

Memories made at unique World Cup ski race

By Inge Scheve
for the Emerald

Spring break was everything but a break from working.

But when "working" equates to rubbing shoulders with the big names on the cross-country skiing World Cup circuit, I must admit that I too could become a workaholic faster than the time that anyone can finish a 50-kilometer race course, which takes the better part of two-and-a-half hours.

The 50-kilometer race in Oslo's Holmenkollen, Norway, is quite an institution in the world of cross-country skiing, known to the racers as one of the most grueling courses on the World Cup circuit.

However, even with fog thicker than split pea soup and temperatures far below what most consider suitable for outdoor activities, upwards of 30,000 ecstatic Norwegians attended. The supporters were clad in knickers and anoraks and were sporting various head gear that ranged from Viking

helmets to mink furs and the more traditional knitted woolen hats.

These fans were scattered all along the course to cheer on their townsmen and village boys with cow bells, chants

and self-made noise composers. The skiers say that they catch an extra high

when they hear the crowd and that it carries them through to the finish.

Once the skiers reach the end, some of them collapse from exhaustion and bury their snot, tear- and sweat-laced faces in the snow.

And it is where these exhausted racers collapse that the reporters and photographers have free access to stuff microphones and lenses into their faces, asking for comments but mostly receiving grunts at best.

We, meaning the working media, love this new stadium built before the 2000 season.

There is a remote-control television camera that runs along the last 200 yards up to the finish line. It's set about six inches off the ground — the right height to capture the facial expression of the winners as they cross.

This year, Sweden Per Elofsson had his gritty face strewn all over the front pages for a few days. At the tender age of 23, he is the youngest skier to win the 50-kilometer in Kollen.

The only American to start the competition was Justin Wadsworth of Bend, who pulled out of the 50-kilometer race somewhere around the 13-kilometer mark after feeling the effects of a month on the road and a nagging stomachache.

The entire world's cross-country elite was present: Sweden, Norway, Russia, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Poland, Switzerland, France, Spain and Japan, to mention a few.

Along with the teams came heaps of TV production vehicles — 19 buses from a Norwegian television channel alone. There was also press from

all odd corners of the world.

My biggest concern as a part of the working media was getting through the media security. With a press pass reading, "The Bend Bulletin," my credibility and legitimacy were not immediately established.

"The Bend what?" "And is that your camera? Do you not have more than two lenses?" Those were a few of the repeated responses I received from a security guy who looked like he probably lived in Gold's Gym.

So, you might wonder, people actually pay good money to come see such unsightly stuff? Well, not exactly.

In Oslo, the local government supports cross-country skiing in full force. It has volunteers prepare tent spots, fill depots with firewood and provide garbage bags, all free of charge to the supporters who choose to camp out overnight to catch a glimpse of their heroes as they ski by them the next morning.

That said, for those choosing the more upscale stadium options, tick-

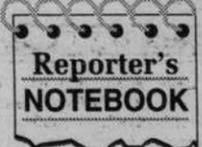
ets are available at the scene for less than \$10 and nobody will be turned away. The more the merrier. People just bring lots of hot chocolate and plenty of wool socks, as heaters are not available.

But there is more in store on this recent foggy Saturday than just a 50-kilometer race. Equally well-known and grueling is the women's 30-kilometer race. High expectations for hometown hero Bente Skari, 28, were crushed as she finished second behind Russian veteran Larissa Lazutina, who has raced for more than a decade and took her win in stride (no face plant for her).

Top American placers were Nina Kemppel in 22nd place and Wendy Wagner in 23rd. Canadian Beckie Scott finished in 16th place.

All in all, it was an experience I won't soon forget.

Inge Scheve is an outdoor sports freelance writer for the Emerald. She can be reached at skinge@yahoo.com.



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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (April 12). You may have thought you knew everything, but by now you should know that you don't. This year, make it your great quest to learn more. Pick a topic you're passionate about in April. Obtain a student loan in May. Take care of errands nearby in June, and take care of the folks back home in July. You may be bogged in fog in September, but stay the course. By December you'll have a great breakthrough, and it's all blue skies after that. By February, you'll barely recognize yourself.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — Today is a 9 — The world continues to be your oyster — for another day, anyway. If you ruled, what would you do? Better do it fast, because for you, the time for talking is over. Just do it!

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — Today Gemini (May 21-June 21) — Today is a 6 — A friend's plan has merit, even if it doesn't get far yet. Later in the weekend will be better. Or, later in the year. You might have time for a trial run this evening. Instead of flying to Tahiti, for example, you could watch a surfer movie while munching on pineapple and coconut. It's a start.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — Today is a 5 — You and your partner sometimes disagree, but you need to join forces now. You both have something to discuss with the person who has all the money. First, list your options, including relocation. Then, settle for more benefits if additional cash is not forthcoming.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — Today is an 8 — Amazingly, the Earth has only appeared to be still over the past few days. It has continued to revolve, and quite a lot of work may have piled up as a consequence. You weren't worried about it then, and you shouldn't worry about it now. Just do it.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Today is a 6 — Work gets in the way of love, and that could make you cranky. The good news is that you could finally solve a technical dilemma, mak-

ing your workload easier. There's more time for love tomorrow.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) — Today is a 7 — There's no time to clean up your place this morning, but you may want to entertain this evening. Can you get someone else to clean for you? If you can't afford a butler and maid, and if your superpowers don't kick in, schedule your social event for Sunday instead.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) — Today is a 5 — Be careful about trying a new tactic. It may not work as well as advertised. Instead of saying you time, it could actually cause complications. Meanwhile, get something you want for your home, cheap. Fix the old, broken one.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Today is a 7 — Even if you sometimes resist your job, and you occasionally resent it, you'll appreciate it now, because that money is welcome. If you don't have a job and want one, this would be a great day to interview. You're attracting money like a magnet, although there still is work involved.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Today is a 6 — You're sure of yourself, but don't get cocky. Someone else's opinion counts, too. You'll find that out soon enough, if you don't already know. Tangling with this person is like arguing with a buzz saw. Don't get too close until he or she has cooled off.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Today is a 7 — You're under pressure to perform, but that's good. It will force you to go public with something you've been practicing. Your brilliance shines through, even if you make a few mistakes.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) — Today is a 6 — Something that initially looks like it won't work could actually turn out well. If it seems more sensible tonight and tomorrow night, it should be a good deal. It won't hurt to wait and make sure.

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