

April 05, 2006

Source: <http://www2.canada.com/reginaleaderpost/news/sports/story.html?id=5aee098c-8e3f-4526-ac92-2aec8c78a0fb&k=22417&p=1>

Kupchyk tears through record books

Murray McCormick, The Leader-Post

Wednesday, April 05, 2006

Mickey Kupchyk fell flat in his first attempt at speed skating.

"I did about five face plants," Kupchyk recalls about his first experience at the speed skating oval at Mount Pleasant Park.

Kupchyk emerged as a record-setting force in the masters division in long- and short-track speed skating this year after only 14 months in the sport. Kupchyk, a 50-year-old native of Regina, set 17 Saskatchewan records, six Canadian and three North American marks in the masters Group 3 (50-59) category.

"Before the season started I thought I had a chance to break provincial records," Kupchyk says. "I never dreamed that I would be this fast."

Kupchyk had been on skates before. He played hockey until he was 40 so the experience of being on ice wasn't entirely foreign.

"It's totally different from being on hockey skates," says Kupchyk, who wore his hockey equipment as protection against falling. "On hockey skates you take off on your toes and corner on your heels. In speed skating, if you take off on your toes, you fall on your face. Everything is done on the ball of your foot. It took me two or three weeks to get used to that."

Kupchyk eventually became comfortable on his new blades. He kept up with the sport through the rest of the winter until golf season rolled around. After another busy season on the links, Kupchyk returned to speed skating.

"I was looking for something to keep in shape over the winter," says Kupchyk, who is a scratch golfer. "In the summer, I lose 15 to 20 pounds golfing and the winter I put it all back on. I had to find something to keep it off over the winter."

Speed skating has been the answer. Kupchyk would bring his equipment to work and skate during his lunch hour at the oval. He also worked with the coaches at the Regina Speed Skating Club and quickly started to improve.

"Speed skating is a technical sport," says Dave Beitel, a Regina coach who has worked extensively with Kupchyk. "You need the endurance and Mickey already had a good base of that from hockey. There are certain drills and exercises that we do if a skater does, they will progress that much faster. That's



CREDIT: Don Healy, The Leader-Post

Regina's Mickey Kupchyk has had a strong season in masters speed skating events.

why Mickey advanced so quickly because he spent time working on those base skills."

Kupchyk originally took up speed skating for something to do while his son, Evan, was busy during the 1 1/2-hour speed skating practices. Kupchyk improved so quickly that he started to chase records.

"When I started this year, the first thing I put in my bag was all of the provincial records," says Kupchyk, who only missed five days of training during the winter. "When I started breaking those, I started to carry the Canadian records. Now that I have knocked off some of those, I started carrying the North American records. Now I carry the world records."

Kupchyk's passion has carried him to the Masters International Games in Milwaukee and the Calgary Oval speed skating final. Kupchyk's first experience on an indoor oval was in Milwaukee. He loved it and proved it by setting four Canadian indoor records.

"It was so big," Kupchyk says. "The track is the same distance as our oval but it was covered. I had never been on ice that was so smooth and so fast. I never thought they could make ice that fast. I skated non-stop for an hour and half. I knew I had to get off because I had to skate the next day but I just couldn't leave."

Kupchyk's next defining speed skating moment occurred during the Oval finale in Calgary when he picked a seat beside Cor Zwaal, a coach with Denmark's national speed skating team. The two struck up a conversation, naturally about speed skating, and Zwaal became Kupchyk's unofficial coach during the finale.

"He had me going 20 seconds faster than in Milwaukee," Kupchyk says. "Usually in speed skating, you pick up a second. What he did was through sheer coaching. He taught me how to use my energy and where to save my energy."

Beitel says that Kupchyk's ability to soak up any advice has helped him get off to a quick start after a late start in speed skating.

"You have to be a sponge," Beitel says. "The ability and more sources of information you get that from, the better off you are. Each coach has their individual way of teaching. The more people you are able to interface with the easier it is to pick up."

Kupchyk plans on competing in the 2007 World Masters International Games in Calgary (Feb. 23-26) where he hopes to keep going faster and establishing records.

"I'm dying to get back there," Kupchyk says. "I have already started training for next year."

Source: <http://www2.canada.com/reginaleaderpost/news/sports/story.html?id=5aee098c-8e3f-4526-ac92-2aec8c78a0fb&k=22417&p=1>