

Bend junior skier strikes gold at Lake Placid camp

By Heather Clark
The Bulletin

There must be something in the snow.

For the second year in a row, a Mount Bachelor Ski Education Foundation Alpine racer has qualified for the prestigious Junior Champions Camp, sponsored by the U.S. Ski Team and staged in Lake Placid, N.Y.

This year, Anton Hilts, a 14-year-old Bend resident, was not only selected for the camp, held January 17-23, but returned with a gold medal in giant slalom, beating out 18 other top juniors from around the country.

"It felt really good, like, I was the best," said Hilts, who said he had a hunch he was going to win after placing well during the week's training runs.

The road to Lake Placid required two qualifying races. The

top 15 J3 (the 13-14 age group in junior Alpine racing) boys and girls from last year's Western region Junior Olympics were invited to compete in the Topolino Shootout, and only the top six there would be invited to the national development camp.

At the Topolino Shootout, held in Park City, Utah, in December, placings were determined by combining the racers best two slalom scores and fastest two runs in giant slalom. Hilts placed fifth overall, securing for himself a ticket to Lake Placid.

And once there, Hilts proved he belonged.

The weeklong camp, at which participants practice each day with national development

coaches, was highlighted by a weekend of racing at the 1980 Olympic venue at Whiteface Mountain.



Anton Hilts

See Hilts / D5

Hilts Welcomes chance to meet other racers

Continued from D1

Hilts took first place in the giant slalom and was eighth in the slalom.

"It was cool because it's the biggest race for J3 in the U.S.," he said. "It was the only time when all the kids from different regions get together and race."

There are three regions in United States Ski Association racing — Western, Rocky/Central and Eastern — and each region sent six skiers to the camp based on results from regional qualifying races.

Not only was the competition stiff, but the conditions were typical Northeastern mountain fare — challenging surfaces, with sub-zero temperatures.

"To ski on different conditions — which is very hard, icy snow — and do that well, that is a great accomplishment," said Nils Eriksson, an MBSEF Alpine

"... He's seeing the results he wants to get just sticking to the basics."

— Nils Eriksson, MBSEF
Alpine coach

coach.

But it wasn't all about competition. The Summit High School freshman noted that the real highlight was meeting the other racers.

"It was just cool meeting other kids that were really good, other kids that are winning races in their region," Hilts said. "It was mostly the experience of being with the kids ... and with coaches that are really good."

Eriksson, a former coach at the Junior Champions Camp, said, "The goal of the camp is to get the best kids together, to get them in a competitive training environment, and for them socially to get to know each other. It's a competition, but that's not the ultimate goal of the camp."

Still, Eriksson believed it was Hilts' highest achievement to date. "It's a big feather in his hat,

a great accomplishment no doubt," the coach said.

And the young racer, who has been skiing since he could walk and racing since age 5, isn't short on big dreams.

"I want to be on the U.S. Ski Team and win a gold medal someday," he said.

His coaches say Hilts is on the right track.

"He is a really buying into lately what we're trying to accomplish. He's seeing the results he wants to get just sticking to the basics," said Eriksson, who has been coaching Hilts for five years.

Hilts has no shortage of stiff competition back here at home.

Fellow MBSEF teammates and J3s Andy Hackbarth and Kevin Prodehl just missed the Junior Champions Camp cut in Park City. And on any given day the three battle it out for top spots at races.

"We have had an age group that is really talented," said Eriksson.

Heather Clark can be reached at 541-383-0352 or at hclark@bendbulletin.com.