at 11 a.m. and all finals are expected to be complete by noon. On Sunday, the mass start freestyle individual races start at 9 a.m.

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