



Eastern Canada/Candy Cane Cup this weekend at Gatineau's Nakkertok Ski Centre

We're back racing after a 21-month pandemic break!

Gatineau, Quebec, December 6, 2021 – Gatineau's ENGNE organizing committee will host the first stop of Canada's Eastern Canada Cup cross-country (XC) ski race series, this weekend at the Nakkertok Nordic Centre. This first major Eastern XC-ski race since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 is receiving strong support from Tourisme Outaouais and Ville de Gatineau to ensure its success.

More than 480 racers are registered from across Eastern Canada, including several local favourites such as Ottawa's Pierre Grall-Johnson of Nakkertok and Chelsea's Laura Leclair from the Chelsea Nordiq club. Grall-Johnson, is fresh off a 4th place finish in last weekend's Western Canada Cup in B.C., hopes to take advantage of his home trails to overcome National Training Centre teammate Julian Smith, who won the B.C. event.

Up for grabs is \$5,200 worth of prize money including \$2,000 contributed for the overall winners by former Canadian National Team coach Marty Hall and his wife Kathy, a "Hall Mark of Excellence Award".

For U20 category competitors, there is a chance to stake their claim on a National Team trip to a U.S. race series later in the season. Most, however, will just be happy to be back testing themselves on the ski course, after over 21 months without a major ski race.

Jacques Dumont, the head of the organizing committee said, "The volunteers are ready and so are the trails, thanks to our Nackertrak artificial snow loop and some recent help from Mother Nature! We are all looking forward to getting back to a real ski competition."

Racing starts with sprint action Saturday at 9:00 AM at the Nakkertok (South) Ski Centre, 900 Ave. Gatineau in Gatineau. The Sprint Finals for the older categories will take place around noon. Racing starts back up on Sunday at 9am, with the older categories skiing until about 10:30.

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ENGNE was created by Chelsea Nordiq, Nakkertok Nordic, Club Skinouk and the Gatineau Loppet to organize the Gatineau stage of the 2016 Ski Tour Canada, FIS World Cup event. ENGNE ran the 2019 Canadians Ski Championships and was scheduled to run the 2021 Championships until it was cancelled due to Covid-19.

Local Favourites: This region is a hotbed of skiing. Two local, potential Olympic Team members Antoine Cyr (Gatineau/Club Skinouk) and Katherine Stewart-Jones (Chelsea/Nakkertok) are racing the World Cup in Davos Switzerland so won't be around for the Candy Cane Cup. There is nonetheless a wealth of local talent that will be competing at this weekend's event. This includes Ottawa's Pierre Grall-Johnson, 17th at the World U23 Championships sprint last year and Chelsea's Laura Leclair who was on the 2021 Canadian World Championship team and has a 15th place finish at the 2018 World U23 championships to her credit.

There will also be strong participation from the Thunder Bay and Quebec City National Training centres respectively, where Pierre and Laura are based.

World Student Games: The 2021 World University Games were originally scheduled for Lucerne, Switzerland last February then rescheduled to start this weekend. The events were abruptly cancelled last week due to the new Omicron variant.

As a result, several Canadian team members are now instead racing the Candy Cane Cup, including Alex Maycock of Orangeville who was in Europe with Zoe Williams of Nakkertok. Other local Canadian team members who will be racing include Bronwyn Williams of Nakkertok, and Zoe Pekos and Shilo Rousseau of uOttawa Nordiq.

National Team Junior Tour: Nordiq Canada is using this weekend of races and those in Mont. Ste Anne next weekend (Eastern Canada Cup #2) to select a team of junior/U20 athletes for a race trip to the US in the latter part of January. Some local contenders for that trip would be Ottawa's Jasmine Lyons, Gatineau's Magalie Daoust and Tory Audet of Chelsea. On the men's side, Guillaume Pelchat of Pembroke, and William Bérubé and Ben Croteau of Gatineau will also be in line for a position on the team. How it will turn out will be decided at the start line, as most racers have missed a full season or more of racing and past form may not be an indicator of present performance.

Family Ties: There will be a lot of similar names on the results sheet and a couple of local families are expected to figure prominently in the results. The Williams family of Cantley has had all 6 children, figure prominently on the results list at many levels of Canadian skiing with Bronwyn leading the way this weekend in the Open Women's class. Her younger sister Mallory and brother Seamus will be racing the junior events. Older sister Zoe will be part of the support team after just returning from her trip to Switzerland for the cancelled World Student Games.

The Halvorsens from Chelsea will also have three racers competing and will also probably figure prominently on the results page. Tove and Mats attend the Pierre Harvey National Training Centre in Mont Ste. Anne and will be competing in the Open Women and Men's categories and younger sister Britt considered one of the top skiers in the U20 class.

Of course, both sets of parents are also key volunteers on the Race Organizing Committee so it will be a busy weekend for those households.

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