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LOCAL SPORTS

Orienteers see future for sport in Whistler

Vancouver club brings dozens for race doubleheader Eric MacKenzie

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Whistler provided a perfect setting for Greater Vancouver Orienteering Club (GVOC) members on Sunday (Oct. 2) and confirmed again for some of Canada's best that the area could be a great hub for the sport.

The club put on a doubleheader of races in its Why Just Run series. Dozens from the Lower Mainland and a few first-time locals navigated a short, morning course in the woods behind Myrtle Philip Community School and a longer course on the Lost Lake trails in the afternoon.

Race official and national team head coach Magnus Johansson said GVOC orienteers were excited to stage an event in Whistler, where he sees great potential for the sport's growth.

"I think it went great. Everyone who was here was excited and I got mostly positive feedback," said Johansson. "We definitely want to do something (in Whistler) every year... and I wish we could do it more often. In fact, I wish we could establish a club in Whistler that could put on its own stuff. That's the eventual goal."

Johansson said the natural environment in the resort provides a different challenge than typical Lower Mainland courses.

"Orienteering is not amazing down in Vancouver (because) there's just a lot of rainforest and it gets kind of crazy," he said. "Whistler has amazing terrain for orienteering because the forests open up a bit more and you can get through the trees."

A bid has been submitted to the Canadian Orienteering Federation to hold the 2014 national championships in Whistler, which seems to have the necessary elements to hold an elite-level competition.

"This is probably the most relevant (terrain) to the World Championships I went to this year in terms of how much rock there was," said national team member Louise Oram after finishing the first race of the day. "It was good to be able to come train up here ahead of time. We call this technical terrain, whereas the terrain in Vancouver is a little too easy."

"Out here, you can actually get really lost."

Johansson won the Elite morning race with a time of 23 minutes, 13 seconds, not far ahead of Espen Jakobsen (23:38) to the 22 checkpoints. Oram, Canada's No. 1 ranked woman, finished third (28:15). On the Lost Lake course, Jakobsen (53:35) beat out Graeme Rennie (1:03:58) for top spot and Oram (1:15:02) was third. Whistler's Adrian Zissos raced the Lost Lake course and finished sixth (1:24:32).

GVOC also staged shorter races with fewer checkpoints at both locations and a "score-O" course that sees

competitors earn points for reaching waypoints in any order within a time limit.

Johansson said he's confident Whistler will be awarded the Canadian Championships and that the event could spur more local participation in orienteering than was seen on Sunday.

"It looks likely that we're going to get it, and in that case I'm sure we would try to ramp up towards it and build up a little more excitement in Whistler about it," he said. "We hope to get more Whistler people to come out. (Zissos) has run clinics, but I guess we also have to do a better job of promoting it better.

"If we pushed it a little bit harder, I think we could get more people to try it."

For more information on the club and results from Sunday, visit www.whyjustrun.ca and select Vancouver.

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