

## Caitlin's World Juniors Race Summaries

### World Juniors 5k Classic Race Summary

The night before the 5k, after we talked about skis and the schedule for the race day, the coaches asked us all how we were doing, especially in terms of nerves. I was fairly calm and definitely collected, but I let the coaches know that I expected some serious butterflies the morning of the race. When the race day dawned, I felt far more at ease than I had expected.

The day started off at 7am with the beeping of my alarm and a walk down to the breakfast room. The German food here at our hotel has been generally quite good, although occasionally there have been some bizarre components. Breakfast consists of a large variety of sliced meats and cheeses, bread, yogurt, granola, dried fruit, fresh fruit, nutella, coffee, tea, and multivitamin juice. While it is nothing like the eggs and other breakfast foods served in the US, this assortment nicely fits my breakfast appetite. After a hearty breakfast, we left at 8am for a 30 minute drive to the race venue, which takes us through the German countryside and into the snowy, forested mountains.

I started my warm up at 9:30, about an hour before my start, and with enough time to test my race skis and preview the race course before it closed at 9:50. The skis and course were both nearly perfect, and so I switched over to my warm-up skis and the warm-up trails to continue my race preparations. After a few more pickups, it was time to grab my race skis again, pull on my bib and race hat, go through ski marking and have transponders put on both ankles, and arrive at the start. I actually put on my poles over a minute before my start, and was less rushed than usual getting into my spot of the lineup. The sun was bright, the crowds were cheering, and I was completely ready for my first race in Europe as I stepped to the line.

The girl who was supposed to start right in front of me was actually the only DNS of the day, but I ended up passing the girl who had started a minute in front and finding several other people to ski with during the two lap course. Although the lap times from the results indicate that I started somewhat slowly, by the crest of the first hill about a minute into the race, I was already breathing hard and completely in racing mode. As is my nature as a distance racer, racing mode means that I try to continually accelerate and push all the way to the finish. As I came through the stadium after my first lap, a racer just starting was a few meters ahead of me. I was not able to close the gap to that racer, but when a German racer on her first lap caught me about 2k from the finish, I was ready to hang on. I used the home crowd cheering as motivation, matching her stride and tempo, which was quick and strong, and eventually passing her before our return to the stadium. As I came into the finishing stretch of a flat turns, one of our coaches shouted a reminder that every second counts, and I used all the energy I could muster to push hard to the finish line. As I finished the race, I knew I had given it everything I had, at least for this particular day. During many parts of the race, I had not felt good at all, but I continued to push the pace, challenge myself to go faster, and never give up. Overall it was a successful effort here in Germany.

### 10k Pursuit

We knew it was supposed to snow on Friday before and during the pursuit, but we still didn't end up being quite prepared for the amount of snow and the conditions that it caused. The snow didn't cause particularly unusual conditions for skiing, but the driving was a mess. Before breakfast, I went outside and took a tiny jog around the hotel and admired the snow. By an hour later, I was in a van that was hardly able to make it up the winding roads to the venue, even with 5 people in the front seat and two more leaning over to put more weight on the front tires for front-wheel drive. We left the hotel with time to spare, but by the time we arrived at the parking lot and walked up to the waxing tents, it was essentially time for me to start warming up. This didn't take into account the fact that I wasn't at all ready to ski, and it took me about 10 minutes to put on all my clothes and boots and get onto my skis. A long and thorough warm-up is essential to my race preparation, and the hectic morning prevented me from getting the warm up that I needed. As I did a few last skate pick-ups before heading to the start, my legs felt incredibly heavy and not very good at all. I shook off this feeling and attributed it to the fact that I was skiing through several inches of newly fallen snow, but as I found out in my race, the feeling was not just due to the snow and instead stayed with me throughout four tough laps of the course.

I was seeded 22<sup>nd</sup>, which was not all that bad a position, but it meant that I started in the middle of the fourth row of racers. After setting up my skate skis and poles in the transition area and putting spare gloves over the bindings to prevent them from filling with snow, I headed to my spot in the chevron. I can't even remember whether they fired a gun or just said "go", but I know that within the first 15 seconds, I was already off to a bad start and losing ground on everyone around me. Racers swarmed by on the outside of the pack during the first hill, but I was insulated in the middle and unable to do anything but hold on to a spot in the tracks. Soon I started moving forward by maneuvering around people, but I never felt like I was in touch with the lead pack. In fact my start was so frantic and taxing on energy that I rarely noticed where the leaders were in relation to me. I believe they were still occasionally in sight on the second lap, but I'm not sure, because just dealing with the racers in a 10 foot radius was enough for my focus.

On an ideal day, I believe I would have been able to ski with the lead group, or at least a chase group, but Friday was anything but ideal, and the whole race was a painful fight to survive. The constant snow during the race would usually have seemed fun, but instead it added to my discomfort. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> lap of the classic portion, I was suffering and the suffering only increased after I switched to skate skiing. At least the transition did go well, and I didn't have any mishaps there, but my legs were extremely heavy even on the first skate climb. Clearly I expended too much energy moving through the pack in classic, in addition to the fact that my body just wasn't quite feeling right. Although I did pass a few people before the finish, there were also several who passed me, and many more who should have been within reach but slipped away. I finished the race with no energy to spare, frustrated with how I had performed and how my body had partially shut down, but marginally content with 23<sup>rd</sup> place given my race feelings for the day. There is something to be learned from every race I enter, and this one was no exception, as I made observations about skiers around me and my own requirements on race morning.

### 4x3.3k Mixed Technique Relay

We had a surprisingly uneventful drive up to the venue on relay day, and were greeted by more snowfalls. All four of us on the girl's team were very excited, and a little bit nervous. I did an adequate warm-up, and then headed to the start just in time to see Sophie take off classic skiing. She got off to a good start, and so I was left to wait out the 10 plus minutes that it would take until she would return to the stadium and I would be tagged and begin the 2<sup>nd</sup> leg. The pack must have split up quickly, because by the first tag, there were already large gaps throughout the field, and Sophie was skiing with a mini-pack and in 9<sup>th</sup>. I started right behind a Canadian skier, and slightly behind a larger pack of 3-4 skiers. All of us started off vigorously and fast, and I couldn't immediately catch that pack or the Canadian girl while striding up the first hill. Soon enough we dipped down into a small area of recovery, and then began the long climb of the course, from farther down than any of the girl's individual race courses had gone. The climb felt fairly terrible, and my legs went numb and wouldn't respond when I wanted to give a burst of speed. The cheering by the US team along the side of the course helped quite a bit, and I kept fighting and eventually got up the hill, not too far behind a few others.

This left us with a downhill section, two steep uphill, and then some flat and rolling terrain before the finish. On the uphill, I found a slight burst of new energy, and was once again spurred on by the cheering crowd. This time I managed to pass at least two skiers in front of me who were fading. Although I continued to feel numb and not all that fast, I held off the skiers behind by gritting through the pain and tagged off to the third leg in 6<sup>th</sup>. Our two skaters had good races, but it was not quite enough to hold off some of the other teams, and we finished 8<sup>th</sup>, less than 15 seconds out of 4<sup>th</sup> place. Really, it was quite admirable that we were less than a minute behind Norway, who won the relay. This had been an exhausting, fun, intense, and beneficial week of racing. I am sad that this trip has come to close, but ready to apply what I have learned about racing to the next races I enter and to return to school and my team in VT.