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## SPORTS

# Gareth Williams wins national X-country title



Kelowna's Gareth Williams (middle) won the 10 K classic gold medal at the Canadian cross country championships in the Yukon. — Image Credit: Contributed

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Kelowna cross-country skier Gareth Williams is a national champion.

Williams earned a gold medal in the 10km classic race at the 2016 Haywood Ski Nationals held March 19 to 26 in Whitehorse, Yukon.

"I enjoy interval starts (a skier goes out every 15 seconds) because they are against the clock," says Williams. "You have to go hard all the time everywhere because you don't really know where anyone else is on the course.

"I actually crashed on the first lap (four laps of a 3.75km course)," he added. "I fell on the big corner coming into the stadium in front of all these people. But I got up real quick and I managed to ski it off and still win."

Williams, who trains with coach Adam Elliot and the Telemark Junior Racers at Telemark Nordic Club in West Kelowna, added a bronze medal in the 30 km.

“It was my first 30k on a real race course which is a lot different from skiing 30k in a loppet. I think there was a total of 1,000m of climbing throughout the whole race,” says Williams. He finished in just over 1 hour and 33 min.

Williams said Whitehorse was a great location for the event.

“The conditions were excellent. Except for the first day. By the time I started, the course had changed to mush and 10 junior boys were faster than me,” he says. “Alex Harvey (two time Canadian Olympian and World Cup winner) won his race by double poling the 10km on skate skis and it was not an easy course.” Williams finished 10th in that race earned a 12th in the sprint.

Williams’ younger brother Ian did well in the 5km classic race coming 8th. He was also 8th in the 10km classic, 10th in the 7.5 skate race and 25th in the sprints.

Ben Shipley finished 8th in the 5km classic race, 18th in sprints, 25th in 7.5 skate and 28th in 10k classic. Brother Matt Shipley placed 20th in the 7.5 skate race and had 3 other top 30 finishes.

Teammate David Walker went 23rd in the 30 km skate race with three other top 30 finishes as well.

Five-hundred skiers representing all provinces and territories except for PEI, travelled to Whitehorse for the annual 10-day event. Athletes from age 14 to open men and women raced, including many Canadian National Team skiers. The races covered team sprints, short and long distance and varied between classic and free technique. were both mass and individual starts.

At the end of January, Williams qualified for the B tour category of World Junior Trials and travelled to race in Germany and Switzerland for two weeks in February.

“Trials is stressful and competitive because the real focus for people is to qualify for worlds and trips,” says Williams. Nationals are actually a lot of fun. It’s not cold out ever and you get a last race with kids you have seen throughout the year.”

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