

Kelvin student sets her sights on steeplechase

By: Devon Shewchuk

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Ceci Howes may only be in Grade 11, but she's going the distance in the world of track and field.

The 16-year-old Kelvin High School student competed in provincials on Thursday afternoon, racing in the varsity girls 1500-metre and medley relay races at the University

of Manitoba.

Howes placed third in the 1500m finals, mere seconds behind the leader — a very respectable finish considering she ran the 1500m to train for her favourite track event, the steeplechase.

While some may cringe at the idea of running three kilometres while bounding over 35 barriers (with a fifth of them followed by a long pit of water) it's all fun and games for Howes.

'I like the extra challenge the barriers give and I really like the water jumps, it feels like you're flying almost. You just jump up, push off and then land in the water... It makes things a little more interesting'

— Ceci Howes on her favourite track event, the steeplechase

"I like the extra challenge the barriers give and I really like the water jumps, it feels like you're flying almost. You just jump up, push off and then land in the water... It makes things a little more interesting," she said.

Steeplechase isn't a race run by the Manitoba High Schools Athletic Association. Howes was introduced to the special event in Grade 8, when her track club coach Scott Radley noticed her affinity for both long distance running and hurdles.

"She's training with two others right now who are also both very good. The nice thing about it is that it's very tough to train if you're by yourself," said Radley. "Last year they all ran the same times, this year they're all very close together. It's a really great environment."

With her training, Howes has a good chance of making at least one of two high-profile Canadian track teams this summer. The U-20 Pan Am Championship team competes in Costa Rica in August, while the U-18 NACAC team will battle it out in Mexico in July.

Competing nationally may be daunting for some teens, but for Howes it's no problem. The multi-sport athlete was a figure skater for about seven years before hanging up her blades in March. Though Howes enjoyed following in the footsteps of her mom, who was also a skater, she said it was time to dial it in and focus on one sport.

"If you think of it, (skating) helps with the water jumps because you have to step up onto the barrier and push off," she said. "Strong ankles from skating definitely helped with that and helped build up my strength."



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Howes plans on using that strength and power to secure a spot on at least one Canadian team this year. Both national teams are taking small rosters on their international adventures.

The U-20 team is inviting 45 Canadian athletes across all events to compete in the Pan Am Championships, with a max of two athletes per event. The NACAC U-18 team has the same event cap, but is only taking 25.

"With 25 there, that's not two per event. They base it off what per cent under the standard you are when they decide who gets to go," said Howes.

The current female standard for the 2000m steeplechase is 7 minutes 14 seconds. In May, Howes ran 7:07.39. Since then, the Winnipegger has only stepped up her training. Last week the teen challenged herself, flying out to Nashville to compete in a 3000m

steeplechase (1000m longer than the U-18 Canadian national team's race requirements), completing it in 11:02.25.

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Howes flew out to Vancouver this morning to complete in one more steeplechase. She plans to shave off some precious time in that race, as this Sunday is the cut-off for athletes to submit their best run times to the national committees. By Wednesday, Howes should hear if she's made the cut.

While Howes is looking forward to hearing back from the teams, that isn't the only goal she's set her sights on. She's headed into Grade 12 this fall, and some NCAA track teams have already come calling.

"I've talked to some schools, filled out some online forms," she said. "Hopefully I'll go to a Division 1 school in the U.S. One day, the Olympics. That's what I'm aiming for."

ON THE TRACK: Miles Mac athlete Jordan Soufi commanded the varsity boys 100-metre heats, beating out dozens to achieve the fastest time of the day — 10.90 seconds.

Last week Soufi hit a personal best of 10.67 and was invited to represent Team Canada in the U-20 Pan Am Championships in Costa Rica this summer.

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