

2x6x52x6 equals number one for Wildcat skier

Every sport is shrouded in superstition. Nordic skiers are known for practices such as fingernail painting, talking to their skis, and finding “lucky boots.” But NMU skier Lindsay Williams doesn’t buy into the supernatural. Her only pre-competition ritual is bringing soy nut butter on road trips—just for the pleasure of eating.

Williams believes the key to being a successful skier is hard work. That’s what earned her a gold medal in the women’s classic sprint at the U.S. Cross Country Championships and a berth on the 2005 World Championship Team. She is the first female from Northern to win a national title.

Williams trains according to the 2x6x52x6 plan—twice a day, six days a week, 52 weeks per year for at least six years. That’s what it takes, according to NMU coach **Sten Fjeldheim ’86 BS, ’93 MA**, for an athlete to realize his or her full potential.

“If an athlete is unwilling to participate in this plan, then there is no place for them on the team, no exceptions made,” said Fjeldheim. “I don’t care how much natural talent they have, the kid with the hard work ethic eventually wins the race.”

In addition to having high standards for training, the NMU ski program is also adamant about its athletes maintaining good grades. “It is a struggle, but I don’t let it get me down,” said Williams, a junior sports medicine major. “I just remember that I can’t ski all the time—I need to have some education in there, too, to keep my brain activated.”

Much like the hills she trains on, becoming successful at the elite level has been a series of ups and downs for Williams. Originally from Hastings, Minn., she grew up with skiing. Her parents cross country skied and would often make trails in the yard for her to follow. There were also a few small trails near her house that she skied on, but she said she didn’t really get into it at the time.

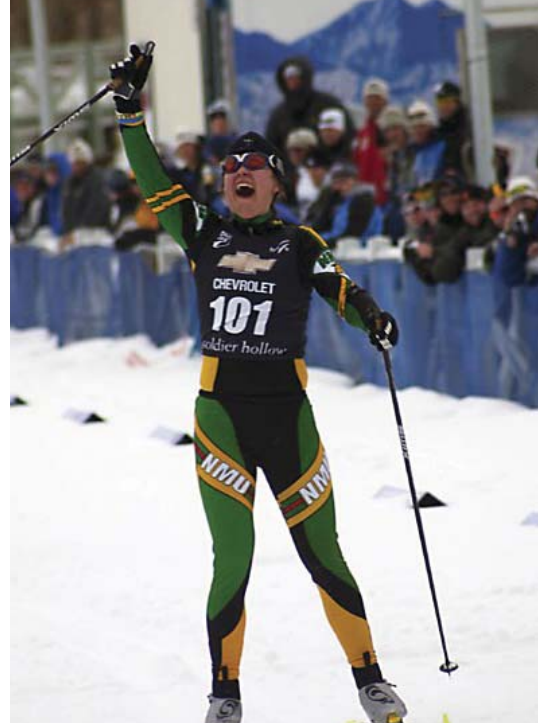
“I thought that was all skiing was—just a short, slow, three-hour trip around a loop.”

She became attracted to the sport when some friends talked her into trying out for the ski team during her freshman year in high school. Williams failed to make the squad that year, but she went with them to a competition downstate and watched the team race.

“I was sitting in the snow watching that race and the girl from our team just flew by,” said Williams. “I wanted to do that. That was when I realized that I wanted to be the best at skiing.”

That summer, Williams began training and developing her skills, and the next year she made the team and began skiing competitively for the first time.

She spent her first collegiate season refining her skills in preparation for the Junior World Championships as a sophomore. Williams took 15th in the world in the women’s 5-kilometer skate race and was only 10 seconds away from making the podium. Since then, she has won several junior national titles in sprint as well as distance events.



Lindsay Williams after her first place finish at the U.S. Cross Country Championships.

“If you look at the NMU ski team, they are all so close to each other in the races that it’s hard to say that any of them are all that different when it comes to performance,” said Fjeldheim. “However, Lindsay is very good at remaining focused and relaxed at the biggest competitions.”

Williams has been invited to join the U.S. Ski Team, but her immediate plans are finishing her bachelor’s degree and possibly beginning a master’s degree program in sports medicine. The Olympics and World Cup competition are in her sights for the future. In 2014, she will be 29—the average age of most medal winners in skiing—and Fjeldheim is confident that by then her skills and experience will put her at the highest caliber and maybe in medal contention.

