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National team skeleton athlete Michelle Bartleman (far right) shows friends Margot Smith and Holly Smith, both 10, how to lie in her sled during Spirit of BC festivities at Brennan Park Recreation Centre on Sunday (Feb. 8).

## Racer passionate over skeleton

### Bartleman foreruns World Cup after strong sliding season

**MEGAN GRITANI-LIVINGSTON**  
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With the Whistler Sliding Centre essentially in her backyard, national team skeleton racer Michelle Bartleman has been down the lightning-quick track many times since moving to Squamish about three years ago.

But it was just last Thursday (Feb. 5), when she sped down the track ahead of the world's best sliders as an advance runner at the sliding centre's first World Cup, that she walked away with an the biggest smile on her face.

"I am giddy with excitement, I'm like a kid in a candy shop," Bartleman said of her first-ever World Cup experience.

"Obviously these guys are amazing, it's so exciting to see all these people that you watch online at three o'clock in the morning when they're racing in Germany, to see them here in real life and to watch them all prep and to see how they approach a race, it's really cool.

"Plus, it's great to do the same thing

as they're doing without the pressure they've got," she said with a laugh.

Bartleman, who was inspired to get into skeleton by the Canadian team's medal-winning performances at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games, currently races on the Europa Cup circuit, which is the third rung of international racing, after the World Cup and Intercontinental Cup tours.

Now in only her third season of racing, Bartleman posted top-six finishes six times in her eight Europa Cup races this season in tracks all over Europe, and called those successes a confidence-builder after a tough season last year.

She is now setting her sights on the Olympics, but said she needs to hone her skills, so cannot compete on her home track come 2010.

"I want to go all the way - 2014 is the goal. It's a long road," she said.

After completing her degrees in professional piloting and journalism and communications at the University of Alaska in Anchorage, Bartleman cast around for a way to get involved in skeleton.

A gymnast and then a sprinter in college, she thought it might be a good fit, and she wasn't ready to be done as an athlete.

Bartleman made it through open recruitment and summer camps to enter the national program, and she chose to move to Squamish to be near the Whistler track, even before it existed.

"I thought, 'This is where the future's going to be,'" she said.

The extra time on the fast and difficult Whistler track is sure to pay off for her. Bartleman estimated that she's had about 50 runs on the course by the time of last week's World Cup.

"This is my home track and this is what I'm sliding on all the time, it makes me that much better when I go to all the other tracks that are fast and hard," she said.

But at the World Cup, Bartleman joked, her goal was to simply get down the track in one piece in front of the entire top-flight skeleton world.

"I'm happy to get down alive and right side up," she said laughing.

Looking ahead, she sounds happy to be in Squamish - with its airport, which could help her get back into flight instructing, and with the Whistler track just up the road - and she's thrilled to be involved in skeleton.

"This is the season that I have fallen in love with my sport."

## Howe Sound curling team zone champs

### Community helping Sounders reach provincials

**NEIL JUDSON**  
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The Howe Sound Secondary School curling team dominated the Zone Championship last weekend (Feb. 7-8), qualifying it for the Provincial Championship for the second consecutive year.

Grade 11 skip Patrick McEachran led Austin Sweeney (Grade 11), Alex Sykora (Grade 12) and Ben Hughes, the lone Grade 10 Don Ross Secondary student, undefeated through five games at the North Shore Winter Club.

The Squamish community is supporting the team in its quest for a provincial title.

The Howe Sound Men's Curling League are giving the students a cut rate to sharpen their skills during official league competition this year.

Meanwhile, both high schools, the Senior Men's



The Howe Sound Secondary School curling team poses with their trophy after winning the Zone Championship in North Vancouver on Sunday (Feb. 8). Ben Hughes, Austin Sweeney, Alex Sykora and skip Patrick McEachran are heading to the Provincial Championship in Smithers in March.

Curling League and Squamish Fire Rescue are pooling funds together to make sure the guys can make the long trip to compete in the big show in Smithers.

Coach Glen McEachran

said the team has a better grip on the game with the extra men's league training. He helped skip at first but eventually handed over the broom to his son Patrick so the team could play a few

games on their own.

"I think they won as many as they lost against the men on their own and they won the last game before the playoffs quite decisively against a decent team so I think that boosted their confidence," said McEachran, adding he hopes Howe Sound can compete better than it did at last year's provincial bonspiel, where it finished with a 1-6 record.

"This year overall the team is much more solid," he said.

Howe Sound indeed showed improvement at last weekend's regional double-knockout tournament. Unlike last year, when it was forced to win six games in a row because it lost its first game, Howe Sound beat all of the opposing teams handily.

Of the seven opposing teams that are qualified for the provincials, McEachran expects the Interior teams to present particularly stiff competition. But Howe Sound has more experience than ever and is ready to rock.

The bonspiel runs March 5-7 and each team is guaranteed seven games.