



Dave Reese photos/Daily Inter Lake

NEIL PERSONS, one of the first local skiers to make the U.S. Telemark Ski Team, rounds a gate during a race last year on Big Mountain. Persons will be competing at the telemark World Championships on Big Mountain today through Monday.

WELCOME TO THE WORLDS

Big Mountain hosts telemark World Championships this weekend

By DAVE REESE
The Daily Inter Lake

About six years ago Neil Persons starting doing something different from the rest of his ski buddies. He entered the world ranks of telemarking.

Persons, from Whitefish, was the first local to make the team of the U.S. Telemark Ski Team, and now he gets to take part in the World Championships this weekend at Big Mountain.

Persons seems to have created a monster.

Every year at the Thursday night telemark race league on Big Mountain, the ranks of skiers swelled. He got his friends into it, they got their friends into it, and now Whitefish is a hotbed of telemark skiing, a unique combination of downhill and cross country skiing.

"Once all my friends got involved and their friends got involved, everybody starting skiing faster. It's been good for the sport," he said.

More than half of the U.S. telemark team lives and trains in Whitefish. Whitefish team members include Glenn Gustafson, Reid Sabin, Cris Coughlin, Cody McCarthy, Peter McMahon, Natalie Angell, Matt Beedle, Neil Persons, Jef Elliot and Kris Carpenter. Since Persons opened the floodgates of local telemarkers who have gone on to make the U.S. team, Reid Sabin has assumed the title of world champion.

Sabin, the first American to win a world championship telemark race, will defend his title after taking a bit of a break from racing the last year. Last week, Sabin won the national title and placed second in the World Cup finals at Crystal Mountain, Wash.

"I'm glad to have the world championships in Whitefish," said Sabin. "But it's also a lot of pressure. My plan is to be first or last. It would mean a lot if I could defend the title."

The races are today through Monday. They take place on Chair Two, which provides good viewing for spectators. Countries represented are Japan, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, France, Germany, Slovenia, Denmark,



THE NORWEGIAN TEAM showed up in spirit with team members' hair dyed blue.

Canada, Spain, Italy and the United States. The top 10 men and top five women will represent each nation.

The races include giant slalom, classic, sprint classic, and the new dual sprint classic. The giant slalom is a speed event with a jump. (See schedule on next page.) The all-terrain classic race includes giant slalom sections, banked turns, rollers, several skate sprints, and a nordic distance jump where competitors launch up to 75 feet. The sprint classic is a shorter version of the full classic race. The dual classic is a new all-terrain race where competitors race side by side.

Skiers use stiff plastic boots and skis similar to alpine skis, but in telemark skiing the heel is free to move up and down.

These races will decide the world champion in the three telemark disciplines, plus an overall champion determined by the total time of all three races. The World Championships happen every two years and are separate from the World Cup, which awards a season crown based on season-long World Cup results. This year's World Cup title went to Kjeitl Sovik from



REID SABIN, from Whitefish, will be defending his world title.

Norway. In the jovial spirit of amateur ski racing, the Norwegians showed up with their hair dyed blue. It's that kind of fun atmosphere that has kept skiers like Sabin in the sport of telemarking.

"There's no bad blood here," he said Tuesday, standing below the shimmering slopes of Big Mountain, waiting to put on his boards for a training run. "Even with all the success I've had, everybody's been really supportive. Everyone is glad to see others doing well."

Telemark ski racing is entirely amateur. It's not even an Olympic sport — yet. The U.S. Telemark Ski Association is hoping to get the sport on the 2010 Olympic roster.

See WORLDS on page C2

Big Mountain hosts first World Championship race

WORLDS/from C1

Making the U.S. team means competing in several races around the country each year, all without major financial help or sponsorships. The World Championships could likely be the last big race for Cody McCarthy, a member of the U.S. Women's Team who lives in Whitefish. She found out she's pregnant this week, so she'll be concentrating on family life. "It's about time," she said. "I've had my fun."

Sabin, too, has been taking more time with his family, but this weekend, it's time to put on his game face. "I'm out to win ... and have fun. That's how I approach every telemark race."

No resort has held more world cup races than Big Mountain, but the previous 15 all pale in comparison to this week.

"This is the biggest week of our careers," said Glenn Gustafson, a member of the U.S. team and a Whitefish native. "It's the culmination of four years of asking ourselves, 'could we host something like this?'"

"This is the Olympics of our sport. It doesn't get any bigger than this."

THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS schedule of events

is as follows.

Thursday: Opening Day
10 a.m. - 2 pm: Master's and Junior races/Team Training:
6 p.m.: Parade of Nations in downtown Whitefish. Public bib draw at O'Shaughnessy Cultural Arts Center with guest speakers and Master's awards.

Friday: Giant Slalom Races on Ed's Run
10:30 a.m.: first run
1 p.m.: second run

Saturday: Dual Sprint Classic Races on Ed's Run
10:30 a.m.: first run
1 p.m.: second run

Sunday: Classic Race on Big Ravine to Hibernation
10:30 a.m.: single run format

Monday: Dual Slalom Fun Race or Weather Contingency Day

10:30 a.m.: Fun Race starts
6 p.m.: Awards banquet at Great Northern Bar and Grill
Awards will be given out on the deck of Moguls Bar & Grille following the races each day.

Gate keepers, crossing guards and course slippers are needed for all races. Volunteers will receive a free lunch and an all-day lift ticket voucher for another day of skiing within the next year. Volunteers should meet on the third

floor of the Chalet building every morning at 8 a.m. during the race schedule.

To volunteer, or for registration and updated event information, call 862-2911 or visit Big Mountain's Web site at www.skiwhitefish.com. Race results and photos will be available on the Web site each day.

On the Net:
www.telemarkski.org



The Griz STORE



has... **Monte** Wear
for kids ...

Lots of Adult Griz Gear Arriving Daily!

Across from Smith's • 257-3840

CALL...
ON THE "HOME TEAM"
TO REFINANCE,
BUY OR BUILD.
RATES ARE GREAT!



WILL ASTLE
"Home Team" Member
756-4252
wastle@glacierbank.com

GLACIER BANK
MEMBER FDIC • glacierbank.com

GOLFERS GOLFERS GOLFERS

Enjoy Golf Again...

Play



GOLFERS GOLFERS GOLFERS