

Today Melfort, tomorrow the world

Saskatoon Special Olympians really get around

By Janice Harvie
of The StarPhoenix

Melfort will be a busy place this weekend as more than 100 athletes, plus coaches, volunteers and support staff, converge on the city for the 1993 Saskatchewan Special Olympics.

Athletes ranging in age from 12 to 56 and representing the eight provincial zones will compete in snowshoeing, nordic skiing, alpine skiing, speed skating and figure skating.

The snowshoeing and cross-country skiing venue will be the Melfort Golf Course, while the Melfort main arena will house skating events. Wapiti Ski Hill, a 30-minute drive north of the city, will play host to the alpine skiers.

Saskatoon will send about 25 athletes to the Games, including Tyler Gilbert, Jennifer Williams and John Wickett, who have also been chosen to compete at the International Special Olympics in Austria in March.

"I was surprised. I didn't think I would get picked," said Williams, a speed skater who turns 21 in March.

Williams began her competitive skating career in Regina five years ago and continued her involvement with the sport after her family moved to Saskatoon a year ago. She will compete in 200-, 500- and 800-metre events in Austria.

"If I can win a race I might get a medal, but I don't care about the medals," said Williams. "The 500 is hardest. The 800 starts slower and picks up and goes faster so it's not as hard."

Tyler Gilbert, a 17-year-old downhill skier, was also surprised, and pleased, to get the chance to compete in Europe.

"I'll try hard for gold, but I really like meeting other athletes," said Gilbert, who prefers the giant slalom event.

"It's fast," he grinned. "When I'm practising I have to do big turns, they're hard. I'm better at going through the gates."

Gilbert, who stands 5-feet-11½, has a bit of an edge over most other competitors: "L-o-o-o-n-g legs."

John Wickett, 22, will compete in 200-, 500- and 800-metre senior speed skating events in Austria.

"I think John's sprints are his specialty because he doesn't do his crossovers (on turns), so I push him hard on the straightaways," said Lareina Morin, a coach with the Saskatoon Lions Speedskating Club. "He gets pumped because he knows that's where he can go fast."

Great determination is a common link shared by the Olympians.



Morin



Williams



SP Photo by Gord Waldner

Winter Games this weekend in Melfort are the start of a busy stretch for Tyler Gilbert

"I think because they're handicapped they push harder because they want to achieve the goals they've set. They want to be recognized for their great effort," said Morin. "They have a lot of drive. They really like what they're doing, so they put a lot of effort in to it."

All three of Saskatoon's Austria-bound Special Olympics athletes are also involved in other sports.

Gilbert likes to play basketball and golf for recreation, but he also lifts weights and competes in track and

field.

Wickett and Williams also compete in track and field. All three are under the direction of Jorgen Lorenzen.

Williams specializes in the 60-metre sprint, the 200 metres and long jump.

"Jennifer's a real team player. She's got all kinds of athletic ability and she's really determined," said Lorenzen.

Wickett competes in long jump and track events from 200 to 800 metres. His specialty is the 800.

"As a runner John is really tough

mentally," said Lorenzen. "When he sets his mind to something he really goes out and does it. His strength is probably his determination. And he's incredibly strong and quick."

Gilbert, although the youngest, is a team motivator.

"Tyler puts the group together. When we go out to do relays, he gets the team together and settles everyone down," said Lorenzen. "Tyler's dad got him on a weight program last fall and that has really improved his strength."