

SPORTS

World Cup Telemark Champ

Sabin leads U.S. ski team to new heights

By DAVID LESNICK
The Daily Inter Lake

Not only is it an impressive piece of hardware, but so is the honor that goes with it.

Reid Sabin of Whitefish is the first U.S. skier to claim the World Cup Telemark's overall title.

Sabin, 28, took the season's coveted top spot for men by accumulating 717 points on the strength of a string of key mid-season victories.

"From my first race in Salt Lake City two years ago, I knew I wanted to win it," he said.

"I was just a little surprised (it happened this quickly)."

The World Cup trophy will now reside in the Sabin household for the next year. It's approximately two-feet high, tarnished and shows the signs of being well-traveled over the years.

"Definitely," he said of competing again next year.

"I'd like to do well, defend the title. The World Cup championships are at Big Mountain in 2003, so I have to keep at it for that long."

And there's also a good chance the sport will be added to the 2006 Winter Olympics.

"Depending on what's going on in my life, I'll hang around," he said.

Sabin competed in 15 World Cup events this winter, winning six times in five different countries. His break-

through performance was placing first in the classic race in Sweden.

He followed that with a pair of wins at Big Mountain, and one each in British Columbia, France and Switzerland.

He won both the classic and the sprint classic three times.

His other highest finish on the tour was a fourth.

"Either I did really well and won, or I blew it," he said.

"I crashed in three of the first four races."

Sabin did win the next time out, the fifth stop on the tour in Brannas, Sweden.

"The start of my good luck, I guess," he said.

"I won four of the next five races."

And two of those were in front of family and friends at Big Mountain.

It was Sabin's victory in Kimberley, B.C., however, that put him atop the standings for good.

"They were shocked," said Sabin of how the European skiers viewed his success.

"I guess maybe they thought it was a fluke."

This was Sabin's third season of World Cup competition, but his first full-time. U.S. skiers get no financial backing from the U.S. Telemark Association, so they are responsible for raising all their funds.

Sabin estimates it cost him \$4,000 to compete.



Karen Nichols/Daily Inter Lake

WHITEFISH SKIER Reid Sabin holds the World Cup Telemark ski trophy that is given annually to the overall winner.

Whitefish skiers shine

SABIN/From B1

"We get huge support from the town of Whitefish and from the Big Mountain people," said Sabin of his financial backing.

And without it, he wouldn't be competing. While the winner of the Iditarod wins \$69,000 plus a new truck, there are no such financial rewards for winning races, or the Cup, on the telemark circuit.

"But hopefully this will make it easier to get some endorsements," he said.

"It doesn't really matter to me, though, as I don't do it for the money."

Sabin originally was into alpine skiing, but switched to telemarking while attending college in Missoula.

"I always had a passion to ski race," he said.

"Both my parents were ski instructors. We lived two hours from the hill."

That was in Washington state.

"Once I started getting into backcountry skiing (in Mon-

tana), I skied Alpine less and less," he said.

Sabin was one of seven skiers from Whitefish who made the U.S. team for the 1999-2000 season.

Cody Thompson of Whitefish finished second in the women's final standings, winning one event and compiling 794 points.

Pia Raita of Finland dominated the tour and claimed that division's Cup title with 1,188 points.

Back to the men, Whitefish's Chris Rice was fourth, 543 points; Taug Boschen 17th, 177; Glenn Gustafson 18th, 167; Jeff Elliott 28th, 97; and Neil Persons 44th, 37.

Two years ago, Sabin and Gustafson were the only Whitefish skiers on the U.S. squad. Persons was the first, back in 1995.

"For a long time, the East Coast was real strong," said Sabin.

"The balance of power has shifted to the West."

Sabin and his Whitefish teammates are proof of that.

See SABIN on Page B2