

1973-2023 Wostawea Time Capsule Story

“Mattea McNair: A Profile”

Story shared by Don Wright

When asked to describe herself in three words, Mattea McNair didn't miss a beat: “Independent. Ambitious. And fun.” Clearly, she knows who she is and what she wants to do, and she credits Wostawea for helping her become the wonderful young person that she is.

Mattea has been skiing since she was three years old. In 2010, when she was five, she joined the Jackrabbit program. Her first skis were simple strap-on things, but she could fly. Always smiling, inevitably leading, and never complaining, she took to lessons like a duck to water. Of course, snacks in the Odell Park lodge helped! “I remember the lessons, but mostly I remember the hot chocolate, cookies, and orange slices. The snacks were the real highlight!” What about your instructors? “Sure. They were great. But I really liked the orange slices.” Fun Days were another highlight, especially the tug-of-war. “The girls always won!”

In many ways, Mattea has never looked back from Odell Park. Making her way through the Jackrabbit and Track Attack programs, Mattea made a ton of “Saturday-morning friends,” and, later, on the Ski Team, a handful of best friends. “I have skiing to thank for some amazing friendships in my life.”

Indeed, the Ski Team has been a big part of Mattea's life for a long time. She remembers seeing Juliana Luiker and Harriet Wright crushing it in their blingy racing suits and thinking that they were the bomb. “They looked like they were having a blast, and I kinda wanted to be like them.”

Of course, Eric Luiker made everything fun. “He's such a great coach. I just love him. I mean, we all do.”

The feeling is mutual, by the way. Eric notes that Mattea was totally dedicated to the Ski Team and remains “one of our most decorated members.” He also adds that she was super keen, with a lot of positive energy to give, making her a coach's dream.

Coach Anna Healy agrees. “Mattea is not one to wait for opportunity to come to her – she knows what she wants, takes the challenges upon herself, and courageously carves *her* path forward. She owns her destiny, takes responsibility, has unsurmountable ambition, leads by example, is adventurous and joyful.” Plus, “She has a heart of gold and is instantly loved by anyone lucky enough to cross her path.”

In her very first NB Cup race, Mattea won first place. For that reason, Caraquet is still one of her favourite places to ski. “I like the hills in Charlo,” she says, “but there is something special about Caraquet, the gentle, rolling trails.” After winning her first race, Mattea said to herself, “This is fun. This is really cool. I can do this.”

As a member of the provincial ski team, Mattea has skied at Joliette, the Easterns, and the Nationals. “I especially remember my first time in Joliette. It was crazy cold, -20-something. Most of the races were cancelled. The organizers had us running sprints in a school hallway! But, on the last day, they were able to hold one race. I finished 8th.” By any definition, it was an impressive result. A few years later, at the Easterns, she had a 10th-place finish in the classic race. “It was snowing. Basically, there were no tracks. But I do well in adverse conditions, I guess. I just kept saying to myself, ‘I'm going to finish this race even if it kills me.’”

