

PEI Speed Skaters Collect Hardware in Saint John

January 13, 2011, Charlottetown – If the first meet of the year was any indication, PEI's short-track speed skaters are looking forward to some strong showings in 2011. Twenty-seven Island skaters competed recently at the Charles Gorman Memorial Speed Skating Championships in Saint John, NB and took home twelve medals, including eight gold.



Previously the Maritime Speed Skating Championships, the meet was renamed this year to honour Gorman, a former Olympian and world champion speed skater from Saint John.

The meet was highlighted by the participation of a recent Canadian Olympic medalist. Anouk English won two medals for Canada at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino in short-track speed skating. Formerly known as Anouk Leblanc-Boucher, the Quebec native retired from competitive skating shortly after her success in Torino, relocated to southern New Brunswick and started a family. She has been skating recently with the Saint John club and took gold among sport class skaters in the Gorman meet.

Eight PEI skaters matched that gold medal performance, notching top honours in several of the meet's thirteen divisions. Niall Burnett of Charlottetown, 2009/10 Canadian midget age class champion, took gold in a very competitive division 2. Carly Connell, PEI's other reigning Canadian champion, grabbed the top spot in division 3 – making it three gold in as many competitive appearances this season. Michael Pass took gold for division 7 males, while Korrina Leclair won the division 7 gold for females, as both posted personal best times in every distance. Andrew Binns prevailed with the gold for division 7 males, while Megan Campbell of Summerside and Kyle Connell of Charlottetown swept division 8 gold for PEI. Thomas McQuaid posted three personal best times on his way to gold for division 11 males, rounding out PEI's gold medal haul.

“We've had some great team and individual performances in the past few years,” said PEI head coach Phil Byrne, “but I can't remember a recent meet where it came together quite so well in terms of gold medals and breakthrough performances. We are thrilled for these young athletes and very proud of the whole team's performance. We had twenty-four of our skaters put up at least one personal best time.”

Other medalists from PEI included Peter McQuaid with a silver in division 7 male, Magen Francis with bronze in division 7 female, Rebecca MacLean with a bronze in division 8 female and Andrew McQuaid with bronze in division 8 male.

176 skaters from ten clubs across the Atlantic provinces competed at the meet, where Andrew Evans of Fredericton took top division gold for males, edging Fredericton clubmate Evan Brideau. Samia Gould, also of Fredericton, nabbed the division 1 gold for female skaters. Jesse Francis of Stratford recorded the fastest times among PEI skaters, including a new personal best in the 500m distance. He finished sixth in division 1. Dan Cottreau also put up some strong times for PEI in division 1, finishing tenth.

Other skaters competing for PEI in Saint John were Jack Connell, Ellen Burnett, Clare Cullen, Michael Rogers, Thomas Trotter, Zach Moran, Taylor Johnston, Morgan McGinn, Jared Vriends, Miriam Burnett, Victoria Trotter, Kristen Binns and Michael Trotter. The PEI contingent combined for forty-three personal best times, including eleven skaters who had personal bests in every distance. Jesse Francis, Niall Burnett, Jack Connell and Carly Connell also achieved qualifying times which will permit them to compete in the upcoming Quebec "Espoir" meet in Montreal on January 22 and 23.

The next event in the region for PEI skaters is the Eastern Canadian Speed Skating Championship, being held in Fredericton, also on January 22 and 23. The Eastern Canadians are the only age class type meet of the season in Atlantic Canada and will feature Speed Skating Canada's newly instituted racing formats and age classes. The meet will also be the second to last meet for PEI skaters prior to February's Canada Games in Halifax.

More information on Speed Skate PEI and its programs can be found on the club's website at www.speedskatepei.com.

Photo courtesy of Kevin Scott.