

Building Momentum

By Michael Somppi
NDC Member 2010/2011

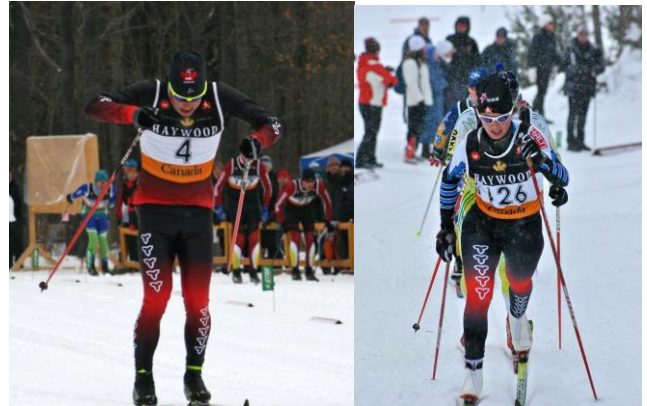


Back in May 2010 when our team was recently named and our training for the upcoming winter was just getting underway I was excited to start my 4th year with the Thunder Bay National Development Centre. One of the biggest reasons I felt excited was because our team of 10 athletes included many returnees who are good friends and training partners as well as some new faces, all pumped to be named to the team and full of energy and optimism for the sport. The fresh energy brought by the new members mixed with the experience of the returning athletes would surely provide a positive foundation for team dynamics which we could build upon and improve throughout the season.



To sum up our team's fantastic weekend of racing let's look at the stats: in Friday's prologue our team had 7 top 15 Open category finishes, in Saturday's skate sprint our team had 6 top 15 finishes and in Sunday's distance classic pursuit our team again had 6 top 15 finishes. Highlights for the weekend include Erin Tribe's bronze medal in the skate sprint (her first Senior Women's NorAm medal!), Jimmy Gunka's silver medal in the prologue and bronze medal in the sprint (Junior Men's category), Andy Shields' mini-Tour victory in the Junior Men's category and impressive 4th place finish in the Senior Men's skate sprint, and lastly Michael Somppi's bronze medal in the 30km classic pursuit and 3rd place overall in the mini-Tour.

Now it is February 2011 and I am very happy to be able to say our team dynamics have improved and so has each individual, not solely based on speed and results, but in the complete sense of the term "athlete". Following the World Junior/U23 Championships and the mid-season Super Tour events (where our team split in two) our team recently joined together again to compete at the Eastern Canadian Championships held at Nakkertok Ski Club and hosted by Club Skinouk. The 3 day race weekend was a mini-Tour format where Friday and Saturday's race results determined your starting position for Sunday's long distance pursuit race. Each athletes finishing position when they crossed the line on Sunday was their finishing result in the mini-Tour.



Andy Shields - 30km classic Erin Tribe - 15km classic

To conclude, a cheerful team with positive dynamics is a successful team. A seemingly simple statement that is often difficult to manifest. I am proud to be part of a team that has continually improved this season and look forward to building the momentum even more. Our team will be splitting up again shortly with several members competing at the Canada Winter Games and other members contending at the Madison Super Tour event. The team will then reunite to compete locally in the Sleeping Giant Loppet followed by the National Championships in Canmore, AB.



Somppi followed by teammate Hamilton in the sprints

During the weekend's racing our team operated like a well-oiled machine. With some extra help in the wax room provided by Lisa Patterson, our staff did an excellent job giving us fast competitive skis each race. It was also very helpful having Mary Tribe shuttling athletes to and from the race site and even cooking dinner one night for everyone. The Lennie family also graciously hosted our team for a tasty dinner one evening. With all this help, how could we go wrong? If you take a look at the results, you'll see our athletes definitely did their share to make the trip a success. Everyone had their game faces on and put in some impressive performances.

