

Snow-sport site called world's best

Summer program for skiers, boarders part of \$900,000 plan for Canadians to get gold in 2010

BY DAWN WALTON
FARNHAM GLACIER, B.C.

Jasey-Jay Anderson, one of Canada's most successful and recognized names in snowboarding, rattles off a list of mountain glaciers around the world where he has trekked in search of snow each summer.

Each has been too crowded, too expensive or just not long or steep enough for giant slalom or snowboard cross-training. He pauses, looks up at the snow-covered Farnham Glacier, an open bowl tucked into British Columbia's Purcell Mountains, and smiles.

"This blows out the doors on all of them," he says.

The 28-year-old from Mont-Tremblant, Que., is among 60 of Canada's best and most promising snow-sport athletes picked to train here near Invermere in southeast B.C. It's part of a pilot project aimed at making Canadian skiers and snowboarders among the best in the world.

Those backing the \$900,000 program — funded largely by the Calgary Olympic Development Association, but also by the Vancouver 2010 Bid Corp. and the Canadian Olympic Committee — have their eyes on the Vancouver-Whistler Winter Games in 2010.

"The timing was right this year with 2010. We certainly need a new approach if we intend to be on the podium in 2010," CODA president John Mills explained.

Canada has held the Olympics twice — the Winter Games in Calgary in 1988 and the Summer Games in Montreal in 1976 — but Canadians didn't strike gold at either.

Those involved in Canadian sport want to end that drought in Vancouver. Setting up this training facility at Farnham is part of that plan.

"Success in the short term will be measured by the athletes and coaches and how many times they want to come back," CODA chairwoman Peggy Valentine said. "In the long term, it'll be on the podium."

About two decades ago, this area was identified by powder-hungry heli-skiers. CODA turned its attention to this glacier, rarely disturbed by wind, as a training facility about three years ago and spent the last year getting the funding together to start training camps here.

Until now, skiers and snowboarders chased snow to Europe, South America, Oregon's Mount Hood and Whistler's Horstman Glacier for summer snow training, but in the process ended up elbowing each other, and commercial camps, to carve out some space.

Farnham is cheaper, closer to home and by most accounts the best summer training ground for skiers and snowboarders in the world.

While the glacier itself is about three kilometres wide and 1½ kilometres in length, the athletes are training on only a small slice. They are dropped off at 2,927 metres near the peak and can choose among warm-up runs as well as four flagged slalom, downhill and



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JACQUES BOISSINO/CANADIAN PRESS

Compared with other glaciers in the world, Farnham 'blows out the doors on all of them,' Quebec snowboarder Jasey-Jay Anderson says

mogul courses spaced across about 150 to 200 metres.

In Europe, maybe 15 or 20 courses would fill a space of that size, and athletes from several nations would be jockeying for position.

"You're fighting with so many other teams," said Michael Janyk, 21-year-old ski racer from Whistler, as he prepared for a warm-up run.

"Now we get the best pick every day. I haven't been anywhere that matches this."

At Farnham, each run is about a kilometre in length and has a drop of 330 vertical metres.

"This is a lot better. Three or

four times as long, a lot steeper, so you get a lot better training out there," said Colin Smith, a 20-year-old mogul skier from Red Deer, Alta., comparing this to his summer training at Whistler.

It's also mid-July where scorching temperatures in Europe are melting glacier snow fast.

Here, the snow depth ranges from about 75 centimetres to three metres, and the temperature ranges from below freezing early in the day to about seven degrees by midday. Early mornings, the glacier is rock-hard perfect for the downhill racers. A few hours later, the sun has softened the glacier for the freestyle athletes to ease over

Glacier training

The Canadian Alpine and Snowboard teams are using Farnham Glacier (part of the Purcell Mountains), one of the best glaciers in the world, for summer ski/snowboard training.



THE GLOBE AND MAIL

the bumps and jumps.

Dusan Grasic, technical coach of Canada's men's alpine World Cup team, doesn't mince words: "This is the best glacier I've ever skied."

But future use of Farnham doesn't come without obstacles.

Helicopter transport — several 10-minute trips ferry athletes to and from the glacier each day — has gobbled up more than half the project's budget. Tractor-like snow cats for grooming and hauling athletes up the glacier had to be air-lifted by helicopter in a military-style operation.

To cut costs, officials are considering making an old logging

path into a permanent 18-kilometre road up the Farnham Creek valley so athletes can be bused in daily or stay longer if lodging can be developed. Of course, environmental concerns come with that. Finally, it needs funding — lots of it.

Still, CODA is hoping to build a case to make Farnham a fixture in Canada's growing arsenal of top-notch training facilities.

They point to Calgary's Olympic Oval, built for the 1988 Winter Games, which has been called the fastest ice in the world, and credited for helping kick-start the careers of speed-skating superstars such as Catriona Le May Doan and Jeremy Wotherspoon.

Farnham could make household names of currently unknown Canadian skiers and snowboarders.

Stephan Kurz, one of the most successful women's alpine coaches on the World Cup circuit and recently wooed from Germany to become head coach of Canada's women's team, said training on Farnham will help.

"In 2010, we should have the athletes on the podium, and we have to start now, not in 2009," he said.

"It's not just optimism for Canada's future in sport that fills the sunny mountain air. Patriotism also soars.

Sylvia Kerfoot, a 26-year-old mogul skier from Whistler sporting a Vancouver 2010 toque, pauses to talk about the helicopter ride ("Wow!"), the cat machine tow rope to the top ("Wow!"), and the panoramic mountain view ("Wow!"), as she hikes toward the freestyle course.

"You get to come here and train in Canada for Canada. It's amazing," she said.