



Hargraves earns medals

February 03, 2010

SOMERSET — Somerset skater Sarah Hargraves won two medals at the 25th Annual Bay State Winter Games that were recently held in the northern Berkshires.

Hargraves won a gold medal in the female artistic solo category for 13-year-old females and a silver medal in the freestyle category.

Somerset resident Kelsey Pereira came in seventh place in the female preliminary-restricted/test track competition.



First slalom goes to Mounties

Berkshire Eagle Staff
Tuesday, Feb. 02

PITTSFIELD -- Depth was dominant in the first slalom Alpine ski race of the high school season.

The Mount Greylock boys won their fourth straight race despite a slip from Connor Krell, their top racer in the first half of the season, while Monument's girls overcame a 1-2 finish from Lenox to win their third.

Nicole Sonzogni won for the fourth consecutive race, finishing in 41.20 seconds, while teammate Erin Barry finished second for the third time this season in 42.90.

The Spartans won out with their depth, placing all six of their skiers in the top 15. Natalie Akers was fourth in 47.81 seconds, while Courtney Freadman (sixth) and Alexa Pfeiffer (eighth) joined her in the top 10.

Kelsey Marzotto finished out Monument's scoring by taking 11th place.

Pittsfield's Samantha Gooch took third, while Taconic's Alyssa Latimer was fifth, rounding out the top five.

Sonzogni and Barry helped Lenox to a second-place finish, the Millionaires' best of the year so far, but the school still finished behind Monument 205.05 to 209.97.

In the boys race, Pittsfield's David Graziani continued to come on strong, taking first place for the second straight week and becoming the season's first two-time winner. Graziani, slowed by an injury earlier in the season, has now won two straight races, with a Bay State Games gold medal sandwiched in between.

Graziani finished in 39 seconds, .42 faster than Greylock's Kent Hanson. Hanson, though, led Greylock to the team win in 182.70 seconds. The Mounties had Nick Krant (seventh) and Collin Delano (eighth) in the top 10, with Eli Burnham rounding out the team total in 14th. Greylock needed each of their efforts to continue its perfect season, because the Mounties had two skiers that didn't finish.

Taconic finished in second place in 185.88 seconds despite the absence of Tony Cruz, the Braves' top skier in the first half of the season, who is injured.

Eamon Connor led Taconic by taking fifth in 42.44 seconds. Five teams were represented in the top five, with Pittsfield's Connor Graham in third and Lenox's Jimmy Zuber in fourth.

McElrath wins gold at Bay State Games



PHOTO COURTESY, Sherborn resident Severine McElrath recently won a gold medal at the Massachusetts competition of the Bay State Winter Games.

The Bay State Winter Games just celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2010. The Massachusetts competition was held this January 22nd-24th in Williamstown, Northern Berkshire County, and featured artistic and technical skating competitions, among other winter sports. Severine McElrath was the gold medalist for an artistic event in her age group and division at the state level.

McElrath, a 13-year-old girl from Sherborn, has been on the ice for less than four years. She won several medals for her skating technique in Massachusetts and New England skating competitions. This summer, she was ranked nationally at the State Games of America in Colorado in her skating category. The Bay State Games was her first time competing in an artistic event at the state level. "What Severine did in such a few years is remarkable," Coach Melissa Gaudette from Bay State Blades of Natick said.

McElrath feels that she rapidly progressed in skating because of her balance and grace. For 11 years she has danced at Paulette's Ballet Studio in Newton and she performs annually on stage in front of hundreds of spectators.

"Severine always works hard at perfecting her style; I only have to correct her once," said Paulette Harwood of Paulette's Ballet Studio. "The studio, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary, combines the creative spirit of dance and discipline required for many dancers who have taken it one step further."



Olympics inspire local figure skaters

Skating clubs in Pittsfield and North Adams help athletes hone technical skills.

**By Dick Lindsay, Berkshire Eagle Staff
Thursday, Feb. 11**

http://www.berkshireeagle.com/sports/ci_14380618

PITTSFIELD - Brianna Sporbert was first enamored of figure skating when she watched 15-year-old Tara Lipinski compete in the 1998 Winter Games in Nagano, Japan.

Sporbert, a Pittsfield girl who was 5 years old at the time, was excited by Lipinski edging fellow American Michelle Kwan for the gold medal.

"I loved the publicity of the Olympics," said Sporbert, now a 17-year-old senior at Pittsfield High School. "She was the golden girl at the time."

Inspired by the Olympic spirit, Sporbert joined the Pittsfield Figure Skating Club, and 11 years later, she reached the highest level for her age group in the eyes of the U.S Figure Skating Association. She passed the USFSA test for freestyle, dance and moves in the field in the senior category, which Pittsfield club officials say is rare among Berkshire skaters.

Most Americans' exposure to figure skating is every four years during the Olympics, but for Sporbert and other local skaters, it's a way of life.

"I've never gotten to the point I want to stop skating," said Alie Hill, a 17-year-old junior at Hoosac Valley Regional High School in Cheshire. "I like the feeling of performing a clean program and working hard to make my jumps."

