

Sarah Ignores Father and Ends Season 4th in Canada

Like many Fort Smith parents I always give my children sagacious advice. I am able to do this because I am old and wise. The only trouble is that despite my hard won wisdom and the golden gems I share with my daughters, as often as not they ignore that advice and follow their own hearts. Such was the case a year ago. My younger daughter had just won an academic scholarship to a major university to do a graduate degree. “That’s wonderful,” cried her proud father, “when do you start?”

“Well,” she said thoughtfully, “I’m actually thinking of skiing another year.”

“Why?” I asked with bemusement. “You’ve done everything you can possibly do in the sport except for the Olympics, and that was only because you had health problems last year. Isn’t it time to move on?”

I smiled admiring the sound of my own voice and the supreme logic of my argument. My words were succinct and yet irrefutably persuasive. I looked benignly at my offspring, assured that I had convinced her, when she said simply, “I don’t want to leave skiing on a low note.”

So began a year of hundreds of hours of weight training, cycling, roller skiing, running, swimming and even playing the odd tennis match with dear old

dad. Finally, she ended the season last week in Sun Valley, Idaho, at an international competition, where she was the second best Canadian in the classic sprint. The only Canadian to finish ahead of her was former Olympic champion Chandra Crawford. Sarah outpaced such notables as Canada Winter Games triple gold medalist, Alysson Marshall, and Western Canadian champ, Emily Nishikawa. The strong finish in the season finale gave Sarah a step up in the final season's rankings. She was ranked 4th of 121 racers in Canada in the 2011 Haywood FIS Regional Series and 5th in the Teck Sprint Series. Last week reflecting on her Idaho experience, Sarah said, "I felt pretty good and my skis were running well, I skied pretty well. I would have really liked to get to the semis, but overall it was a decent outing." Sarah added, "I am really looking forward to returning to the North next week."

Along with Sharon Firth, Sarah was an "ambassador" at a Fast and Female event in Norman Wells on April 8–10. Thanks to Sarah's fund raising, which included donations from Sport North, the Ski Division, Ski North, MACA, First Air and many others, this gathering provided opportunities to participate in dance, gymnastics, biathlon, yoga, cross-country skiing and leadership activities for 46 young women from many NWT communities. It is the most northern and ambitious event that Fast and Female has held anywhere in North America and Sarah, along with a strong team of northerners, had been busy organizing it for the last several months. Sarah raised \$55,000 for the event so that participants could attend at no expense to them. Despite the high cost of travel in the NWT, girls from small communities were able to take part. Chaperone Marie LaForme, a teacher from Colville Lake School, described

the enthusiasm of the girls from her community. “They had made calendars a couple of weeks before leaving and they were marking off the days. There’s not a lot of opportunity to get out and do events like this and it was exciting for them. They really enjoyed the biathlon part.”

So the ski season has ended with Sarah pursuing two of her passions: racing and sharing her love of sport and skiing with young people. As for me, I have recovered from the rejection of last year’s advice, for I now have a granddaughter. And she thinks I’m pretty smart.