“NMU has blessed me with awesome teammates and coaches and helped me go further with skiing than I thought I’d ever go,” said Williams. “It’s been great fun the entire time.”

—Becky Kratz

USOEC receives federal funding

Congressman Bart Stupak (D-1st) helped the USOEC secure \$440,000 in federal funds as part of the Fiscal Year 2005 Omnibus Appropriations bill signed by President George Bush in December.

The bill also called for the continuation of the B.J. Stupak Olympic Education Scholarship program, which provides funds to current and future Olympians to attend college while training for the elite levels of their sports. The scholarship program received \$988,000.

"We are grateful to Congressman Stupak and the entire Michigan delegation for their efforts in support of student athletes at the USOEC," said NMU President Les Wong.

Northern's contribution toward USOEC operations has dropped substantially due to recent campus-wide cost-saving measures in response to cuts in state higher education funding. NMU now provides \$80,000 to the USOEC, which represents the net tuition revenue of center athletes attending the university. Jeff Kleinschmidt, director of the USOEC, said that the federal assistance takes the pressure off the operational funding for at least the next five years.

"Nearly 100 student athletes will now be able to continue their education while training to represent all Americans at the Olympic Games and other elite competitions," he said.

The scholarship program is named in honor of the congressman's late son. Student athletes are eligible for a grant up to the full cost of attendance, not to exceed \$20,000 annually. They must attend a post-secondary institution on at least a half-time basis and meet all rules regarding eligibility for financial aid.

USOEC turns 20, becomes host of Speedskating Olympic Trials

The United States Olympic Education Center (USOEC) has been chosen to play host to the 2006 U.S. Speedskating Short Track Championships in December. The competition will determine which skaters will represent the United States at the 2006 Winter Olympic Games in Torino, Italy, Feb. 10-24.

The championships will take place at the Berry Events Center on NMU's campus Dec. 12-16.

"Our nation's best short-track skaters will come to Northern Michigan University to compete for the right to represent the USA at the greatest athletic competition on Earth: the Olympic Games," said NMU President Les Wong in accepting the successful bid. "To U.S. Speedskating and to the athletes who are training so hard to reach the Olympic dream, thank you for allowing us to be a part of your quest for gold. We are honored."

The championships will be the final event of the USOEC's year-long 20th anniversary celebration, which began Feb. 9 with the NMU Olympic Challenge, a sports extravaganza of intrasquad competition held in the Superior Dome before a crowd of 1,200 spectators from across the Upper Peninsula. The event marked the date in 1985 that NMU was selected as the home to one of the U.S. Olympic Committee's four training sites. Today, it remains the only education center where elite athletes train as potential Olympians while simultaneously working on their high school and/or college degrees.

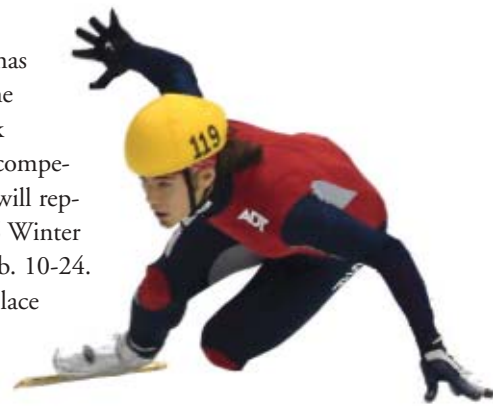
The USOEC was awarded the speedskating championships bid after a lengthy selection process that began in April 2004. Andy Gabel, president of U.S. Speedskating, said the USOEC was chosen based on the success it had in hosting the 2003 World Cup in Marquette.

"We know that the competition is in good hands with the staff at the USOEC and the people of Marquette County," Gabel said. "We have enjoyed an excellent partnership with NMU for the past 20 years, and this event is an extension of that mutually beneficial relationship. The USOEC has a strong reputation for hosting quality events, including the 2003 World Cup, which was clearly the best-organized short track event in the world last season."

The Short Track Championship event is mandatory for all prospective Olympians. About 50 skaters are expected to meet the qualifying standard necessary to compete. Time trials will be held Monday. Races Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday will determine the Olympic team.

Ticket prices and packages will be announced this summer and will be posted on the USOEC Web site at <http://usoec.nmu.edu>.

—Cindy Paavola '84 BS



Apollo Ohno skating at the 2003 World Cup meet held at NMU's Berry Events Center.