



Xavier Mansfield

RACING TO THE TOP



With a smirk on his face and a gleam in his eye, Xavier Mansfield, 16, pauses to reflect upon his three years on the Anwatin Ski Team and training at nearby Theodore Wirth Park in Minneapolis. "I would always be going off on my own, especially in sixth and seventh grade, even in eighth grade," he explains. "I wanted to go further. We would always just ski in the Eloise Butler area, and I wanted to go past that to the bog and into the Wirth lake area or even up to the chalet. But [the coaches] didn't like it. They were pretty mad."

Tenacious Xavier realized he had potential to become a good skier, and his Loppet Foundation coaches took notice, too. To harness Xavier's perseverance and adventurous spirit, the coaches arranged for him to join the racing arm of the Loppet Foundation or Loppet Nordic Racing (LNR). With scholarship support, Xavier was able to elevate his training. "I guess when I got into LNR, I realized everyone was better than me," Xavier says. "I couldn't really just go out on my own." Xavier took the LNR training seriously, and through hard work made the Junior National Team in 2014 and 2015.



'You really have to want to do this'

In the summer between seventh and eighth grade, Xavier and two of his teammates attended LNR summer practices at French Park and Elm Creek. Xavier learned that it takes dedication and commitment to get up early and be ready to go at 6 am when Coach Mary Luoma picked them up to drive to the suburban parks. The boys roller skied and trained with the more competitive LNR ski group.

"When I started doing LNR, waking up super early three days a week to go work out when it was hot, I realized you really have to want to do this," he says. The Loppet Foundation's support continued into the fall when Xavier and another teammate went to West Yellowstone in Montana for early season training over Thanksgiving break.

Xavier branched out into year-round activities like participating in his favorite event the UCare Tri-Loppet, in which he canoes, runs and mountain bikes. He has competed each summer since seventh grade. "You get really dirty or wet, but that is fun, and at the end there is a bunch of food and everyone is there," he says.

Xavier thinks ski team trips are a key element of Loppet training. They provide the space and time to develop team cohesion and incentive to keep youth engaged in the program year-round. "It gets kids that wouldn't be doing these kinds of sports into it. And, eventually, helping them get really good at it. It creates leaders," he says. "And, it is a lot of fun."

Junior National Team selection

Xavier excelled in Nordic skiing. In his sophomore year at Patrick Henry High School, he took sixth place in the Minnesota state high school competition in 2015; he was the only non-senior in the top 10. He credits the Loppet Foundation for providing the opportunity to learn to ski, develop and improve his ski skills, continue to train at a high level with top-notch coaching, and excel in the sport he has grown to love. His dedication to skiing has carried over to the classroom as well. Training takes a lot of time, so Xavier has learned to balance academic and training demands.

Xavier credits his parents for their support. Although they could not make it to his races in middle school, given work and other commitments, he knew they were behind him. He thinks that if more of his teammates had family support, they would be excelling on the ski race circuit, too. He hopes the Loppet Foundation can reach out even more to families beyond the existing parent-night programs to show how the Loppet provides amazing and fun opportunities for their kids.

Xavier would not be skiing or succeeding at the state and national level were it not for the Loppet. "It's like a way of life I guess; everything is about skiing and school. It takes a lot of dedication to get through the Anwatin program. I learned that," Xavier says. "I was fast and then I realized I wasn't one of the best."

When youth can participate in a year-round program with thoughtful coaches and a supportive organization and community that provides a home for developing athletes the result is kids like Xavier, who hopes someday to make it all the way to ski for Team USA.

The Loppet Foundation provides opportunities and creates passion for year-round outdoor activities and adventures in the Minneapolis area, especially among inner-city youth.