

Championship Goals

By Leith Dunick, tbnewswatch.com

With the Olympics on his mind, Michael Somppi has a lot to prove this season, a pivotal one for the 22-year-old Thunder Bay native.

A veteran member of the National Development Centre Thunder Bay squad, the three-time Canadian National Championship medallist has set loft goals for himself in 2010-11, starting with securing a berth on the Canadian under-23 team at the world championship in Estonia.

If that's not enough Somppi wants to represent his country on the OPA tour, medal at the Canada Winter Games in Halifax and finish in the top-five at the NorAm Series races, the Canadian championships and last, but not least, the Super Tours.

He hopes it leads to Olympic berths in 2014 and 2018 as anyone who has dedicate the majority of their time to an athletic endeavour might feel.

"I've been on the team for four years now, so it's really become who I am," said Somppi, named alongside nine others to this seasons team. "The team, they're all my friends, they mean a lot to me and we support each other really well. That's how we get through the race season and compete strongly in every race. Some people have a low day, other people have a high day. We try to bring each other up and build on it. "

Joining Somppi on the team, one of four housed at different venues in Canada, are three other Thunder Bay athletes rookie Jimmy Gunka and sophomores Scott Sullivan and Chris Hamilton as well as Erin Tribe, who moved away for many years, but returned to the city to compete a year ago.

Others named on Wednesday include Orillia's Harry Seaton, Ottawa's Leif Lennie, Black Creek, B.C.'s Andrea Lea, Waterloos Andy Shields and Marathons Dudley Coulter. Somppi, who placed seventh overall at the 2010 senior men's championships, third in the 50-kilometre classic mass start race, participated in a pair of national team training camps with them this year.

"That was a real opportunity for me to see what the next level is like and to be a part of that next level. Its a place Id like to go in the future," said Somppi, who was joined by Seaton at one of the two camps. "We fit in just fine. Everyone was very accommodating and happy for us to be there. Physically we were not on snow, so dry-land training is a little different. Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses. But in roller skiing, that's the closest we get, we did intervals and we ranked up OK. "

NDC coach and Thunder Bay native Eric Bailey said getting his athletes to the senior national level is the reason for the teams existence these past 16 years.

"Our sole mission for being is to take the athlete during their developmental years, their late teens and early 20s and give them the skills and the training to progress onto the senior team and onto the World Cup, in his seventh year under the Cross Country Canada banner. Its a very, very intense program. To compete at that level, the amount of training required is two times a day, every day, all year. They take a couple of weeks off after the last race in March. We name the team on May 1 and they begin their training as a team. "

Tribe, who moved to Barrie a number of years ago, is in her second year with the NDC, and while the excitement hasn't died down yet, its definitely time to get down to business, she said.

"Last year was a really big transition year for me. I learned it was a full-time, day-to-day priority to start training and about always fine-tuning all the details. I started every day with a purpose, every time I train to start with a goal and to reach my goals, because it all adds up in the end," Tribe said, hopefully of a spot on the 2014 Olympic team, but realistically looking to make a push for 2018.

The under-23 trials will take place Jan. 6 to 9 at Lappe Nordic Ski Centre. The Canada Games trials will also be staged at that time.



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