

Season report 08/09 – Andrew young
Written before Finland Easter Races 2009

Seeing as the season is almost over I felt it is about time I wrote my annual report. Although the sun is shining, the birds are singing and it is now definitely spring here in the UK, in northern Finland in the arctic circle winter is still prevailing and the skiing is not yet finished for the season. In the Tornio valley they hold a competition every Easter weekend, 4 x10km races in as many days. A tough ask. Last year you may recall it went well here and I qualified for world cup and became number one in the world for my age. I look forward to returning there next week to try and better my results.

One may look at cross country skiing and think it is a winter sport and the season runs through the winter months, December to March. However our season runs 50 weeks out of 52. This year we started training on the 18th of April, setting out to do over 650 hours of training to bring us to the top of our games in February. In fact I do more training off snow in the summer than I do in the winter. And this year was no exception.

The summer started well, mostly easy training with nothing more than a few sprints to tax the system. By mid June however, I developed shin pain in my right shin. I visited a physio regularly throughout the Summer and Autumn. And the problem has only just been resolved. At the end of June I attended the British Olympic Association Generation 2014 camp, aimed at getting people to be competitive at the 2014 winter Olympic games in Sochi. It was a good week with hard training and a lot of new lessons learnt. From this camp, feeling good, I attended the British team's summer camp held in Huntly and Aviemore. Both locations provided excellent training facilities and allowed the training standard to improve. Towards the end of the school summer holidays the training stepped up a gear or maybe 5 gears all at once. This was the hardest block of training I have ever done. 3 weeks and 72 hours of training. One week was 22 hours of training the next 24 and the last week 26 hours. The week following was a greatly appreciated rest week.

The Autumn then followed. Good results in the British roller ski championships and the Scottish roller champs (I won both) set me up for a great run into the winter season. During the school's October holidays I attended the British teams training camp in Sweden at the Torsby snow-tunnel. (a tunnel (similar to a car tunnel) with 1.5m of snow on the floor and goes up and down hills and round sharp corners). The camp was not short of amazing. I have never seen so many athletes in such concentration. The tunnel is 1.2km long and at times was pretty much a continuous stream of skiers training. The training we did there was again of the hardest possible level. I have never done so many intervals in 2 weeks and I have never had legs that I actually think are about to fall off they are that sore, either.

Although the rest of the team went to Norway to continue training together until Christmas I had to return to school, a true disappointment - knowing your team mates are out training hard on snow and you stuck in double maths. However I trained as well as I could between the end of October and the 2nd of December when I flew out to join the team. This period was particularly unsettled due to family reasons beyond my control and my heart. I had been getting abnormal heart rhythms during intense

training, basically I got slower and slower and slower but the effort going in was higher and higher and my heart rate got higher and higher. I could be working in a zone with my heart rate between 180bpm-190bpm and my heart rate could peak at over 210bpm for no apparent reason. So a short trip to the Olympic medical institute in London to source the problem. The problem was sort of sourced but not... then I fled the country and went skiing so it wasn't solved.

I raced at Gala in Norway for my 1st race of the season. A tough 15km classic technique race and a classic technique sprint (the sprint was hardly a sprint – advertised at 1.8km – but was more like 2km). I raced ok but not as well as I wanted. The 15k was my better race scoring 117 fis points, but I really wanted to go sub 100 (fis points – Federation in skiing points – work that 0.00 is the best for winning a world cup or Olympics, your points are worked out by your percentage behind the winner). Looking at the positives it was my 1st 15km race and I still got a world cup qualifying race and hopefully when I step back down to 10km I should be able to smash the 100 points.

From Gala I went to the Davos (Switzerland) world cup. Here a 15km classic race and a freestyle sprint. The classic went well, I was the youngest in the field by 2 years from team mate Andrew Musgrave. I didn't finish last but I was in the back 10. That's what I expected considering most skiers peak at 28 and I was only 16. The purpose was to gain experience, which I did and hopefully in years to come this will give me an edge over competitors. The sprint went to plan as well with another good result.

The following week I went to the Dusseldorf city centre sprint world cup. The individual was by far my best result of the season. I was 0.64 of a second behind my team mate Andrew, was 70th position and with in a second of the 3 places above me. The next day was the team sprint – basically an interval session – each person goes 3 times, taking it in turns to ski 1.6km. So my heart decides to play up at the most inopportune moments and I have an “episode” and we failed to finish the race. Then the doctor realised that my heart was affecting “world class” performance or something to that effect and decided to do something about it when I returned home in the new-year.

