



# NorAm Western Canadian Championships, Teck Coast Cups a successful combo

## Local athletes post strong results at Whistler Olympic Park

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A young cross-country fan cheers on one of the racers at the NorAm Western Canadian Championships. Photo submitted

Whistler Olympic Park was the place to be this weekend, with the Haywood NorAm Western Canadian Cross-Country Ski Championships, as well as the second and third Teck Coast Cup Races taking over the Callaghan Valley venue.

Hosted by Callaghan Valley Cross Country, it was one of the largest races to take place at the venue since nationals in 2013.

“The weekend was awesome. Mother nature was very helpful in the fact that she didn’t rain on us,” said Tony Peiffer, president of Whistler Nordics cross-country ski club that hosted Saturday’s Teck Coast Cup race. “It was a ton of fun.”

The event attracted more than 600 athletes, ranging in age from tiny atom-level skiers and seasoned masters competitors to Olympians.

Three para-nordic athletes also raced in the events.

Skiers from across the country travelled to Whistler to participate, Pieffer added.

The event also marked the first time the Sea to Sky corridor hosted the prestigious NorAm Western Canadian Championships concurrently alongside a Teck Coast Cup event.

The valley’s talent was on full display throughout the weekend, with local skiers posting strong performances among the crowds of visiting racers.

Peiffer's daughter Benita made it onto the podium, finishing first in the junior girls' one-kilometre buff sprint heats on Friday and second in the junior girls' 7.5-kilometre race.

Whistler Nordics' Mila Wittenberg took seventh in both the juvenile girls' one kilometre and 7.5-km events, while Spud Valley Nordics' Marlie Molinaro took 10th in the midget girls' sprint and eighth in the two-km classic.

On Saturday, Whistler's Michael Murdoch took the bronze in the junior boys 7.5-km final, with teammate Mads Groeholdt following in ninth, while Joe Davies placed eighth in the juvenile boys division.

But despite the onslaught of impressive results, Peiffer described something even more important that struck him during the event.

"These two little kids — they couldn't have been more than seven years old — with little pink cross country shoes... They were just sliding along like they were going for a walk. One little girl goes, 'I really like this skiing thing.' They were just chitchatting away, and I just killed myself laughing. But right on, if this (love of sport) gets ingrained then you've given the gift of sport to these kids and they totally enjoy it," he said. "(What's) most important, from my perspective, is that the kids have other kids to go play with and have great memories."

The event also included relay divisions, a new format for the series that added another dose of fun to the weekend's events.

"It's not necessarily about the competition but more about the participation," explained Peiffer. "We had relays with the younger kids, and the older ones, they have fun with it. They dress up and it becomes more of a fun event rather than who won and who didn't win."

Peiffer said the weekend's events would not have been possible, let alone run as smoothly as they did, without the 70 to 100 volunteers who showed up each day.

"The unwavering dedication from volunteers truly make these events happen," he said. "There was a host of volunteers from everywhere — we had to fly some in because we need some technical volunteers who have expertise — but everybody in the whole Sea to Sky participated, all the clubs... pulled together to make it happen, and that's how you make these things happen."

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