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Sports

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The belief to succeed

Man who coached Canada to gold in cross-country skiing gets P.G. Hall of Fame nod

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In 1998, Canada's cross-country ski team was fledgling and in disarray.

It was post-1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, and the budget for the program was next to nothing.

When Dave Wood took over as its head coach and team leader, he saw something though. He knew it could be built into an international powerhouse and he had a stable of athletes who could hit the podium at World Cups and the Olympics.

"The first thing that had to happen was to create the belief to succeed," said Wood from his home in Rossland recently. "Beckie [Scott] had some good results and we had people capable of producing them, but they still had to believe they could do it.

"It was a dirty sport but a lot better than it was. We created the belief that Canadians can succeed, but money was critical. In 2001, I connected with a sponsor who came forward with money that was no-strings-attached and we could hold training camps."

Wood's accomplishments and accolades with not only the national team but past provincial teams, earned him the nod into the Prince George Sports Hall of Fame. He'll be inducted into the coach category with seven other athletes, builders and coaches this Saturday at a ceremony at the Hart Community Centre.

In four years, under Wood's guidance, Scott produced Canada's first gold medal in cross-country skiing at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

Chandra Crawford followed with gold at the Turin Olympics in 2006.

"By 2006, it [the national team] was more than just Beckie," said Wood. "It was Chandra and Sara Renner won the first [World Cup] medal in 2005."

Renner and Scott also teamed up to win silver in the team sprint in Turin.

Wood also guided the Canadian men's team to its best-ever performances at the 2010



WOOD

Vancouver Olympics.

The belief to succeed for Wood all began in Prince George when he competed for the Hickory Wing Ski Club at Tabor Mountain.

Hickory Wing was founded and built by the late Johan Pettersen who will be also inducted into the Hall of Fame on Saturday.

Wood's coaching career was influenced by Doug Gweder, the 1999 Hall of Fame inductee who raced to 22 medal-winning performances at the Canadian Cross-Country Ski Championships.

Wood progressed from athlete/skier and general club volunteer at Hickory Wing and became the B.C. Team Head Coach for cross-country skiing from 1994 to 1995.

Hickory Wing is no more and there are now more than 1,000 members at the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club based at the Orway Nordic Ski Centre.

Orway is the host venue for biathlon and cross-country skiing for the 2015 Canada

Winter Games and it meant a \$1.7 million facelift the last two years to improve what already ranks as one of the province's best cross-country/biathlon facilities.

Along with a new 30-lane shooting range, built to International Biathlon Union standards and was completed last fall, it gives the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club the ability to host national and international events.

"The sport has come a long way since then and the facility improvements make it truly an international facility," said Wood. "It's exciting and I think it's a fantastic facility. The club in Prince George is well-positioned and viable."

Prior to his head coaching role with the national team, Wood served as the national team's junior coach.

He calls cross-country skiing a "complex sport" and many aspects have to come together to succeed.

Junior skiers at the club level who dream of climbing onto the podium at the World Cup and Olympic level have to take baby steps.

They have to learn the mental side where their goals are set and constantly re-evaluated.

"You have to be patient and grind it out," he said. "A lot of kilometres have to be trained. [You can succeed] if you keep everything in perspective and it's not overwhelming."

"You have to enjoy it. Four hours of running in the mountains is hard and challenging, but it can be fun. People have to create that for themselves. It's a long road, not a short road."

Wood, now 59, will make the drive from Rossland this weekend to receive his accolades and see his friends.

"It is kind of surprising, you never know how things will work out, but it's always nice to be recognized."

Other inductees for entering the Prince George Sports Hall of Fame this weekend are:

- Gibby Chase (powerlifting); Pat Harris (wheelchair basketball); Ed Day (cross-country skiing); Jason LaBarbera (hockey); Glen Scott (lacrosse); Johan Pettersen (cross-country skiing); and Bjorger Pettersen (cross-country skiing).

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