After Dusseldorf, I went to Norway to train with the team over Christmas. It was a good training block and I could feel my skiing improving over the 2 weeks. I raced once in the block at the Gasbu rennet. It was a 10km classic race where I won my age group with 50 seconds in hand for the second year running. Things were starting to look good for the mid season races in February and my form was really starting to come together.

Back to school again in January whilst the team went to the Swiss nationals to compete, and me stuck in double maths again. I also had a recording device placed under my skin in my chest to monitor my heart. Training was going well until the week before I left to go the world junior champs in France. I spent that week in bed with the flu and did only a half hour easy bike that week. The next week in France was an on snow run into the World juniors. However it was a far from ideal run in, as I still wasn't well enough to do intervals or any intense training. The world juniors started with the classic sprint. It went well finishing 39th only 3 seconds off

qualifying for the heats (top 30 go through) although thinking sprinting is my weaker discipline. I also qualified for world cup with a sprint race for the first time, which was good. Two days later I was on the start line for the 10km freestyle race. However I failed to finish, most likely due to dehydration and still a bit of illness in the system.

The week later I went to high altitude in the Czech Republic to gear up for the European Youth Olympics. It was an incredible week where I could quite literally feel my form get better and better and better. I felt amazing and was thinking that it was really possible for me to win a medal at the youth Olympics the next week, as I had targeted at the start of the season. On the last day of the holding camp in the Czech Republic before moving to Poland I became ill. At first we thought it would get better fairly quick, but I remained sufficiently too ill to race the whole week. And missed the whole thing only leaving the hotel 3 times in a week. I tried to race the sprint on the last day but during warm up I realised that not even a man made of molten rock would be able to cope with the pain in my chest and skiing easy wasn't going to do me any justice going into the competition ranked 4th.

We left Poland and went back to the Czech Republic for the World Champs. Here I raced the freestyle sprint, which turned out to be a complete disaster. Not because I was still ill, not because the British team did anything wrong in the preparation but because of a cameraman. I set off, 2 strides into my race a camera on an extendable boom was lowered into my path and caught my left ski tripping me up. Race over. In a race where every quarter of a second counts and the average fall loses 20 seconds there was no chance. I cruised the rest of the race to finish 98th, my worst result of the season by points and position.

Felling slightly fed up and upset I returned home, thinking that 650 hours of training and a lot of money had been a bit of a waste this year. However February soon ended and an end was put to the bad part of the season. I was now gearing up for Finland, the end of season races and was starting to actually feel on some kind of form again. I set off for Finland with high hopes and it turned out well.

Written Post Finland Easter races 2009

I returned from Finland last night having had some of the best racing of the season. I am obviously very disappointed with the season as a whole. I missed the most important race because I was ill, performed badly because I was ill and then found it hard to find my top form shape again for the end of the season. But my first race in Finland started off well with a win in the under 18's 10km skate category, racing an age group up. I scored 96 FIS points, which is my best so far. I then went on to race at junior level (under 20's) racing two age groups up from my own and finished 8th and 7th in the 10km classic in Yllas and Yilltornio. I am disappointed with the FIS points from the race in which I came 8th I scored 113 ish. For me this was my best race of the season, I skied well and kept form throughout the whole race, and most importantly I felt good on the skies. However the points seem to tell a different story. The season ended with a very warm race at about plus 9 degrees and great atmosphere around the whole venue. I enjoyed the race although it was not my best and I tired dramatically towards the end.

As I went out on my cool down ski with trousers rolled up round my knees and short sleeves I realise spring is well and truly on the way as the soft snow turns to water as I ski. With spring comes a lot of things. I must evaluate the season, plan for next season and start training for next season.

So evaluating the season, well it didn't go to plan, but the good points are that I am ranked number one in the world for my age in sprint, number 3 in the world for my age in distance and I am the youngest male ever to start world cup. Next season I would like to qualify for the winter Olympic games in Vancouver. So after my brief two-week break from training I will start all over again for next season.

I would like to thank all those who have supported me throughout the season both financially and out on the snow, its been greatly appreciated.