Hill has skated for 11 years under the banner of the Christmas Brook Figure Skating Club, based at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Rink in North Adams. Hill also has been influenced by the Olympics, because her favorite skater is American Sasha Cohen, the 2006 silver medalist in Turin.

While Hill has competed several times without medaling at the annual Bay State Winter Games, held at the Veterans rink, she said she finds satisfaction in simply performing in front of family and friends.

"It's a fun competition," Hill said. "There's no pressure having home ice."

Ian Hill, 14, Alie's brother, who has won four gold medals and one bronze at the Bay State Games, said he enjoys figure skating because he's "pretty good at it" and likes to entertain the crowd. However, the eighth grader at Hoosac said it bothers him that he's the only male teenage skater for Christmas Brook and is one of just five boys on the club's 65- skater list.

"My best friends are 6- and 7year-olds," he quipped.

Ian and Alie's mother, Regina Hill, said that once figure skating isn't fun anymore, it's time to stop. "We also want kids to learn how to skate because it's a lifelong skill," added Hill, the co-president of Christmas Brook.

While the Olympic spirit and enthusiasm is encouraged by both local skating clubs, the coaches appreciate the local skaters' effort to improve - just like their Olympic idols. Many youngsters skate year-round and travel outside of Berkshire County to find available ice time when local rinks aren't available.

"The kids are willing to dedicate a whole chunk of personal time," said Amy MacDonald, a coach with the Pittsfield Figure Skating Club, which is based at the Boys and Girls Club. "Their work ethic is a great comment on their character."



Millis skater playing it cool



Ken McGagh/Daily News staff
Millis figure skater Meghan O'Brien, 9, holds up two of her medals on Tuesday.

By Melanie Graham/Daily News staff
Feb 17, 2010

<http://www.milforddailynews.com/features/x1999160233/Millis-skater-playing-it-cool>

MILLIS — Salchow, waltz jump, toe loop, triple axel - figure skating terminology is practically a foreign language. But at just 9 years old, local skater Meghan O'Brien has it down.

"My favorite moves are the waltz jump and the salchow," O'Brien said, rattling off the terms naturally.

O'Brien, who lives in Millis, recently won two gold medals at the Bay State Winter Games, a yearly competition for Massachusetts athletes. She was awarded the top prize for both her artistic and freestyle performances.

Even in sneakers, she's eager to demonstrate a new, difficult move called a "stretch bend" on the carpet.

"It's fun, but it's hard," she said.

Starting at age 3, O'Brien took to the ice and before long, was gliding with ease. Despite a brief hiatus to take gymnastics, the young athlete has been skating competitively since the age of 7.

"She always comes off the ice and wants to do it again," said O'Brien's mother, Donna.

On Friday, Jan. 22, O'Brien and her mother set off to Berkshire County for the Bay State Winter Games. Their plan was to "just have some fun" with the competition, but by the end of the weekend, O'Brien would win both her first and second gold medal.

Prior to the Bay State Games, O'Brien had only received silver or bronze medals in competitions, aside from one fourth-place finish early on in her career.

For her freestyle performance, the young athlete skated to a piano arrangement of "Bella's Lullaby" from the movie "Twilight." This style of skating, she said, is stricter with the moves and techniques used during the performance.

O'Brien's favorite style of performing, though, is the artistic figure skating, where more dancing and theatrics are allowed in the routine. For the Bay State Games, O'Brien performed to The Brady Bunch's "It's a Sunshine Day."

Modeled after the Winter Olympics, the Bay State Winter Games are held each year in the towns of North Adams, Pittsfield and Williamstown. The figure skating competition is held at the Williams College skating rink.

"For a lot of (athletes) the (Bay State Winter Games) are the highlight of their year," said Peter Cohenno, the games' director of communications. "It's something a lot of kids look forward to."

Run by the Massachusetts Amateur Sports Foundation, the winter games offer figure skating, Alpine skiing and masters hockey competitions - with teams of players aged 40 and over and 50 and over, Cohenno said.

But it is the figure skating, Cohenno said, that takes much of the focus of the games. This year, the games' 25th anniversary, around 450 figure skaters made the trip to compete.

"The figure skating is kind of our showcase," he said.

The showcase, it seems, is what O'Brien loves about the sport, despite the early-morning practices at Norfolk Arena ice rink and weekends spent competing.

"I love at the end of the performance, when you're finished, and everyone just claps and claps," O'Brien said with a grin.

And although the possibility of Olympic competition is a ways off, O'Brien doesn't rule it out as a part of her future.

"If I could go to the Olympics, I would," she said, "but if I can't, I would still like to compete."

"She's just having fun for now," her mother added.

O'Brien and her mother look forward to watching figure skating, and the Olympics are always a special occasion which they watch together.

The young skater's favorite athletes? Olympic silver-medalist Sasha Cohen and Olympic gold-medalist Kristi Yamaguchi.

"I'll work 10 jobs if I have to (to fund her skating)," Donna O'Brien said.

The figure skating competition has just started at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia, with the pairs program finishing up Monday night.

In an emotional finish, Chinese pair Xue Shen and Hongbo Zhao finally completed their 18-year dream of winning Olympic gold.

