

Guelph teen sets modest goals heading into national event

Bennett Wiancko, 15, of Guelph has a little homework to do as he gets ready for this weekend's Canadian age group short-track speed skating championship at the Hespeler Memorial Arena.

Along with practising for six events in the junior class at the three-day affair, Wiancko will be learning the English version of the athlete's oath.

"I've only read it a couple of times. I'll try to memorize it," he says, adding that he can always take a cheat sheet with him. "I'd be more worried if I had to say the French one."

Wiancko has one more practice with the Cambridge Speed Skating Club tomorrow prior to the opening of the championships Friday morning. He'll also go for a bike ride to limber up.

"It'll be little bit of biking just to keep me in shape," he says. "Not to tire us, we're just to bike for a little bit. It works out the same muscles and it's a lot for endurance."

Heading into his first national championship meet, Wiancko has set some realistic goals.

"I'm mostly hoping to get some good times, that's mostly what I'm aiming for."

"Bennett should be looking for a real solid performance with not super, super high hopes for a gold medal yet," says Cambridge head coach Ernie Overland, father to a pair of Olympic speed skaters.

"If he has a good solid championship, this will put him on the right track for next year."

Wiancko survived a tension-packed provincial championship meet in Waterloo two weeks ago to gain a berth in the Canadian championship. The top four in the overall standings at the provincial meet moved on to this weekend's national meet. He finished fourth.

"It was pretty tough, but I'm really glad I made it," he says.

That he was still in position to qualify might have been surprising to some as he had broken his left arm in a fall during a meet earlier this year.

"A lot of the time, you're worrying about falling and staying on your skates," he says of the jostling that normally occurs in the short-track version of the sport.

And he knows the differences between the short- and the long-track versions as he competes in both during the speed skating season.

"Mostly short track, I do at the beginning of the year," he says. "During January and February is my long-track season, so that's a lot easier than going back and forth."

"Bennett's a really fine long-tracker," Overland says. "He's doing very well at both disciplines, which at this point is very good. He'll probably somewhere in the future specialize in one discipline."

"It's pretty neat for him to come off the long-track circuit and come here to make the short-track championships."

While he does say he would like to compete in the Olympics in long track some day, this weekend he'll be concentrating on the national short-track championships.

And he'll take the oath for all the competitors.

"In the name of all competitors, I promise we shall take part in this competition, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, committing ourselves to a sport without doping and without drugs, in the spirit of true sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honour of our teams."



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