

Makowsky living the dream

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Byline: Craig Slater

There were nights early in his career when Lucas Makowsky wondered if it was all worth it.

In the middle of the harsh Saskatchewan winter, Makowsky could be found outside skating laps at the Mount Pleasant speedskating oval.

"I can remember some nights where I'd go skate a few laps and have to go inside just to warm up, to thaw out," Makowsky said Thursday after he received the male athlete-of-the-year award at the Sask Sport Awards banquet held at the Conexus Arts Centre.



Photo by Bryan Schlosser

"It's the Saskatchewan roots that really carried me forward. Humble beginnings, for sure. But it was all worth it in the end."

The numbness created over the last couple of months is slowly disappearing.

Makowsky won a gold medal at the Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver last month in the men's team pursuit speedskating event. Makowsky arrived in Regina earlier on Thursday after competing at a World Cup event in Heerenveen, Holland, where he won a silver medal in the 1,500-metre event.

Exhausted from the long flight home and from the whirlwind schedule, the 22-year-old didn't balk when asked if he feels like an inspiration to his fellow amateur athletes, especially on a night when the best in amateur sport was recognized.

"One of the other athletes here tonight said it best; you never know who you're going to inspire," Makowsky said. "With the partnerships I have made with my elementary school and other people from home, I heard from them that just me being at the Olympics was an inspiration.

"Being able to bring (a gold medal) back is pretty special."

Humboldt's Lyndon Rush, a bronze medallist from Vancouver in the four-man bobsleigh, was the guest speaker at the banquet. After sharing his experiences from the Olympics with the guests, he held his medal above his head to a standing ovation.

Makowsky said it's a proud moment not only for an individual athlete, but also for all amateur athletes in attendance.

"That's where we all want to be -- top of the podium," he said. "I know for me it was one goal of mine just to qualify for the Olympics. I'm sure it's a goal for everyone who is sitting in that room."

Other award-winners from Thursday's banquet included 11 members of the Wascana Racing Canoe Club who were a part of the 2009 Canada Summer Games canoe/kayak team that was named the team-of-the-year.

The 19-member team won 10 medals at the Games, including four gold and six bronze medals.

The Wascana club members who were a part of the 2009 Canada Games canoe/kayak team are Jacques de Jager, Simon Fense, Lliam Folk, Megan Gibson, Zara Hanson, Ashley Holowatuk, Chris Laplante, Iain McLeod, Chelsey Mitchell, Riley Schnell and Gina Sopario.

John Wetzstein of the Saskatchewan Rowing Association was named the Sask Sport coach-of-the-year. With the 2012 Summer Games in London on the horizon, he feels it's part of his duty to ready his athletes for the fast-approaching Olympic qualifying meets.

Wetzstein coached Saskatchewan's rowing team to six medals (one gold, one silver and four bronze) at the 2009 Jeux Canada Games. In addition, that same year his team members captured two gold medals at the under-23 national rowing championships in London, Ont.

It was a happy 19th birthday for Saskatoon's Kendra Chernoff, who won the youth female athlete-of-the-year award.

Brianne Theisen of Humboldt was the female athlete-of-the-year. Shylo Wolf of Saskatoon was selected as the youth male athlete-of-the-year, while Ken Orr of Churchbridge was voted the master athlete-of-the-year.

WINNERS

The following is a list of the award winners from the Saskatchewan Sport Awards banquet, held Thursday night at the Conexus Arts Centre:

Master athlete-of-the-year: Ken Orr, Churchbridge, cycling

Youth male-athlete-of-the-year: Shylo Wolf, Saskatoon, canoe/kayak

Youth female athlete-of-the-year: Kendra Chernoff, Saskatoon, swimming

Male athlete-of-the-year: Lucas Makowsky, Regina, speed skating

Female athlete-of-the-year: Brianne Theisen, Humboldt, athletics

Team-of-the-year: 2009 Canada Games canoe-kayak team, Regina

Coach-of-the-year: John Wetzstein, Regina, canoe/kayak

Coach dedication awards: Dale Hazell, Saskatoon, figure skating; Laurie Wachs, Saskatoon, synchronized swimming.