Another Chinese pair, Qing Pang and Jian Tong took the silver while German pair Aliona Savchenko and Robin Szolkowy received the bronze.

Last night, the men's short program introduced several of the competitors vying for medals this year including Americans Evan Lysacek and Jeremy Abbot as well as Canadian favorite Patrick Chan. The men's program will finish up tomorrow night with the free skating competition.



Randolph skater ices the competition

By Greg Gorman
Randolph Herald
Feb 23, 2010

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/randolph/features/x692841047/Randolph-skater-ices-the-competition>

Randolph — It wasn't the Winter Olympics, but Randolph's Courtney Phillips didn't seem to mind.

The seventh-grader at St. Agatha School in Milton participated in the 2010 Bay State Winter Games in January.

Phillips performed a long program and a short program. She didn't come home with a medal but that hasn't changed her passion for the sport.

Phillips, 13, has been skating for a decade, picking up the sport while her father Nat was coaching her brother's youth hockey team.

"I started skating and I was good at it," she said.

Courtney signed up for lessons and learned under coach Rachelle Di Bona.

She contemplated playing hockey for a while but now she just wants to focus on her figure skating.

Courtney's participated in her first competition when she was 5. She won. She has since competed as far away as Colorado.

"She had a natural affinity for it," Nat Phillips said of his daughter's gift. "She's a great kid. She performs in front of people. I couldn't have done it at her age."

Courtney said she, "wasn't really nervous" when it was time for her to skate her programs in which she placed fourth and fifth. She prepares for each program by stretching and jumping rope. She listens to the Black Eyed Peas before she competes.

Courtney's mother, Diane, made the trip to Williamstown to watch her daughter. Diane says she crosses her fingers and says a prayer when Courtney takes her place on the ice.

Courtney was in Williamstown for three days and competed during two of them. She spent her free time swimming and browsing the local stores.

"Williamstown is a nice place," Courtney said. "It's got a lot of nice things. There are shops and restaurants. It's a place I'd like to go back to."

The rink at Williamstown, according to Courtney, isn't too cold. In Williamstown, she was skating on hard ice. Courtney says each individual skater has their own preference when it comes to hard or soft ice.

"I like skating on hard ice but I am used to soft ice," Courtney said.

The 2010 Bay State Games were not the first for Courtney. She has competed in the Games since 2005 and has three gold medals to show for it.

"It seemed like a good competition to get into," Courtney said.

In addition to figure skating, Courtney likes to compete in lacrosse. She has skied Wachusett Mountain and likes to ride her bike. She is also a basketball cheerleader and plays soccer in Randolph's U15 League.

She also likes going to her gym class but her favorite is figure skating.

"I like to watch figure skating on TV," Courtney said. "I like to see what they do. They do well. I want to try to skate like them."

Courtney is also a good student. She writes essays constantly. One essay on the Boston Duckboat Tour finished in the top 20 out of 1,000 entries in the Tour's annual contest.

"Courtney is a beautiful skater," Courtney's mom, Diane said. "We are so very proud of her accomplishments on and off the ice."

Courtney will have time to rest during the school vacation. She likes to spend her free time going to the mall and the movies with her friends. The last movie she saw was Avatar. It got good reviews from the seventh-grader.

Courtney has advice for anyone who wants to take up figure skating.

"If you want to be a figure skater, you have to try hard and be patient and work at it. It's not going to come to you just like that."

Axiom Insurance/Bradway Financial hockey team wins gold at Bay State Winter Games

LONGMEADOW The Axiom Insurance/Bradway Financial masters team captured the gold medal last month at the Bay State Winter Games ice hockey tournament in North Adams.

The team went 4-0 en route to the gold medal and beat the Olde Crabs of Danbury, Conn., by a score of 7-1 in the championship game, played Jan. 24 at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Ice Rink. Players reside in East Longmeadow, Longmeadow, Ludlow, Springfield, West Springfield, Wilbraham and Dartmouth. The TBP40+, an over-40 team sponsored by Teddy Bear Pools, won the gold medal in the over 40 division. The team also went 4-0 en route to its championship. TBP40+ beat the Hingham Sea Dogs 5-0 in the gold medal game. TBP40+ players hail from Agawam, Feeding Hills, Chicopee, East Longmeadow, Longmeadow, Springfield and Wilbraham.



The masters team took gold in North Adams. (front row, left to right) Marty Wright, Wally Stupak, Ed Malone, Dan Ferioli, Bruce Lammers, Pete Kenyon and Rick Mastroianni. (back row) Joe Cambi, Dave Garvey, Steve Kravitz, Chip Bettencourt, Barry Ryan, Tim Burtch, Kevin Collins and Bob Grant.



Members of the over 40 team win gold as well. (front row, left to right) Gary Grout, Steve Davis, Darin Cate, Bart McCarthy, Mike Ashe, Bill Scatolini and Dave Perry. (back row) Joe Brosseau, Bob Gattorna, Vern Meyer, Jim Ferrero, Denis Punch, Claude Dion, Tony Roda and Chris Pereaault.
