

BDST - Annual review

Another spectacular year for the British Disabled Ski Team and our supporters

Thanks to some stand out performances this year our skiers came back with 40 Medals from international competition.

August 2010

In this month we held a talent ID assesment weekend looking for new skiers for our squads. Skiers from the age of 13 onwards were targeted and overall we looked at a round dozen new hopefuls.

These days, we have to be quite selective about who we engage with as there is a good pool of skiing talent that would like to ski with us, we know from experience that the opposition out there is tough and we also are very aware that we need to work with some very tight resources. We get very little central government funding.

From our talent weekend we came away and selected our latest crop of skiers. For our youth squad, this included Jack Titley, a 16 year old with a mild form of cerebral palsy, Asif Rahmani - an Afghani lad of 18 who is seeking GB nationality and Menna Fitzpatrick - a great young visually impaired skier. Our adult squad was then boosted by Alex Krol, a sitskier in his late 20s, Ben Hooper - an experienced sit skier who wanted to try his luck with the BDST and Fran Brown a sit skier in her early twenties.

Ian Bishop, one of the skiers from the Combined Services Disabled Ski Team also joined us on the adult development team.

With our development squads refreshed, we then went into the new Winter season with a great full complement of team members.

October 2010

Huge snowfalls in Austria coincided with the arrival of our youth development squads. We had a great crowd this week with Jack Titley, James Whitley, Benji Millard, Ben Sneesby and Menna Fitzpatrick all skiing well.

All progressed well and some were put forward later in the year to take part in their first adult races.

November 2010 - Adult development and elite weeks

The adult development week was just as challenging climactically as the youth week. Blocked roads due to fallen trees and high winds added to the drama.

Still, as we always do, we weathered all the storms and had some great time on snow with our new skiers. This week we had Fran Brown, Alex Krol, Ben Hooper, Jade Etherington, Fiona Gingell, Ian Bishop and we were joined by Martin Hewitt, Pete Dunning and Mick Brennan.

Redpoint did a marvellous job for us in the two development weeks and the stay at the Rindererhof adjacent to the lifts at 'Tux could hardly have been better.

Following the development weeks we had two weeks of pre-season camp for the elite skiers.

Here we had the benefit of Physios, Strength and Conditioning experts, Sports Psychologists, ski technician and extra coaching staff. These two weeks were productive, but tiring.

The early season - everyone is getting medals!

Things kicked off well this year with some amazing December results.

In the Italian IPCAS races Peter Dunning picked up a couple of golds and Martin Hewitt got two bronzes. A brilliant start.

Then, over at the European Cup races in Pitztal in the SuperG, the only race to run after some appalling conditions, Talan Skeels Piggins scored his first Euro Cup gold medal and showed Sean Rose (in fourth) a clean pair of heels. Talan thanked ex- British racer Andrew Freshwater for some excellent training input here. From a team perspective getting the involvement of coaches from the able-bodied environment is something that we feel we need to do more and more.

Moving down the road to Kuhtai, Kelly Gallagher started her best season ever with her new guide Charlotte Evans in stunning fashion picking up two silvers and a bronze, Anna Turney had a bronze and a fourth place, Jane Sowerby a fifth and 6th and Sean Rose a 4th and 7th place.

January 2011 - World Championships and Interski

The December races were a great run in to the World Championships for January 2011.

At the Worlds we were fortunate to be taking a large team having had some last minute confirmation of wild card entries for Martin Hewitt, Mick Brennan and Peter Dunning. These three joined Kelly and Charlotte, Anna Turney, Sean Rose and Talan Skeels Piggins who had all qualified as of right. Sadly, due to injuries Jane Sowerby and Tim Farr had had to withdraw from this event.

We had some fantastic training organised by Coach Jane Stevens during the run-in to Sestriere 2011 with a holding camp in Serre Chevalier and input from strength and conditioning expert Nick Ward, physio Paul Gould, Assistant coaching from Kurt Smitz and Scorge and ski teching from Spike Kullas as well as brilliant buddy support from Jonny Sutton and Geoff Longrigg.

In Sestriere we were delighted too to be entertaining Jane Emmerson and Jacki from Get Kids Going! Jane and her crew had not only provided us with some vital cash support for these championships but are personal supporters for Kelly and Anna - so the chance to entertain them in Sestriere at our World Championships was brilliant.

While the team were in Sestriere, myself and Ben Sneesby were over at the Interski conference in St Anton. Interski is a conference held every 4 years and is the chance for each nation to send their top ski instructors and representatives to help spread knowledge. It's also a good excuse for a party or two. Young Ben and I had been requested to attend as the UK's first ever adaptive contingent for the skiing demonstration team. This is quite a big deal and so while the racers were busy representing GB in Italy, Ben and myself were trying to perfect synchronised skiing and cross-over manouveres and to not let all the other world class skiers on the team down!

