

Long track skaters beat the odds Carruthers and White make team without proper training facility

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By Bill Doucet

CAMBRIDGE - Realistically, the odds were against Sylvie Carruthers and Taylor White.

Despite being high-ranking short track speed skaters when the Cambridge Speed Skating Club members switched to long track, the transition should have been a humbling experience.

Not that either lacked the talent to change disciplines, but full-on training in Cambridge is a nearly impossibility.

Carruthers and White have been forced to train on the short track at the Hespeler Arena for long track, which is far from an ideal arrangement.

They've driven to Ottawa in hopes that an outdoor rink was frozen over and have a teammate whose grandparents own a now frozen pond on Guelph Line.

They even flew to Calgary to train at the Olympic oval.

But despite lacking place to train properly, the duo made Team Ontario's long track squad for the Canada Winter Games.

The Games run from Feb. 13 to March 1 in Prince George, B.C.

Carruthers, who switched over to long track last season, following in her brother Dan's footsteps, has surprised herself by making the Canadian championships last season, and now the Canada Winter Games.

"It's been really tough training wise, because (at the Hespeler Arena) during practice, if I have my long track skates on, I can't turn corners on a hockey rink because they don't have that same bend in them," said the 17-year-old Carruthers, who is set to graduate from École secondaire Pere-René-de-Galinée.

"So it's been hard to transition because I can't really train for it. I have to go to training camps the week before the competitions and then after the training camp I race.



Against all odds

Bill Doucet, Times Staff

Sylvie Carruthers (left) and Taylor White are both heading to the Canada Winter Games for long track speed skating, a sport difficult to practice here without the proper rink.

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“Making it to Canada Winter Games is a huge accomplishment. I’m pretty impressed with myself; I’m not going to lie. I didn’t think I’d be able to get this far.”

At the trails in Quebec City in December, Carruthers admitted she had rather ordinary races in the 500-metre and 1,000m distances, but finishing third in the 1,500m and 3,000m pushed her to second place in points and a spot on the team.

The fact that she’s more adapt to the longer races comes naturally for her, as she’s a high school medallist in cross country and track and field distance running.

“I personally just like being in my own little mental state when I race,” Carruthers said.

“I can get much more into it. Like in cross-country, I’m just going by myself at my own pace.”

She also enjoys the purity of the sport. In short track, it’s eight people knocking elbows and one crash can change the complexion of a race. In long track, it’s two people on the track racing for time.

“It’s a great feeling, looking at the clock and saying, ‘I did that; no one pulled me to get me that time. I did it myself’.”

Now Carruthers can check something off her skating bucket list.

“My brother made it in short track to the Canada Winter Games in 2011 in Halifax and ever since then that’s been my goal for the last four years.

“So I’ve been training my butt off for the last four years and actually making it was one of the best feelings I’ve ever had.”

White, on the other hand, is an even fresher face on the long track circuit. The 17-year-old Ayr resident started dabbling with long track in November when she was made an alternate for the Canada Winter Games short track team.

Deciding to ply her trade on the longer oval, White’s mother Gloria drove her to Milwaukee to see if she could meet the qualification time standards at a competition for the Games qualifier.

Milwaukee was a success and at the Games trials she was named an alternate on the team. When Team Ontario member Isabelle Weidemann let it be known this week that she was going to be competing in a World Cup event instead, White was added to the team.

White is enjoying the switch right now – even though she still plans on competing in short track this season – for obvious reasons.

“Right now it’s new and exciting, and I’m doing well at it. It’s good right now and it’s a change from short track,” said the Southwood Secondary School student.

White has been fighting the same battle as Carruthers, trying to find an appropriate venue to train.

“(Hespeler Arena), it’s basically useless. You get just a couple straightaway strides in. You can’t really practice too much, other than starts and straightaways.”

There are also some other issues that White is dealing with and she admitted that she’s going to need practice before hitting the ice in Prince George.

“The corners in long track have been hard. I don’t really know the technical parts of long track yet and I’m kind of just getting by on my short track ability right now. There’s still a lot to learn,” White said.

Being a newbie on the scene may help her at the Games, as no one will really know what kind of a threat she is - she is a 500m specialist in short track, a distance she finished first and second in at the trials.

The flipside is she has no idea who she’s up against.

“I’m not really sure who the other competitors are, so I don’t really want to say how I’ll do against each one of them individually.”

Past the Canada Winter Games, both girls are thinking about their future. The pair have applied to the University of Calgary, with plans of training at the Olympic oval.

Carruthers will keep up her career in long track, while White is leaning that way too.

“I think there’s a better opportunity for me to do well in long track,” White said.

In addition, Cambridge club members Olivia Scott and Sam McEachern have qualified for the short track team. Cameron Mason is an alternate for men’s long track.

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