

Island Sports



Sam Sherer practices on a short sprint track to keep his lungs in shape for mountain bike racing, but he must go to the mountains to hone his riding skills.

Photo by Brooks Parssinen

Sherer takes to the hills

By Stephanie Heelan Cotsonas

As islander Sam Sherer puts on his helmet, knee pads and chest, back and shoulder pads, it is surprising that he is not heading out to the football field but is instead hopping on his bike.

Sherer is happy that spring has arrived if only so he can get back on his mountain bike. He is a member of the local downhill mountain bike racing team VonCooper.

While working at a bike shop, Sherer was introduced to the sport after his friend Willem Cooper brought his downhill mountain bike in to be serviced.

Sherer entered his first race last season. "I have been riding bikes and trail riding as long as I can remember and I knew I would like the downhill aspect. I didn't really know what it would be like and I did not know it would be as hard as it is. My first day on the mountain was intimidating. It is a totally different world than going out and riding some trails," he said. "Riding a bike is easy, racing is another story. There is a physical aspect as well as mental, especially with downhill. You really don't know what to expect. There are roots, rocks and turns, things that you can't even see on the trail; it is a volatile surface."

On average there are 150 to 200 riders in each race, although each rider starts separately with 30 seconds in between. In downhill, the average course is three-to-four minutes with a starting gate at the top and a finish gate at the bottom.

"You are just trying to finish the track as fast as you can. Every second that the clock turns over, it is a race against time," Sherer said.

According to Sherer, mountain biking as a sport has really grown in the past ten years and there are various types of racing and competitions. "You have cross country, slope style, board cross, short track, and depending on the different terrains and tracks there are different types of bikes. Some are really light, and only some can take the abuse of downhill."

The season does not really end for these bikers because the mountains have started doing snow races. "You can keep it going, which a lot of riders like because it is a continuous cycle. I did a snow race this past winter at Shawnee Peak and it was very hard getting used to the feel of riding in the snow. You think it is going to be somewhat like mud, but there is absolutely no traction. It definitely takes skill, but also a little bit of luck," Sherer said.

For those athletes who don't live close to the mountains, practicing downhill racing can be a challenge. "We accept the fact that we have to drive not only to race but to practice. We will do trail rides around here to stay in shape and practice on a short sprint track to keep our lungs going. But as far as honing your riding skills, it is only on the mountain. It is really hard to replicate what a mountain has because you don't have the elevation change," he said.

Like most physical sports, mountain biking is not without the risk of injury. "The most popular injury in mountain biking is the collar bone. Some people say that you are not really a mountain biker until you have broken your collar bone," Sherer said.

The 2007 North Kingstown High School graduate is attending Fort Lewis College in Durango, Col. where mountain biking is commonplace.

Sherer plans to enroll in the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) this fall and then head back to Durango for the spring semester. He is currently preparing for his first race of the downhill mountain bike season which is the U.S. Open in Vernon, N.J on May 23 and 24.

Walk to help 'tomorrow fund'

The Tomorrow Fund, a local non-profit agency that helps children with cancer, will hold its 6th Annual Stroll on Sunday, April 27, at Garden City Shopping Center in Cranston.

The Stroll is organized by a committee of volunteers; many of who are parents of children with cancer.

Individuals and teams are encouraged to participate in the stroll and collect as many pledges as possible. A minimum donation of \$20 per walker or team member is required. All walkers are asked to pre-register by tomorrow, April 18. Pre-registered walkers will receive a "Tomorrow Fund Stroll" t-shirt. Trophies will be awarded to the team and individual raising the most money.

The Stroll begins at 10 a.m. All proceeds will benefit the Tomorrow Fund, the only local non-profit organization that provides daily financial and emotional support to children with cancer and their families.

For more information or to receive a Registration & Pledge Form, call The Tomorrow Fund at 444-8811 or visit www.tomorrowfund.org.



I know, I know

The Jamestown Community Chorus shared their talents during a visit with the seventh grade chorus at Lawn Avenue School last week. Katie Rosner, top, is sure she knows the answer to JCC Director B.J. Whitehouse's question. Dorothy Strang, below, practices a rhythm drill with Nick Anding.

Photos by Andrea von Hohenleiten



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