

World Telemark Ski Championships



Kelly Mull/Mountain Photography

GLENN GUSTAFSON of Whitefish is one of the U.S. Telemark Team members who travels around the globe competing in telemark skiing. Gustafson is shown here in the World Telemark Championships at Big Mountain Sunday.

Last pure sport

■ Telemark skiing epitomizes amateur racing

By DAVE REESE
The Daily Inter Lake

WHITFISH — Ken Fujikawa had a nice vacation this week.

Came to Whitfish. Did some skiing. Competed in the World Telemark Championships.

But then Fujikawa, like many other amateur skiers, will settle back into his old routine: work. The ski patroller at Niseko ski area in Japan is like many of the 80 athletes from 13 countries who arrived in Whitfish last week to

compete in the World Telemark Championships. The races finished Monday.

For most of these skiers, it's back to the grind.

These are people who pay their own way, with few or no sponsorships. They buck up for their own meals, lodging, travel and other expenses. The perks of the professional ski ranks are not to be seen at a telemark race, even the World Championships, which were held on U.S. snow for the first time this week.

"It's the last pure sport," says Jimmy Ludlow, a member of the

U.S. Telemark Team and the outgoing president of the U.S. Telemark Ski Association.

Teammate Chris Rice lives in Salt Lake City and travels to several races a year — on his own dime. Rice is a construction worker by trade, and saves up for a binge of racing every two years. He races in the off years, but keeps his day job.

Although there is a push by the U.S. Telemark Ski Association, the sport's governing board, to get telemarking into the 2010



Dave Reese/Daily Inter Lake

REID SABIN holds his daughter Elise at the World Telemark Championships on Big Mountain Saturday. Many of the skiers juggle family commitments with amateur telemark racing. The races concluded Monday.

See *PURE SPORT* on Page B3

Telemark skiers race on own dime

PURE SPORT/From B1

Olympics, telemark ski racing is strictly amateur.

Two weeks ago at the national finals at Crystal Mountain, Wash., Big Sky Brewing Co. in Missoula put \$500 dollars toward the winners, one of the only times a cash purse was provided this year.

"You should have seen peoples' eyes getting huge over those little paychecks," said Glenn Gustafson, a member of the U.S. team who competed this weekend on Big Mountain.

Gustafson has travelled the world competing in telemark races. Last year he traveled to national championships in the United States, Spain, Canada, Norway and Sweden.

In his travels, he has earned some of his truest friends. He and his competitors have shared meals, rooms and space on the floor. This week Gustafson — who lives in Whitefish — had the opportunity to return the favor.

The Swedish national team stayed at his place, and after they left, the German team took over his living room floor and hung around Whitefish to do some skiing at Big Mountain.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian team bunked out at Phil Lewis' house.

Lewis, a Columbia Falls High School teacher, said he couldn't have asked for a better bunch of houseguests.

"I'd have them back any time," Lewis said. The Norwegians — all blue eyes and blond hair — arrived at the races with their hair dyed blue.

"These people were so much fun," Lewis said. "But all that blue hair ... it was hard to tell them apart."

WHILE RACING is the passion of many of these skiers, it sometimes takes a back seat to family.

Reid Sabin, a Whitefish man who won a World Championship title two years ago in Valtherons, France, cut way back on his racing last year — in order to help raise his daughter, Elise.

Sabin puts family first, but competed in the World Championships this week on his home course.

Waiting around at the finish line of the sprint classic, Sabin bounced little Elise around in his arms.

When Elise, still in diapers, had that aroma of needing a

change, Sabin laid her down on a pile of ski jackets and got the job done himself, while in the background you could hear the jangle of cowbells urging racers down the course.

Cody McCarthy, another Whitefish skier, will be retiring from ski racing after this week's race to spend more time with her family, and Cris Coughlin, at 43 the senior member of the U.S. women's team, is hanging up her telemark boots to pursue personal goals such as learning to fly an airplane and do more back-country skiing.

Her teammates call Coughlin "Sigmo" — short for Significant Mother.

"Sigmo" traveled to France and Slovenia earlier this winter to compete, and capped off her career in the World Championships rather inauspiciously Monday.

She blew out of a gate in the Classic race and did not finish. She shrugged it off as a case of "brain cramps" and said maybe she'll attend a few races next year to maintain the close friendships she's grown over the years.

"It's such a time commitment. I want to still ski and stay in shape, but I don't want

to be fanatic about it," Coughlin said.

Norway's Eiric Rykhus claimed the overall World Championships title after capturing three podium finishes over the weekend.

Rykhus, 21, took third in the sprint classic Saturday, won the giant slalom Sunday, and the classic on Monday. Amy N'Guyen of France won the women's overall title.

Unlike many of the American skiers, Rykhus gets sponsorships that help pay for his world traveling. It helps that he wins.

Lena Rogell is the stereotypical Swiss: blond-haired, blue eyed and pretty.

At 21, she's been racing on the World Cup circuit for five years and pays much of her own way to races.

With the help of people like Stuart Williams, owner of Green Acres lawn service, local telemark ski racers have gotten to pursue their passion.

Williams donates much of his personal time and money toward helping the U.S. team, many of whom live in Whitefish.

"I love supporting these people, They're my best friends, and it's a wonderful sport."