

# Queen

OF THE

## MOUNTAIN

Local Four-Time Champion

(and New Mom!)

Defends Her National Title

by **SAMMI JOHNSON**

**A**s Whitefish Mountain Resort prepares to host the U.S. Telemark National Championships, March 18-21, local telemark racing phenom Kelsey Schmid-Sommer is ready to defend her title as the four-time Women's National Champion. Only this year will be a little different. This year, Schmid-Sommer will try to defend her title just three months after giving birth to her first child.

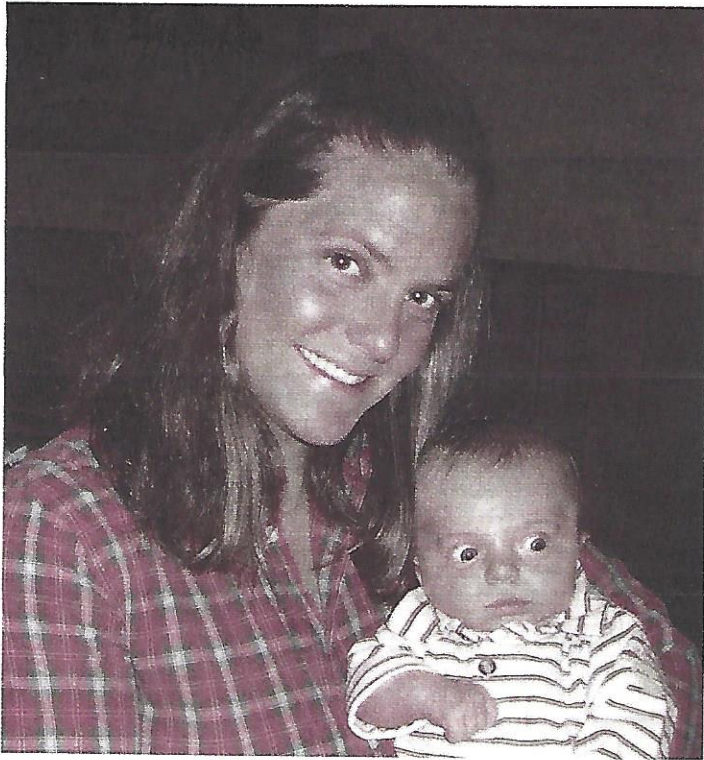
Schmid-Sommer, from Whitefish, has dominated the sport in the United States the past several years. She is the only telemark racer – man or woman – to ever have won four consecutive U.S. National Telemark Championships (2005-2009). Since she began telemark racing in 2006, she has raced in 26 sanctioned U.S. National races and has placed 1st in 20. On the world stage, she has raced in 28 international World Cup races and has seven 4th place finishes and four 5th place finishes, with the remaining being in the top ten.



Schmid-Sommer began downhill skiing when she was three years old in Franconia, New Hampshire. She began her alpine racing career at eight years old and raced competitively throughout New England for 10 years. In college at the University of Montana in Missoula, she picked up Telemark skiing in her free time at Snowbowl. After graduation in 2001, she moved to Whitefish where she met members of the U.S. National Telemark team—members who lived in the Flathead Valley and were dominating the sport on a world level. In 2005, Schmid-Sommer joined them and has been traveling across Europe and the U.S. on the World Cup Telemark Circuit.

Schmid-Sommer wrapped up the season last year with news that took precedence over her championship title. She announced to her teammates that she was pregnant but would be back in race-shape after her baby's delivery. After a healthy pregnancy and delivery, Schmid-Sommer and her husband welcomed their son, Nicolas, just over three months ago. After just a month of training and intense work-outs, she is back in race-shape. She says she's motivated and confident, but is not ignoring the physical new physical challenges.





“My body still feels totally different. When I started back to my training regime, it felt like I was starting from scratch,” Schmid-Sommer said. “What was encouraging was to finally get back on my skis. It was like riding a bike. My muscle

memory, body and mind all responded very well, and I quickly regained my confidence. It was relief to know that I didn’t have to completely start over this season.”

