

Whistler Nordics glide into new season with Teck Coast Cup race

By Brandon Barrett



PHOTO BY JOERN ROHDE / COURTESY OF WHISTLER NORDICS

NORDIC NEWBIES A pair of young skiers participate in a Teck Coast Cup race at Whistler Olympic Park earlier this year. The Whistler Nordics Ski Club is hoping to attract new skiers to the sport this winter.

Club hopes to attract new skiers, volunteers for the winter

The Whistler Nordics Ski Club kicks off its 2015/16 season this weekend with a mid-distance race designed as the perfect primer for new and developing skiers. Over 100 athletes of all ages will take part in Teck Coast Cup #1, hosted by the Hollyburn Cross Country Ski Club, in the Callaghan Valley, the first of three Teck Cup races held in the Whistler Olympic Park this season. With no course longer than 7.5 kilometres, the Nov. 29 race is open to all skill levels and offers a great introduction to the sport, said Whistler Nordics skills development coordinator Margot Murdoch.

"It's a better course and a better race for the average cross-country skier — you don't have to be a hotshot," she said. "It's a great opportunity for kids to gain confidence with slim to no expectations and realize how much fun racing can be."

Each competitor contributes to their club's aggregate points just for taking part, not only for earning a podium finish, and all underage racers will get a prize of some sort. Registration must be completed by 9 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 26 at www.zone4.ca.

After low snowfall hampered race organizers at last year's first Teck Coast Cup race, Murdoch said the conditions this year are "outstanding."

"The course is better than it ever was last year all year," she noted. "It really is an opportunity to get out there and give it a shot."

The early-season contest will also serve as something of a tune-up for a handful of Whistler Nordics' teen members preparing for a pair of NorAm races in Canmore, Alta. and Silver Star next month. Juvenile racers Mike Murdoch and Benita Peiffer are long shots to qualify for Canada's 2015 Youth Olympic team.

"For them, (Sunday's race) is almost like a time trial," Murdoch said. "They'll do pretty well here, but it's a chance to actually get a race under their belt before they go to a more important race."

After two winters of challenging weather, Murdoch said the club has experienced "a dip" in new entries, and is hoping to attract more youngsters and their parents to the Callaghan this season — and the sooner the better, as the club is currently hiring coaches based on the number of registrants, and programs will be cancelled if there isn't enough interest.

"We're looking for lots of parents to get involved and for kids to have fun," she said, adding that there are plenty of opportunities for parents to volunteer at races or earn their officiating certificate. "Like most sports in Whistler that aren't mainstream, parents have to have a fair bit of commitment as well. But it's a great family sport."

Thanks to support from Whistler Sport Legacies, those who sign up for Whistler Nordics' Skills Development Program get reduced seasons pass rates of \$25 to access Whistler Olympic Park's cross-country trails. The skills program begins Dec. 5 at Olympic Park and Jan. 5 at Lost Lake, and includes entry to the Teck Coast Cup #2 and #3 as well as the Sigge's P'ayakentsut in February.

"The program offers a real progression, and of course the club's goal is to produce some racers, but that's not the only goal," said Murdoch. "It's a sport for life... and provides kids who aren't as keen on downhill with another awesome winter sports in the area."

Several of the club's competitive racers will be in the Whistler Nordics waxing trailer on Saturday from 11:30 a.m. at Whistler Olympic Park to help any competitors who want help preparing for the next day's race.

To register, or for more information, visit www.whistlernordics.com.

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