

# KIMBERLEY ALPINE TEAM

- Small,  
but  
*Mighty!*



THE KIDS BUILD RELATIONSHIPS FOR LIFE AND HAVE INCREDIBLE EXPERIENCES ALONG THE WAY



Text by Britt Bates, Photos by Maurice Frits



When I recall my years as a ski racer what most readily comes to mind is being in the start gate; my chest pounding as adrenaline courses through my limbs, my poles reached over the gate and planted firmly in the snow, the thin plastic timing wand resting against my spandexed shins before it begins the clock when I burst it open, pushing into my first turn. Learning how to channel that heady rush of fear and excitement into physical assertiveness and reach for success is only one of the myriad of lessons I took away from the formative years I spent ski racing.

The club was known then as North Star Racers, but has since changed its name to Kimberley Alpine Team.

It isn't just a new title; the switch reflects an incredible growth and expansion in the club. The revamped program looks at skiing in its entire spectrum; instead of only focusing on ski racing, the club coaches all-mountain skiing. This includes training for competitions in powder, moguls, rails, and jumps, in addition to the traditional racing gates in slalom, GS, and Super-G courses.

"We do a 50/50 split between ski racing and freeskiing. Kids can choose their preference at age 12, when it becomes

more specialised," explains Jon Blair, the program director and head coach for Kimberley Alpine Team. Blair is heading into his fourth season in this position, and works alongside two other full-time coaches, Ming Neil and Jenna Godbout. In addition, there are about fifteen dedicated coaches for the Tiger Kats; the introductory program which builds fundamental skills in kids under the age of ten.

Even as they become older and more specialised, spending more time and energy in one area, all athletes are still required to participate in both forms of skiing, racing and freeskiing. This is hugely beneficial as the

club creates athletes who are well-rounded skiers, confident and skilled in any terrain. Instead of just sticking with what comes most naturally, athletes are asked to push their boundaries and step outside of their comfort zone. "We have kids doing 360's when maybe they wouldn't have normally tried it," says Blair. "It's very rewarding."

Even before formal freeskiing was an element of the club, learning how to break down boundaries and fears was an important part of my racing experience too. As a shy and somewhat reserved kid, learning how to physically assert myself was

profound. Letting fear shapeshift into courageous action and an enthusiastic drive toward success is something I first recall sensing in the focused quiet of the start gate, then surging as I dug my edges into the ice. Today, it's a lesson I am still grateful for, as like most lessons and skills we learn from athletics, it transcends just physical ability and becomes beneficial for our mental and social capacities too. Blair agrees: the program teaches kids assertiveness and drive. "They learn to set goals, and then to make a plan in order to execute those goals." It goes without saying that this strategising and vigor goes far beyond the finish line.

But despite the internal focus of setting and achieving goals, and the solitude of racing a course; when everything slides away except for the sound of your skis and own breath; ski racing is not an independent sport. Rather, the sport offers great camaraderie, with teammates learning from an early age how to support and help each other.

"The kids build relationships for life and have incredible experiences along the way," Blair affirms positively, shaking me from my memory of those bright winter days more than a decade ago in my own life. "We are small, but we are mighty." ■