

Patty Wortley

BC SCHOOL SPORTS COACH OF THE MONTH MARCH 2009

School: Fernie.

Years coaching: Off and on for 21 years.

Currently coaching: Ski and snowboard.

Also coached: Track and field, volleyball, basketball, cheerleading, soccer, kindergarten gym, gymnastics.

Subjects: P.E. and social studies.



Patty and her son, Kris

How did you end up in Fernie?

My husband and I wanted to go to a ski town so we found ourselves with no work in Kelowna. We looked for a ski town and Fernie fit the bill plus there were jobs for both of us. It was Thanksgiving weekend and there was snow everywhere in town.

I couldn't even get on a sub list in Kelowna in '84 and my husband's company got sold. He was in the ski business, he got a job as a ski groomer at the hill and I got a job at a hotel on the hill. I skied in the day and worked at night and then I would sub.

What's it like coaching skiing and snowboarding in Fernie?

For snowboarding and skiing this is definitely the place to do it. We have a fantastic mountain with lots of variety, ski runs, trees, and great powder. The kids on the team are very good all round.

How come you decided to coach?

When I was in Sparwood they didn't have a ski and snowboard team and I thought that was a shame and there was a little ant hill of a ski hill with a handle tow with someone's dad doing the lift. We did really well. The second year they were competing they qualified to go to Provincials, and they were very wide-eyed, a lot of them from the coal mining towns in the mountains, many have never been farther than Creston. When they came to Whistler they were very wide eyed.

I'm taking kids to Panorama this year who have never been to Panorama and if we qualify for Provincials, they will be in Whistler. For a lot of kids it'll be a very big trip.

How did you find sport in your life?

I chose to make it my career as well as what I like to do in my spare time. I had really positive coaches myself and I guess I found them very encouraging. I didn't have a bad experience. It also led to travelling. I love to travel and a lot of that comes through sports. And the influence of my family being into the outdoors and sports.

What's your biggest challenge as a teacher-coach?

Time commitment. Managing your time so that you're not too stressed out. Especially when you're a parent, have a full time job and devoted to sports. Time management is a big challenge and for all ski and snowboard coaches, recently participation is dropping off and that's a bit of a challenge and we're trying to find ways to bring it back up again. It could be cost, it's an expensive sport.

We thought it'd be fun to make the zone championships a two day championship instead of one to make it a bit more relaxing and fun.

What was the most humorous thing you've encountered as a coach?

I did have a skier one year at Provincials who put on his buddy's gear, even though he had a helmet he fell hit his head, got a concussion so he couldn't race the next day. So one of my other snowboard boys, borrowed some equipment, rushed to get some gear, he didn't win, but he did really well. The other guy was totally out of it, he didn't know where he was.

Another time I had a boy who was snowboarding, all the coaches were watching him go through the gates, he was in a red suit, he was so fast he looked like a rocket. Everyone was like "wow, Tim's gonna win" and just before the finishing gate he missed the very last gate. He was the fastest, but he wasn't focusing so he missed the very last gate. He probably would have been at the top of the podium that day. He was flying.

What's been the hardest thing to encounter as a teacher coach?

One year, I think it was 2001-2002 that we didn't have any competition because of job action, when politics gets in the way of sports I find that very frustrating and unfair to the athletes. We had no competition that year and I think that was true across the board.

More about Patty

I was in Sparwood for several years before getting a transfer to Fernie. I live on the Ski Hill in Fernie. We were the fourth house that was built there. Now it's really built up. The residential area is three times the size it once was.

I ski every day that I'm not working. I cross country, it's just out the back door. Ski snowshoe and cross country ski in the winter time. In the summer I mountain bike, water ski, rock climb and hike.

I have two girls and a boy. They are 17 and they've all raced on my snowboard and ski teams. Just two of my kids are racing this year and they are very good. But I've enjoyed coaching them.