

# World Junior Races Summaries

Scott Patterson

## 10k Classic

After a reasonable late morning and a typical German breakfast (very different than my usual pre-race oatmeal), we left our hotel to drive to the nordic venue Notschrei, a half hour away. The morning was uneventful. There were no problems with skis, random doping control tests, weather problems, or even the fog that had plagued the venue for the previous two sprint days. We were greeted at the venue by clear blue skies, bright sunlight, and immaculate racing conditions. The tracks were hard and fast.

About an hour before my start, the coaches recommended we test our race classic wax on the course before it closed. I quickly completed the testing informed the coaches about my skis and left them to be top coated while I continued on my warm up. The course for the 10k consisted of 3 times around a 3.3 kilometer loop. Each loop had 4 significant climbs with several other smaller hills interspersed. I had skied the loop almost every day for over a week prior to the race so knowledge of the course was insignificant. The warm up trails were a little flat but I seemed to have a fine warm up and was not all that nervous as I collected my race skis. My start position was about in the middle of the field as my FIS points are decent but not exceptional.

Thirty seconds behind a Ukrainian skier, I started my first world junior race. I tried to start fairly slowly and build my speed during the race but due to the difficulty of the course and the nerves from it being my first race that plan did not mature. I skied the first lap feeling that I was relaxed and my splits stated that I was leading the race. The fastest seeds were last so I tried to push through any splits. Lapping through the stadium after my first lap, I joined up with an Estonian skier for about a kilometer. I still felt that the race had not taxed my body too much up to that point. I went into the second lap hoping to increase my lap time. About halfway through the lap is the longest and hardest sustained climb of the course. It might be about a kilometer of consistent climbing. Even though it is not all that steep the hill is very taxing. I caught the racer in front of me and dropped the Estonian on the climb but was defiantly starting to hurt. My tempo was slowing down and although I was still gliding pretty well up the hill my arms were weakening. The third lap was brutal. Too that point it was probably the second most tired I have been during a ski race, losing out only to the 15k at JOs in Truckee because of the altitude. I tried to push it up the hills on the last laps but I knew that my pace was slowing down. I was receiving splits that I was second in the race. This information did not help my confidence as there were still another 50 racers to come in. When I crossed the finish line I was in second, but was rather disappointed because of how I felt during the race. I was worried that every single one of the 50 racers would beat me. When I was cooling down, the announcements of other people's places did not encourage me. The result turned out decently as not every one of the 50 starters following my bib beat me, only 16 of them. Even though I was 17<sup>th</sup> which for the US is a pretty good result, I was a little disappointed as I knew I had more potential.

## 20k Pursuit

The pursuit race followed the same 3.3k loop with 3 classic laps followed by 3 skate laps. Prior to the race an additional difficulty emerged with the weather. Snow was rapidly accumulating on the race trails. I tested both my pairs of skis before the race, was happy with both of them, and then warmed up fairly easily as the race was 20k, a really difficult course, and in several inches of fresh snow. About twenty minutes before my start I filed into the lines to get both skis marked, timing transponders attached to both ankles, and attach my number to my upper left thigh. Then I set up my transition pit. Because it was snowing so hard, the coaches had given every athlete gloves to put over the skate bindings to prevent the falling snow from clogging the bindings. Additionally the race organizers had leaf blowers out to clear the areas of the several inches of freshly fallen snow. The groomer got off the trails after regrooming because of the snow about 5 minutes before the start. At about the same time with incredibly dramatic music playing, the officials allowed the athletes to parade in to the starting positions. I was bib 54 and in the 8<sup>th</sup> chevron. After a bit of waiting and getting cold, the race started.

Knowing that I was pretty far back in the race already, I started much more aggressively than normal. The start was still chaos. Everyone it seemed was acting like they could win the race in the start. It was defiantly impossible to win it but it could be lost. Lots of people crashed, broke poles, were forced into others, were shoved out of tracks, or had a multitude of other aggressive actions occur to them. The eventual winner of the race may have even been taking down sometime early in the race. I managed pretty well in the start and had moved up into the top twenty within a few kilometers. From there the race was basically a tactical defense of my position in the tracks while not losing ground on the leaders. The first two laps were uneventful. It was a little difficult to match the sometimes awkward strides of the person in front with another person on my heels. On the third lap I began to tire. My arms were especially bad during the climb to the high point on the course. I hung on to my position but the pack was spreading out a little bit. Before the transition, I was dreading the fact that I still had another 10k to ski and another three times to go up the largest hill on the course.

My transition went smoothly but it was not especially fast. I focused on emerging from the transition with all the right equipment and being a second or two slower rather than skiing with different poles. The skate leg felt almost like it was a different race. I was still tired but not falling apart as badly as I was during the last kilometers of the classic. I was skiing pretty smoothly but lost several places during the three laps. Each time up the hill increased the burning sensation in my legs. When another skier passed me I would be able to hang on their tails for a short period before falling off. I was unable to make any moves on my own. When I wanted to try and drop several people skiing with me, I just did not have the additional energy. It was much more difficult to try to ski away in a short burst from someone who is skiing the whole leg at about the same pace. My usual strategy of just skiing the whole race faster than everyone else was not helpful. I hung onto the Japanese skier who came blowing by on the large hill for a little bit as he skied the fastest skate split. Also I was able to jump on with Andrew Musgrave, one of Great Britain's few world cup skiers for the final stretch to the finish. Altogether it was a moderately good race. I would have liked to have skated much faster or held on to the Japanese skier to the finish. The only real downside was the place.

## 4x5k Mixed Technique Relay

The relay day we were again greeted with heavy snowfall but the air temperature was a little colder. I missed watching the US team's start because I was warming up for my leg, the first skate leg and the third leg overall. However as I was getting my skis marked the team was already a sizable distance behind the leaders. When Sam Tarling tagged off to me after finishing his 5k we were sitting in 16<sup>th</sup> overall. The Austrian team was right with us and passed me right after the transition. We skied together for a little while and bridged the gap to the next 3 skiers by the time we were at the bottom of the first time up the largest climb. As the group of five neared the top of the hill, I attacked egged on by the crowd. Within a few hundred meters I had gapped the four other skiers. I came through the first of two 2.5k laps in 13<sup>th</sup>. I had built a reasonable distance on the skiers behind me and was looking to catch the Czech team before the end of my leg. I had spent most of my energy on my first lap and was not able to close as quickly on the second lap. Yet, I caught the Czech skier about 200m before the tag zone and tagged off to the anchor leg in 12<sup>th</sup>. Even though he skied a fast leg the US anchor Eric Bjornsen did not gain any positions in the race when he just lost in the sprint to the finish to Sweden. When the split came out I was only 19 seconds behind the fastest time for me leg.