We are so proud of our team performances as everyone in Italy skiing for GB put in a personal effort that was truly remarkable. However, of course, the highlights were Kelly and Charlotte coming back to the UK with TWO world Championship medals in Silver (Slalom) and Bronze (GS). These were the first ever World Championships medals for GB skiers and a fantastic achievement, especially for a pairing that a few weeks earlier had only just had their first few runs together.

February and March 2011- More medals and new beginnings

If the World Championships were the highlight for our elite skiers, the end of the season was a revelation for our development initiatives. Fuelled by some financial support from our friends at the

BOOST Charitable Trust we were able to put on extra training events and also to help support some new skiers in their first steps in competition.

Notable in this period are some wonderful debuts with Jade Etherington and her guide Fiona Gingell showing that we have now got some real talent in ladies visually impaired skiing. Jade and Fiona went out to the Paralympic Winter World Cup event in Sweden and got medals in every single event despite some horrendously cold temperatures. Joining them out there were Martin Hewitt, Pete Dunning and Ian Bishop with all five of this team of skiers being well looked after by Combined Services Disabled Ski team coach Mark Scorgie (Scorge to his friends). Smiling through the frostbite here the team between them brought back nine medals in all - four for Jade and Fiona, three for Martin and one each apiece for Peter and Ian.

Fresh from Sweden, Jade and Fiona joined our BOOST sponsored two week camp in Austria and hooked up with fellow development skiers Asif, Ben Sneesby, Ian Bishop and James Whitley as well as Peter Dunning, Kelly and Charlotte. At the end of the camp were some races: Kelly and Charlotte continued their winning form, we which were now starting to expect (!), but young James Whitley got his first race and, at 13 showed some of the other male standing skiers how things should be done! James finishing 20th out of 32 and getting some valuable race points and experience. Ben Sneesby too got an outing in the races here and was desperately unlucky not to finish.

Then, in March Jade and Fiona and James again tackled the race circuit, this time In St Moritz and again impressed. Jade and Fiona with a silver and a Bronze and James getting a 10th and an 11th placing. Also in St Moritz were Pete Dunning and Ian Bishop picking up some solid mid field results.

Elsewhere, Sean had some fantastic results on home ground in Kimberley Canada with four podium finishes (including 2 golds) and Jane Sowerby too picked up a gold medal here, with Anna Turney getting a Silver and Pete Dunning a great bronze.

Meanwhile in Spain, Kelly and Charlotte picked up 5 medals and ended up overall Slalom champions in Europe and Anna picked up another two medals.

The end of season GB medals tallies were:

Kelly and Charlotte: 12 medals (inc. 2 World Championships medals);
Anna Turney: 6 medals;
Jane Sowerby: 1 medal;
Talan Skeels-Piggins: 1 medal;
Sean Rose 4 medals;
Martin Hewitt 5 medals;
Jade and Fiona: 6 medals;
Peter Dunning: 4 medals;
Ian Bishop: 1 medal.

A total GB squad tally of 40 medals this year! This is to my knowledge the second highest total we have ever achieved, but crucially this year it was spread across a large number of skiers and a fantastic sight to see is the number of new ski racers coming on to the scene.

We also have had our highest ever finish (as far as I am aware) within the European Cup rankings finishing in 8th overall. When you bear in mind that we have such a small team this really is an amazing result and one that is a testimony to the dedication of all the skiers and staff in the last twelve months.

A final word this year though needs to go out to some notable retirements from the regular skiing circuit.

Russell Docker, three times paralympian and whose Gold medal in SuperG in 2005 in Austria came at the start of our journey to becoming a skiing nation to be reckoned with.

Sean Rose, two time paralympian and winner of our first ever World Cup medals.

Talan Skeels Piggins, paralympian. Talan has retired all too soon, through injury.

Martin Hewitt, who having shown great promise has also retired too soon. We wish him luck in his latest expedition - climbing Mount Everest.

and Ben Hooper, who goes on with Sean and Tim Farr to try and conquer crossing europes largest glacier by snow kite.

We also say goodbye to Jane Stevens who has been coach since before the Turin games. Jane is a hard act to follow, and has played a major role in bringing the team up to the standard we are at right now. She will be being replaced next season by coaches Rip (Richard) Pridday and Sue Greenberg.

Finances

This year has been challenging for the team.

We are delivering what is considered to be a world class programme on a very tight budget. Unfortunately this year we had some bad news that one of our funding streams would be cut. This was not because we had done anything wrong, but was essentially down to government cutbacks.

We continue to explore different streams of income and have had some successes, but there is no reason to believe that we can be complacent. It is likely that the climate for funding will continue to cause us some concerns.

David Chugg,
Team Manager, British Disabled Ski Team.