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Nelson's Julien Locke competes at Canada Winter Games

by Bruce Fuhr on 15 Feb 2015

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http://thenelsondaily.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/Original/news_images/thenelsondaily/feb/julien_locke_2015-easterns-15km_ian_austin.jpg

Julien Locke of Nelson, seen here competing earlier this year at cross country race in Eastern Canada, is eager to represent Team BC at the Canada Winter Games in Prince George. — Photo courtesy Ian Austin

The Canada Winter Games opened Friday in Prince George with some 2400 athletes and 1000 coaches locked in competition in the Northern BC City.

Nelsonites can be buoyed by the fact the Heritage City has a local athlete to cheer for at the Games as Nelson Nordic Ski grad Julien Locke competes in the sport of cross country.

(Castlegar's Tyler Hartleb, 16, has also been named to Team BC in long track sport in Prince George. Hartleb, from Castlegar, skated for the Nelson Speed Skating Club.)

"The U23 World Championships was the primary goal for the season (but) after crashing in the final round at the World Championships trials and not qualifying for the team, preparing for the Canada Winter Games, along with the National Championships, became the next focus," Locke told *The Nelson Daily* prior to the opening of the Canada Winter Games.

Locke felt quite confident entering the qualifications earlier this year at Highlands Nordic in Dunton, Ontario.

Four skiers from Locke's current club, the Black Jack Club in Rossland —Locke, Colin Ferrie, Scott Fraser and David Palmer — competed at the qualifying event.

However, Locke crashed in the sprinting event, finishing third and was left off the team as only one sprinter can qualify.

That shifted the focus of the 21-year-old skier to the Canada Winter Games, and future Canadian National Championships.

"Individually, my aim is to win the sprint and podium in the distance events," the 6'2", 185-pound skier explained.

"As a team, we have a good shot at success in the relay and we will be look to top the podium in that event."

Locke's events at the two-week National competition — cross country races are scheduled for the last week of the games — are the 10-kilometer Classic Individual Start (Monday, February 23), 1.6 km Classic Sprint (Tuesday, February 24), 15 km Skate Mass Start (Thursday, February 26) and 4 X 5 km Team Relay (Saturday, February 28).

Locke, along with his twin brother Peter, got their start in skiing at the Nelson Nordic Ski Club.

However, after a few years in the system, the two decided to join the more competitive Black Jack club in Rossland. At the time there wasn't much happening in Nelson and Rossland ran a higher calibre team so the pair thought there was more opportunity in Rossland.

The Blackjack coach also had former Canadian national team coach Dave Wood on staff. Wood continues to be Locke's coach.

Locke is hoping a bit of home-course knowledge and familiarity of the area helps during the cross country events.

"I have raced on the Otway trails in Prince George since I was 14, however, the courses have all been recently upgraded to FIS standards for the games," said Locke, who runs his own web design, photography and filmmaking business when he's not pounding the training trails.

"I raced on the new trails at the Western Canadian Championships last year. They are very well built trails with the new improvements all of the race courses are full width (10 meters), have adequate climbing, and flow together well."

"They are very fun courses to ski," he added.

Locke continues to be busy on the cross country circuit following the games.

He leaves for a short training period before the National Championships in Thunder Bay and the US Super Tour Finals in Sun Valley, ID.

The goal is for podium finishes in the sprints and finish top 10 in the distance races at those events.

In 2016, Locke will focus on the "Tour de Canada," a multistage World Cup event beginning in Quebec and moving across the country to finish in Canmore, AB.

"Competing in that event, as well as the U23 World Championships, will be the primary goal for next season," said Locke with aspirations to continue to compete in the sport with an aim have success at the World Championships, Olympics and World Cup circuit.

But right now all eyes are on Prince George and the Canada Winter Games.

A place Locke hopes to find success and bring home a medal or two for host Team BC.

GAMES NOTES: Former Nelson Speed Skating Club skater **Tyler Hartleb** is competing in the long track event in Prince George against athletes from 14 to 19 years old. The long track event happens the first week of the games.

