

Junior Olympic Experience 2009

We arrived in Sacramento on March 3, at the tail end of a snow storm that dumped more than eight feet of snow on Donner Summit. The storm closed a portion of the freeway up to the summit, so we had to wait a day before we could make the drive from sea level to 7,240 feet. Despite the huge amount of new snow, the trails at the Auburn Ski Club, located near Truckee, California, were very firm and in excellent condition. Leading up to the Junior Olympic race week, I familiarized myself with all of the races courses while acclimating to the altitude.

On Monday, March 9, I received my first shock of racing at altitude with the freestyle sprint. Racing at a high altitude is a bit different than closer to sea level because there is less oxygen in the air. I found myself out of breath much faster and at slower speeds than usual, although the conditions and effects are the same for everyone. The sprint course was short and very fast; my qualifying time of 2:15.39 was good enough for 53rd place in a field of 93 J1 males (ages 16-17).

After a day off, Wednesday brought the 15km freestyle race. Things were a bit hairy at the beginning because it was a mass start—and a technical downhill section (part of which is known as “The Black Hole”) 2km into the race didn’t help calm the field. I managed to avoid any crashes or pole breakage and stayed with a group that set a good tempo for me throughout the 2-lap race. I faded a bit at the end, but skied to a 32nd place finish.

Our team took advantage of a training day on Thursday to check out another local trail system, Tahoe Donner XC. The trail system offered much gentler hills than the race venue, along with stunning views of the mountains around Truckee.

Friday featured the 10km individual start classic race. As with the other distance races, the two-lap course featured several mountain-side switch-backs with great views of the surrounding area (although there wasn’t time for sight-seeing during the race!). I had excellent kick, and placed 56th.

The final race was the 3x5km classic relay race on Saturday. I skied the middle leg on the Great Lakes Division A team, along with Kai Sharp (Houghton) and Zach Wagner (Marquette). Again, we had good kick and all skied strong legs, finishing 18th out of the 28 J1 relay teams.

I had a great experience at the 2009 Junior Olympics, and all of my hard work and training over the past year really paid off. I would like to thank the Keweenaw Nordic Ski Club for providing financial support for traveling to California. I am very thankful that the local nordic community is so supportive of junior skiing. I would also like to thank the Copper Country Ski Tigers, who also provided financial support, as well as my ski coach Mike Young, who has provided me with top-notch coaching support not only at JO’s, but year round as well.

--Jay Woodbeck

pictures below:

