



Biathlete Roots branches out to cross-country

[Ted Clarke](#) / Prince George Citizen

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Isaac Wamstecker of the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club of Prince George races to a first-place finish in the atoms boys sprint B-final Saturday at the Teck B.C. Cup cross-country ski event at Otway Nordic Centre. - Citizen photo by James Doyle

Nearly two years had passed since Arthur Roots last raced the ski trails at Otway Nordic Centre.

Two years ago, he came agonizingly close to the Canada Winter Games medal podium in the biathlon sprint when he finished in fourth place, 15 seconds away from bronze.

Much has changed since then in the life of the 22-year-old from Prince George. The year after the 2015 Games he made the cut for Canada's national team, went overseas and competed with the hot shots of Europe on the IBU Cup circuit.

Now a full-time environmental engineering student at UNBC, Roots is back home after four years living in Canmore. He was back without his rifle on the trails at Otway, where he learned how to ski, for two days of racing the Teck B.C. Cup cross-country series and he won both his races in the open men's category. In Saturday's 800-metre sprint, Roots crossed the line just ahead of Thomsen D'Hont of Yellowknife, N.W.T., in the A-final.

"I'm not really used to sprints, I just managed to beat Thomsen out in the final two or three metres in the lunge for the line," said Roots. "It's tricky to have the balance and power to race for the line like that. It's not something I practice. It's excellent training (for biathlon) to do that."

In the 15-kilometre free technique mass start race Sunday on a slick, somewhat treacherous course, he covered the three-lap distance in 42 minutes 52.4 seconds, winning by 1:39 over D'Hont.

"It was icy on the corners, it was definitely scary," said Roots. "We need more snow."

Roots was happy with how his engine performed in two days of racing in cold and blustery conditions. He's preparing for the North American/Canadian national biathlon championships at Otway, March 6-12, where he'll likely see some of the racers he competed against last year on the IBU Cup circuit in Italy.

"I was able to have some good races over there last spring – I skied the fastest I've ever skied and managed to shoot really well, so it was really fun," said Roots.

Kaia Andal, 17, a veteran of the 2015 Canada Winter Games cross-country events, used her knowledge of the Otway course

to finish first in the junior girls five-kilometre mass start. She edged Elizabeth Elliott and Beth Granstrom, both of Revelstoke, for top spot on the podium.

"It was a lot icy, but it felt really good," said Andal. "It's the shortest-distance race I do. We were all pretty close at the top of the hill. There's a little extra section we hadn't raced before. We ski it every day but we've never raced on that one section before.

"I like the distances better but (Saturday's sprints) were pretty good."

Andal was fourth in the open women's sprint, won by Caledonia skier Kajsa Keyes.

Andal has gotten off to a great start this season. At a Nor-Am event in December in Rossland she posted two firsts and one third-place finish.

The Caledonia club entered 86 racers, up considerably from previous years, and 21 of those 86 were in the 10-years-or-younger categories. That's a good sign for the rejuvenated racing program overseen by Graeme Moore, now in his second season as the local club's full-time coach.

"The great thing about having the race come to Prince George is it gives the local athletes a bit of a measuring stick against the other clubs," said Moore.

"This weekend, lots of the bottom (younger) categories were covered by Caledonia athletes. It's exciting to see the up-and-comers and the future of our program coming out to support the race and it's nice that the parents came out on a cold and windy day to support their kids. If they can get the bug for racing at this age then they can really make some good improvements and find out what racing's about."

Moore was impressed with Andrew Blackburn and Cedar Jacob, who finished second and third respectively in the peewee boy mass start race, with Liam Reusch not far behind in fifth place. Damian Georgyev placed second in the midget boys mass start and was second in the sprint, while Liam Williamson was sixth and Lukas Nolli was seventh in the bantam boys mass start event. Torrin Foster topped the charts in the atom boys sprint and mass start races.

One of those next-generation Caledonia club racers, eight-year-old Isla Cadell, found the fast way around the peewee girls 1 course Sunday, winning gold in the 2.3km mass start race. She made the sprint final but fell near the end of the 250m race and had to settle for sixth.

Isla, who says she idolizes Megan Tandy, the World Cup biathlete from Prince George, is following in the tracks of her 10-year-old sister Iona, who was 11th in the bantam sprint and sixth in the mass start race. Their six-year-old sister Skye also races. She won the atom girls 2 event Sunday and was third overall in the atom group.

"I was fast on the downhill," said Isla, now in her third year of racing at the B.C. Cup level. "It's a pretty big advantage," she said of racing on her home trails. "I like the longer races."

With wind chills close to -20 C, Isla was well-prepared for a long day on the slopes.

"I had lots of layers," she said.

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