

# THE PRINCE GEORGE CITIZEN

## Lapointe tracking down Canada Games berth

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Biathlon comes first for Claire Lapointe, but her love of cross-country skiing led her to a lofty perch among her peers in B.C. biathlon's top class.

You can't shoot on the range unless you arrive on skis. So it was no real surprise to see the 15-year-old Caledonia Nordic Ski Club racer climb to the highest spot on the Teck BC Cup cross-country medal podium Sunday after a 14-minute 20.4-second tour of the trails of Otway Nordic Centre.

On a near-perfect day for ski racing for 196 skiers from 14 provincial clubs, Lapointe won the juvenile girls classic event by two minutes and 15 seconds over second-place Annika Richardson of North Vancouver. Lapointe's familiarity with the sharp corners and steep trails that spilled skiers into the widened expanse of the Otway stadium area paid off in a satisfying race.

She was third in Saturday's Home Hardware sprint event, an all-out 0.6-kilometre assault on the time clock won by Hannah Mehain of Vernon.

"The glide was amazing coming down the hills and the grip was perfect going up," said Lapointe. "The course takes a lot of getting used to, it's harder for people coming in from out of town and you have to really pay attention on those corners because there's a good chance you'll fall. We raced on it last year so I've had a lot more practice than some people.

"The highlight of the weekend was the sprints, I had so much fun racing with the athletes from out of town and people I hadn't seen for a while."

Lapointe skied Nor-Am biathlon events last month in Canmore and is considered a likely candidate for the B.C. biathlon team for the 2015 Canada Winter Games in Prince George.

Erika Kreitz, 16, was also a hometown champion Sunday. She won the junior girls 1 classic race, clocking 25:46.3 in the two-lap 7.5km race, 7.9 seconds ahead of Eliza-Jane Kitchen of North Vancouver (25:54.2), and 1:08 in front of bronze medalist Emily Dickson of Caledonia (26:54.9), who won the junior sprint on Saturday.

"I was the last starter in my category but as soon as I started picking them off I knew I was close to the front," said Kreitz, who was fourth in the sprints.

If she stays in the top three in the three BC Cup series events, Kreitz will qualify for funding to get to the national cross-country championships in Newfoundland in March.

Other Caledonia medal results in Sunday's classic event were as follows: Isla Cadell, gold, atom girls 1 (1 km), 11:16.6; Payton Sinclair, gold, atom girls 3, 1 km, 6:33.4; Iona Cadell, silver, atom girls 3, 6:44.2; Chloe Bialuski, bronze, atom girls 3, 7:34.3; Connel Foster, silver, atom boys 3 (1 km), 7:35.9; Mya Blackburn, gold, peewee girls 1 (1 km), 5:29.2; Artemis Douglas, silver, peewee girls 1, 6:02.7; Cara Nessel, bronze, peewee girls 1, 6:49.4; Stephanie Horning, bronze, peewee girls 2 (1km), 5:40.9; Liam Williamson, silver, peewee boys 1 (1 km), 4:52.0; Matthew Rice, silver, peewee boys 1, 6:05.3; Joshua Fiala, bronze, peewee boys 2 (1 km), 4:44.3; Damian Georgyev, silver, bantam boys 1 (2.3 km), 9:36.6; Jacqui Benson, gold, open women (7.5 km), 24:27.9; Jacqui Pettersen, gold, 40-49 women's masters (7.5 km), 28:10.6, Will Andel, gold, junior men's (10 km), 30:42.9; John Hagen, gold, 40-49 masters men's (10 km), 36:13.2; and Scott Forrest, bronze, 50-59 masters men (10 km), 38:09.4.

The -11 C start temperature and sunny skies Sunday made it a snap for coaches to choose the right waxes and there was plenty of snow for groomers to make solid tracks for the classic races.

"The track was perfectly set, almost like World Cup conditions, so today was really a competition of fitness, not necessarily wax or skis and equipment," said Caledonia club head coach Andrew Casey. "This is not an easy course from what I saw, the local kids skied super smooth and looked really efficient all around."

The BC Cup races will serve as a test event for the Nor-Am Haywood Western Canadian cross-country championships in February, which will be hosted at Otway. Race conditions were fast both days and race officials heard nothing but positive comments from visiting teams on the weekend about the facilities. Pippa Roots of Prince George, who was seventh in both junior races, predicts skiers will like the improvements the Caledonia club has made in advance of the Canada Games.

"The courses are really fun, they're more straight up and straight down," said Roots. "Compared to other places in B.C., they're quite challenging courses. It's also quite fun from a spectator's point of view, there are lots of places to watch the racers at different points in the race."

The weekend races christened the new 1,060-square-foot timing building, which puts race officials right overtop the start/finish line in the stadium. Built with donations of labour and equipment from mostly local businesses, the building houses photo finish equipment, an announcer's booth, meeting rooms for teams, and wheelchair-accessible washrooms.

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