

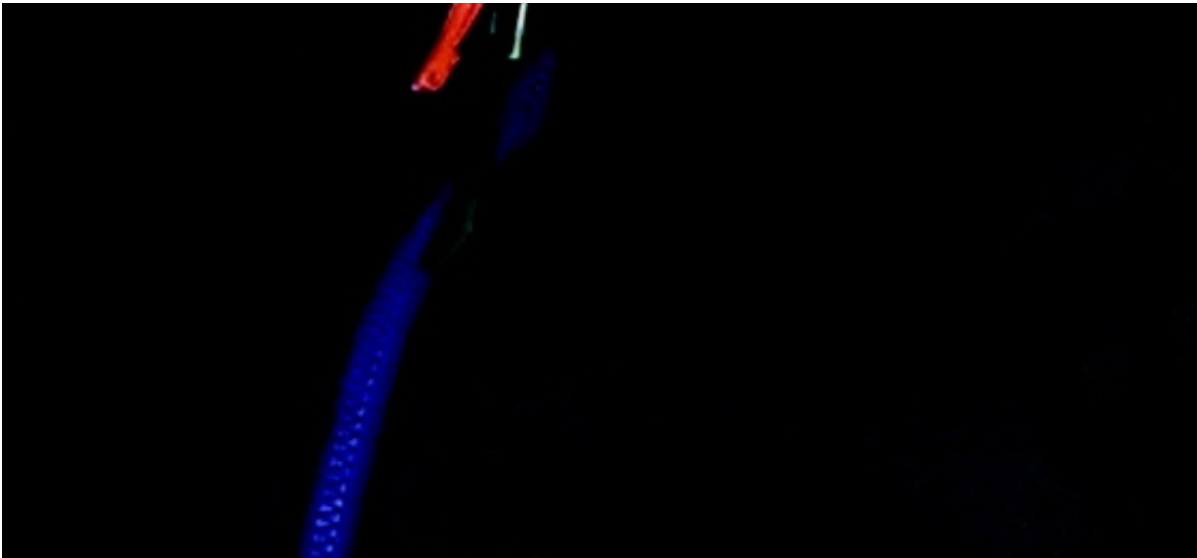
THE PRINCE GEORGE CITIZEN

Kreitz going the distance in Teck B.C. Cup

[Ted Clarke](#) / Prince George Citizen

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Caledonia Nordic Ski Club racer Erica Kreitz finished fourth in Saturday's Home Hardware Teck B.C. Cup junior women's sprint at Otway Nordic Centre.

On her home hills in familiar surroundings with no health concerns, Erica Kreitz was on top of her game Saturday at the Home Hardware Teck B.C. Cup cross-country ski races.

The 17-year-old Kreitz used her knowledge of the trails to pave her way to a fourth-place finish in Saturday's 800-metre classic junior women's sprint at Otway Nordic Centre.

Being healthy is crucial in a sport that places such high demands on physical endurance and aerobic capacity and Kreitz got sick at the wrong time two weekends ago at the NorAm/Canada Winter Games qualifier in Vernon. Ultimately, that cost her a spot on the five-female B.C. under-23 team which will compete in Prince George at the Games, Feb. 22-March 1.

"Unfortunately they only used one race [weekend] as the qualifier and I was totally sick with the flu," said Kreitz. "If they would have credited the results from the weekend previous then I would probably have been on the team. It's unfortunate but there are other races I can fill it with and I can still qualify for Canada Games another time. Obviously it's upsetting but I have overall season goals that are bigger than Canada Games."

The cross-country ski nationals in Thunder Bay, Ont., in March are the ultimate goal this season for Kreitz, who will graduate high school at PGSS in June. Her results from now to the end of the season will decide whether she will pursue a national team spot and a move to the national team training centre at Callaghan Valley near Whistler or give up on racing full time to focus on her postsecondary education.

Kreitz, a member of the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club, crossed the sprint finish a few seconds after B.C. team members Hannah Mehain of Sovereign Lakes (Vernon) and Avalon Wasteneys of Strathcona Nordics (Courtenay). Chiako Yamamoto of Black Jack Ski Club (Rossland) claimed the bronze medal and Saige Bialuski of Caledonia was fifth in the A-final.

Kreitz has raced three sprint events this season on the NorAm and Canada Cup circuits. Those races ranged in distance from 1.2-1.6 km, twice the length of Saturday's race.

"This is an 800-metre sprint and it's pretty important to have a good race tactic and I was happy with it," she said. "I'm definitely more of a distance skier so I think that if it had been a 100 metres longer the result could have been better for me. For not being a sprinter I'm pretty satisfied."

The -16 C start temperature Saturday was too cold for the younger skiers, who aren't allowed to compete in any conditions cooler than -15 C. The cutoff for the older racers was -20 C. For Amund Wirstad, 17, a Norwegian exchange student living in Whistler, the cold came as a shock to his protesting lungs but that didn't keep him from winning gold in the junior men's sprint.

"I've never raced in this cold, ever," said Wirstad, who competes for the Hollyburn Ski Club of North Vancouver. "We would just cancel it [in Norway]. It didn't really affect me. It was a good race. It's a really good course here. It's really hard and a bit short, but I think that suits me pretty well."

New snow overnight made for some tricky waxing conditions but his grip on the track on the hills wasn't a concern for Wirstad, who double-poled for most of the sprint.

Wirstad is from Rena, Norway, home of the Birkebeiner, an annual 54-kilometre race from Rena to Lillehammer which draws 16,000 participants. While he proved capable of winning at the BC Cup level, Wirstad figures he would be a top-30 racer among his junior men's peers in Norway. Seventy per cent of Norwegians consider cross-country skiing the national sport and there's a long tradition of dominating at the World Cup and Olympic levels.

"It's just as big as hockey in Canada," said Wirstad. "Of course, if there is so many skiers, there has to be some good ones."

Gareth Williams and David Walker of Kelowna's Telemark Ski Club were second and third respectively in the junior men's sprint. In other Prince George results, Kaia Andal of Caledonia was sixth in the juvenile girls sprint, won by Jenna Sim of Hollyburn.

Other sprint winners with their club affiliations were: Midget girls: Mila Wittenberg (Whistler Nordics); midget boys: Ian Oliphant (Sovereign Lakes); and juvenile boys: David Bakker (Larch Hills).

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