

# A world's worth of athletes gear up for Whitefish telemark races

Reid Sabin, a Whitefish resident who recently ranked third in the nation in telemarking—that demanding type of all-terrain skiing—says he took up the sport because he wanted better access to wilderness areas.

"You can put skins on tele skis and walk right into the backcountry," he says.

Brian Schott, public relations director for the Big Mountain ski resort in Whitefish, which is the site of a world telemarking competition January 9 through January 12, says that is precisely the reason people began telemarking more than a hundred years ago, in the Telemark region of Norway. "Telemarking," he says, "is the original way people skied."

Despite the long existence of telemarking, though, it has remained a relatively obscure winter recreation, laying fairly dormant until the 1970s. However, Schott calls the 1990s the decade when telemarking's popularity has exploded.

Schott considers telemarking

to be more difficult than alpine skiing or snowboarding, which may dissuade some from trying it. "It involves a lot more muscle control. It's a challenge, but I really enjoy it. There is a flowing motion when you're going down the slopes that I like to compare to dancing."

Sabin agrees, adding, "It's the same sensation of rushing down snow, but it's a different technique. It takes a lot of time to figure out."

Sabin says that for him, telemarking is truly a labor of love. On January 3, Sabin placed third in Salt Lake City's national Sprint Classic competition. Despite being nationally ranked, though, Sabin doesn't stand to win the huge prizes or sponsorship deals associated with other winter sports, because of telemark's younger, less mainstream image in the United States.

"It's hard as an American, because there is not as much interest and support here as there is in Europe," Sabin notes. "I'd say you really have to be dedicated. But

I'm not doing this to get rich, and it's fun to be the American underdog."

Sabin is expecting the United States to catch up with the rest of the world soon. He was part of a group representing Big Mountain that traveled to Salt Lake City to pitch telemarking as an Olympic sport (Olympic officials haven't decided about that yet). Schott says although the majority of telemark competitions are in Europe, Big Mountain will likely host more, especially after the success of last year's national telemarking finals and the anticipated success of this year's world events.

More than 85 athletes from about 13 countries will participate in the upcoming races, an event that Schott says will be exciting for spectators.

"Telemarking is really a unique event combining power and finesse. The racers say this is one of the best courses they've been on, so it's fun to watch."

—Sarah Schmid



Peter Sabin

Athletes from around the globe are set to compete at Big Mountain January 9 through 12.