

Next generation of para-nordic athletes introduced to cross-country skiing

By TYLER HARPER (mailto:tyler.harper@nelsonstar.com?subject=Nelson Star - Next generation of para-nordic athletes introduced to cross-country skiing)

December 20, 2015 · Updated 6:44 PM

 Like 340

 Tweet

 Share (<http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php>)

It



[From left to right] Mikayla Richens, Haley Olinyk and Jessica Rideout gave para-nordic cross country skiing a shot at an event organized by Nelson Nordic Ski Club on Saturday. / TYLER HARPER PHOTO

didn't take Haley Olinyk long before she was skiing circles around her guide.

At one point Olinyk, who is visually impaired, was gliding along when one of her coaches for the day had to gently remind her one crucial fact.

"You know the guide has to be in front of you," said Tony Chin to laughter.

To be fair, Olinyk's guide and friend Mikayla Richens was also learning how to cross-country ski. Olinyk, Richens and Jessica Rideout, who's also visually impaired, participated in an event that taught para-nordic cross-country skiing organized Saturday by the Nelson Nordic Club and led by Chin, a coach with Cross Country BC.

Olinyk, 15, and Rideout, 17, have been downhill skiers for several years. They'd each briefly tried cross country before, but wanted to give it a shot again.

Rideout, who decided snowboarding wasn't for her after she twisted her knee the first time out, started downhill skiing five years ago but said she was looking for something more challenging.

"[Cross country is] a better workout than downhill I find because you're actually using all your muscles," she said. "You have to move your entire body instead of just pointing your skis where you want to go."

That much was clear as Chin took the trio through several exercises before they stepped onto the snow. First, Chin did a vision test on Olinyk and Rideout, and another coach put them through balance tests meant to help them get used to transferring weight from one ski to the other. After practising their diagonal strides indoors, they were ready for the real thing.

It wasn't the first time Olinyk and Rideout have teamed up. The friends have previously played goalball together for BC's junior team. Olinyk was part of the Canadian team that won gold at the World Youth Goalball Championship (<http://www.nelsonstar.com/sports/320911491.html>) in July.

Olinyk, also a downhill skier, had little trouble getting moving even if it felt unnatural at first. "It feels really weird because these [skis] are so much skinnier than downhill skiing," she said.

Canada has had plenty of recent success in cross country, which made its Paralympic Games debut in 1976. Canmore, Alta., resident Brian McKeever has 10 gold medals at the last four Paralympic Games, the most wins ever by a Canadian winter paralympian.

That kind of success might be in Olinyk and Rideout's future, but Saturday they were primarily focused on just staying upright on their skis. The pair are planning on competing at February's BC Winter Games held in Penticton.

"If that goes well we might go for something a little higher," said Olinyk.

