

Caledon's Brittany Webster going to the Olympics



Another Caledon athlete has learned she'll be making the trip to Sochi for next month's winter olympics.

Cross-country skier Brittany Webster, 26, had thought she had not qualified.

The Belfountain area native had two incredible races this past month at the Canadian Olympic Cross Country Ski Championships, coming second twice at Olympic Trials and finding out that only the first place finisher was going to the Games. While disappointed, she knew she had skied well and was proud of her preparation. After a week of believing she was not going to Sochi, the Caledon native got a call to tell her that a second spot had opened up for Canada and that she is officially headed to Sochi, now a two-time Olympian.

She had made the team for the 2010 Games, but illness kept her out of the competition.

Webster had been a star at Mayfield Secondary School in both cross-country running and skiing. After high school, she moved to Alberta to continue cross-country ski racing and started to show huge improvements with sixth and ninth place finish at the World Junior Championships and a fifth place at the World Under-23 Championship.

In the four years since the Whistler Olympics, Webster has won four National Championships and numerous North American Cup victories. This year, she has raced for Team Mito, an organization determined to find a cure for children and adults with mitochondrial disease.

Her parents, Fred and Christine Webster, have been her biggest fans and have been supportive of the talented part-time Caledon resident.

They were on hand at Town Hall in Caledon East Tuesday as Town of Caledon flag was laid out for well wishers to design messages of support to her. The flag will be delivered to Webster by Caledon's former Olympic coach Barrie Shepley.

"You don't have to grow up in the mountains to make it this far in skiing," commented acting mayor Nick deBoer. "We're excited."

"I know this means an awful lot to Brittany," Mr. Webster commented, reflecting that his daughter is going to be in Sochi, far from her family and closest friends. "This is a sign of support. You have no idea how much this means to them."

He added his daughter, who was in Canmore, Alberta, at the time, was scheduled to fly to Germany that night, arriving in time to get over jet lag and do some training. Then they will fly to Sochi in time to do some test runs on the track there.

"The experience that Brittany gained being on the Whistler-Vancouver Olympic Team will be invaluable for her in Sochi, and she is at the perfect age and health to be a major factor in Russia in less than two weeks," commented Shepley.

Webster will be the second Caledon resident and Mayfield graduate to go to Sochi. Snowboard cross athlete Jake Holden is going too.

"I don't know if any high school in Canada would have two alumni going to the same Olympic Games, and with the small size of Caledon, it's an incredible accomplishment," Shepley observed.

When Webster is not skiing or mountain biking, she volunteers as an athlete mentor for Classroom Champions, a program that reaches out to schools in need across the globe and partners classrooms with Olympic athletes. Throughout the year, she submits monthly videos to schools, each with a specific targeted lesson on subjects such as motivation, goal setting and perseverance. Webster encourages her students to start with a big-dream goal, and then helps them plan the steps and short-term goals that will get them there.

Shepley reported her first event will likely be Feb. 8 in the ladies pursuit. With races scheduled for Feb. 13 (10-km Classic), Feb 15 (ladies four by five-km relay) and Feb. 22 (women's 30-km mass start), she could be a very busy woman during the Games.

"I think she's going to do her best," Mr. Webster predicted. "She's fooled us before. You never want to count her out."

Mrs. Webster said her daughter started downhill skiing when she was four at Caledon Ski Club. She got interested in cross-country

while at Mayfield, and that she just loved.

She also stressed that all the Olympic athletes have made tremendous sacrifices over the years to get to where they are now.

They all deserve to be there, and they've probably all had a community behind them, she observed. Every one of them has sacrificed so much.