

## **Biathlon athletes head for North Van**

### **NATIONAL TEAM I 10 days of spring training include cycling, kayaking and shooting**

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The Canadian national biathlon team loaded up its kayaks, hiking boots and bikes in Canmore, Alta. on Friday and made the long drive to North Vancouver.

Now perhaps you're thinking, 'Just a minute here. Kayaks, bikes and hiking gear?'

Biathlon might barely register a pulse in this country, but isn't it a winter sport that combines cross-country skiing and shooting, not paddling, cycling and climbing?

Well, it is May. And with the shooting range at Canmore closed as the whole cross-country track and grandstand area is renovated in advance of Canada hosting its first cross-country World Cup since 1991, the biathlon team was forced to look elsewhere for a 10-day spring camp that is generally heavy on precision-shooting practice and intense cross-training.

Pacific Shooters, the range located up behind Capilano College in North Vancouver, will give the athletes an opportunity to work on their rifle marksmanship. They'll go kayaking in Deep Cove, hiking in the Seymour Watershed and take some long bike rides.

"We wanted a site that was reachable driving out," Roger Archambault, technical director of the small-budget biathlon team, said from Ottawa. "And we wanted to get the athletes out of the Canmore-Bow Valley corridor because we use this time to do some team building with some of our new [development team] athletes.

"We wanted a good setting for the athletes that provided the ability to get in some shooting and the ability to cross-train, whether it's running, cycling, some of the paddle sports. Vancouver was an easy fit."

Archambault also said the national federation is keen to get around the country when it can to allow regional coaches access to the camps and help generate interest in their programs.

To that end, Allan Ball, coaching director of Biathlon B.C., will assist national team coach Richard Boruta and try to soak up as much information as he can.

"This is going to be coach education for me," said Ball. "I don't think he'll be able to teach me very much about riding long distance on bicycles, but the shooting skills are very sport-specific and directly transferrable.

"The other part is organizing a training program. The opportunity to work with Richard, assess his program and see the way he puts the training pattern together, that's really valuable, more valuable probably than the shooting."

Zina Kocher of Red Deer, Alta. and David Leoni of Canmore, two of Canada's three national team members, will attend. Robin Clegg has been excused for personal reasons. There will also be four members of the development team, Hans and Sonya Erasmus, brother and sister from Vanderhoof, Scott Perras of Regina

and Lindsey Bolivar of Yellowknife.

Biathlon fell into a talent-thin crevice after Quebecer Myriam Bedard won double gold at Lillehammer in 1994, but Kocher, just 22, had a succession of Top-20 World Cup results this past season after a stunning 10th-place result in 2004, the best by a Canadian women since Bedard retired. Canadians also won five medals in world junior championships the last two seasons.

"Biathlon Canada went through a pretty serious review in 1999-2000, there was almost a paradigm shift in the way our program operated and we're starting to see the fruits of that now," said Archambault. "The future is rosy and we're targeting medals in 2010."

In fact, this spring's visit to Vancouver, said Archambault, will serve as a bit of a 2010 "scouting activity." And while the group itself won't get out to Whistler, Biathlon Canada executive director Joanne Thomson was in the Whistler-Callaghan Valley area Thursday and Friday, checking out the area that will be used for biathlon and cross-country in the 2010 Games.

"We would love to start building Whistler into our plans as soon as possible," said Archambault. "With a bit of luck, it seems we should be able to be in full swing there by 2008, which is a pretty grand phenomenon considering past Olympics. We might even have access to the trail system before that."

Meantime, Hans Erasmus said he's looking forward to this week's camp and the varied activities that are planned.

The athletes started an aerobic program and some weight training in Canmore a couple of weeks ago.

"We've jumped into some pretty tough training," he said. "The philosophy from the coaches is a little different than last year. It seems to be a little less hours, but more intensity."

Today, the schedule called for some paddling in the morning and running in the afternoon, with some road bike work Sunday and some strength training in the afternoon.

"We do a lot of paddling, especially in the spring and summer," said Erasmus. "It really builds your core strength, good for the shoulders and muscles because of the pulling action."

The group will begin shooting work on Monday.

"I shoot fairly well, but I could improve my shooting when racing," said Erasmus. "I don't usually shoot my potential. You just have to really work hard in the spring because when you start racing, it always falls apart a little bit."

Erasmus competed mostly in Europa Cup last season and hopes to make some World Cup starts this season with an eye to beginning to get the experience he needs to be a medal threat in 2010. And to begin attracting some more sponsorship help.

"Most people don't realize how much money it takes to put an athlete on the podium," said Erasmus. "It takes a lot, especially in biathlon because it takes so long to develop. People who are winning on the World Cup are 28-29. That's my goal."