To watch Schmid-Sommer and the other standouts of the Telemark Skiing world compete, come to the National competition at Whitefish Mountain Resort, March 18-21.

## US TELEMARCK CHAMPIONSHIP SCHEDULE

Thursday, March 18 Giant Slalom - Two-run event with a combined time. The GS includes a Nordic style jump.

Friday, March 19 Karbon Classic - Two-run event which includes Giant Slalom gates, a jump, a 360 degree banked turn and Nordic skating.

Saturday, March 20 Big Sky Brewing Sprint Classic and Banquet -A shorter version of the Classic, with two runs combined time. Banquet dinner with raffle and awards Saturday evening.

Sunday, March 21 Pro Dual Slalom - Two-run format with combined time. There will be two courses side by side and a racer on each course. The Pro-style Slalom will have the gates set a little further apart than the traditional alpine slalom.

# the different categories and race formats of TELEMARK RACING



**THE CLASSIC:** This race is the epitome of Telemark racing as it encompasses different features in one race, making it a very difficult and involved race. The classic uses a one run format with racers going through at least 40 gates, going to a rapelje (a 360 banked turn), a jump (25m-40m distance covered) and a skating/cross country section. The whole race usually takes more than two minutes with the skate section being more than 45 seconds.

**SPRINT CLASSIC:** This is very similar to the longer Classic race, but it's shorter and more spectator friendly.

**TELEMARK/GIANT SLALOM:** This is a more traditional ski race format with 40 gates and a jump half-way through.

**SLALOM:** Not a World Cup event, but the U.S. Telemark Nationals will include this race format in March. With a duel course set-up (red and blue) racers ski both courses and then combine both times for the overall winner.

Racers are judged individually at each gate and turn, making proper technique imperative. A proper turn includes bending the inside knee to trail the lead foot by a "boot length." The heel has to be visibly off the ski and once the next turn has been initiated, the trailing bent knee must move continuously forward into the next turn. There must be no hesitation in the middle as it must be a fluid, continuous movement. If a judge

notices that one or more of these rules were broken, a one-second penalty is added to final time. Also, the jumps have certain distance requirements. The jumps have a clearing distance line that the racer must reach. Not only do racers have to jump that distance, but also have to land in the bent-knee, Telemark position.

Norwegians have been labeled to be born with skis on their feet, so it is appropriate that telemark skiing has its roots based in Norway. Telemark skiing has been called "the World's Oldest New Sport" as it began as a form of function to cross great distances and keep in contact with neighboring villages. It moved in a recreational activity in the late 1800's as people in villages would gather to ski, jump and compete on their skis. The first famous telemark skier was Sondre Norheim as he is credited today as being the "Father of Telemark Skiing." He lived in Telemark, Norway and popularized the telemark turning style, methods and jumps by highlighting telemark skiing from a mode of transportation into a recreational sport.

In the 1900's the sport of skiing progressed, and ski resorts with groomed hills were developed. During this time, alpine/parallel skiing techniques became more popular and telemark methods fell out of popularity. Alpine skiing techniques, with a fixed heel binding, were easier to learn, and it became the norm of skiing. In the 70's, telemark skiing made its comeback as more people were finding telemark skiing to be ideal for venturing into the backcountry. The telemark revival began, and the sport soon found its way back into mainstream. The U.S. Telemark Ski Association was formed officially in 1993 with intent to provide support and education of telemark skiing and racing. The USTSA today is the National governing body for telemark racing in the US. According to the industry trade group, Snowsports Industries America (SIA) telemark skiing in recent years has grown much faster than snowboarding or alpine skiing. SIA reported a 75% rise in telemark gear sales from 2003 to 2004.

For more information on the event and the US Telemark Teams view [www.ustsa.org/new-site/](http://www.ustsa.org/new-site/). ■