

# NDC ends strong season

Five members of the National Development Centre Thunder Bay cross-country ski team ended their season last week with an appearance at the Super Tour Spring Series in Idaho.

Erin Tribe, Michael Somppi, Andy Shields, Dudley Coulter, and Chris Hamilton were selected based on their performances at the national championships in Canmore, Alta. At the series, there were over 200-plus competitors from across North America, including crews from Japan and Norway. This made for great competition to finish off the season.

There was a set of four races throughout this mini-tour, which started with a 3.3K skate prologue. Shields was the top junior of the day and 15th overall in a field of 132 racers.

Somppi finished 15th in the classic mass start and Tribe was 25th in the classic sprints. The series ended with a grueling hill climb where the skiers start based on their combined times of the first three races.

"Finishing the season with a hill climb was so fitting — I was really able to apply myself and really work hard to conquer that mountain," Shields said. "Crossing the finish line felt so good especially after such an exceptional season. Now I get to rest for a month, and believe me I really need that rest."

Overall, it was a phenomenal season for the 10-person team as three members represented Canada on the world stage and six qualified for Canada Winter Games. Andrea Lee, who won a gold medal for B.C. at the Winter Games, also helped lead Lakehead University to the Ontario title and was named a national MVP.

Somppi enjoyed a breakout season in his fourth tour of duty with NDC. The Thunder Bay native made his debut on a World Cup senior race (finishing 62nd in the classic 15K in Estonia on Jan. 22) while cracking the top 15 at world under-23 championships. Shields proved to be the best junior-aged skier in the country, qualifying for the world juniors and winning the overall junior men's title at nationals.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIC BAILEY

**Andy Shields enjoyed an impressive junior season with the National Development Centre Thunder Bay team.**

Thunder Bay maintained its reputation as a hot spot for nordic skiing and we hope to keep this trend alive for the 2011/2012 season.

"This season was a huge stepping stone for me," said Shields, a Kitchener, Ont., native. "The improvement in my fitness and results was far more than I was expecting of myself before I joined NDC. . . . The training center's program is going to be even stronger next year so I can barely contain my excitement."

NDC coach Eric Bailey and his staff are now in the process of selecting its athletes for the 2011-12 season at the end of the month. The top racers will submit applications to the team — one of four of its kind in Canada.

The new team will arrive in Thunder Bay in early May to participate in their first training camp and begin their journey for next season.

— Submitted by Amanda Holdsworth