



Kenneth Simmons edges out Kevin McLean at the finish line of the 25-meter snowshoe event of the Special Olympics on Thursday at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort.

Cool camaraderie

Winter sports help Special Olympic athletes bond with their peers.

By Kelsey Dayton

When Marcus Olson sped across the finish line on Teewinot at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, he raised his arms in triumph.

Marcus, 10, was one of 220 athletes from around the state who came to the resort to compete in the state's winter Special Olympics on Wednesday and Thursday.

This year's games had more participants than any in the past 10 years, Priscilla Dowse, president and CEO of Wyoming Special Olympics, said.

Powell and Dubois sent athletes for the first time, she said, and other communities, such as Pinedale brought more competitors. Last year, Pinedale sent only two athletes, Dowse said. This year, it sent six.

Along with the athletes, about 150 coaches and 100 volunteers helped put on the games.

During the two days of competition — which included a variety of levels and distances in cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and alpine racing — about 700 awards were given out to athletes, Dowse said.

Marcus competed in alpine skiing for his third year. He raced in all three downhill events: the slalom, giant slalom and Super G.

Marcus, who has cerebral palsy, doesn't speak much, but he still expressed excitement before competition each year, his mom, Anna Olson, said. He loved standing at the gate before his race began and then speeding on the snow.

"They all think they are superstars, and they are," Olson said of the athletes.

Special Olympics give athletes who have special needs like Marcus a sense of belonging, Olson said. The two days of competition, as well as the training throughout the year, is great for his self-esteem.

It also puts him on common ground with his peers.

"They've got a mutual like of skiing," Olson said.

While the games focus on athletic competition, for many of the Olympians, the two days are about more than winning.

Mycah Miller, 27, competes in downhill skiing, but her favorite part isn't the racing.

"I like the friendship," she said. Miller looks forward to seeing her friends from around the state.

This year she won a gold medal in the slalom and a silver in the giant slalom, but even that wasn't the highlight of the games for Miller. She always looks forward to the dance.

This year, Miller and fellow athlete Tim McLaurin sang the national anthem at opening ceremonies on Feb. 8.

"It was my dream since high school," she said. "I knew it could come true."



Landon Tippetts is congratulated at the finish line by his father, Nick, after crossing the ski race. Some 220 Special Olympians from across the state competed in this year's W