

Dear SOD,

Thank you so much for helping me with the costs of traveling to Europe this past month. My number one goal this year was to qualify for World Junior Championships, so after the final race in Thunder Bay a few weeks ago I was feeling on top of the world. This was my first trip to Europe, and I'm hoping the first many.

The trip started off on January 16<sup>th</sup>, as myself and the rest of the Canadian World Junior and U23 team made our way to Vierumaki, Finland. We spent 7 days there staying at the Scandic hotel. The focus of this week was to get over jet lag as soon as possible, as well as getting used to skiing and training in a new country. While most of our skiing was done on the trails just down the road from our hotel, we did get to ski at the Lahti Nordic Centre for two days which was really cool. The trails there are incredibly challenging, but super fun. I love going and skiing at places like Lahti (and Otepaa) where World Cups so frequently take place, because knowing the trails that they are racing on makes watching them much more enjoyable.

While a select few of the U23 athletes left for Otepaa a few days earlier for the World Cup, myself and the rest of the Juniors and U23's packed up our things on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and headed for Otepaa Estonia where we would be staying for the remainder of the trip. We had a couple days to ski in Otepaa and get to know our courses before my first race, the 10km skate individual start on the 26<sup>th</sup>. From then on there was racing everyday, alternating back and forth between Junior and U23 racing. While my own races did not go nearly as well as I had hoped, it was still an amazing experience to be over there in Otepaa racing against the best in the world. Getting to watch teammates like Kevin Sandau and Jess Cockney having top 6 results was tremendously inspiring, and so exciting to see first hand. And of course, watching Alex Harvey win the U23 pursuit was amazing to say the least. Watching the Canadian flag get hoisted into the air and hearing our National anthem was possibly the most inspiring experience I have ever had.

Immediately following the U23 men's pursuit, we all piled into the vans and made our way back to Helsinki. We spent our last night there before getting on the plane the next morning and starting the 22 hour trip back to Canmore.

Despite not having the results I was looking for, this trip was an incredible experience for me. In the past couple of weeks I have been reflecting back on what my goals have been over the years, and it's hard to believe that at 19 years old, I have already achieved one of my lifetime goals of racing for Canada at the International level. It just goes to show that if you're willing to put the time and effort in, as cliché as it sounds, anything is possible.

Jordan Cascagnette  
Canadian Junior National Ski Team  
Alberta World Cup Academy  
<http://jordancascagnette.blogspot.com/>