

## ***Methow Valley hosts Kenya's one-man Olympic Nordic team*** *Other national teams likely to train here next winter*

*By Danica Kaufman*

Why would a resident of Kenya choose to spend winter in the Methow Valley? Well first of all, Philip Boit is not just your average Kenyan. He's been fighting the odds for 12 years to compete as a Nordic skier at a competitive level, and his target is the 2010 Olympics, his fourth and final Olympics as Kenya's first and only athlete to compete in the Winter Games.

It all started in 1996. Philip Boit and his compatriot, Henry Bitok, were trained in Finland to become competitive skiers. Both were former middle distance runners with no previous skiing experience. Their project was sponsored by sportswear giant Nike. Kenya had only one slot for the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, which was filled by Boit. Boit's participation in the games gained worldwide media coverage. He finished 92nd and last in the 10-kilometer classic race. The awards for the race were delayed while the winner, Boit's friend Bjørn Dæhlie of Norway, waited for Boit to reach the finish line in order to hug him. The experience was so moving for Boit that he named one of his sons Dæhlie Boit. Later, Boit competed the 1999 Nordic skiing World Championships in Ramsau, Austria and finished last, again. After the event, Nike dropped its sponsorship, leaving Boit to settle for dryland training in snowless Kenya for more than two years.

But Boit was determined, and decided to sponsor his own training. In the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Boit finished 64th in a sprint race, leaving three competitors behind him. After the Salt Lake City Olympics Boit left competitive skiing, but came back to participate in the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin where he finished 92nd in the 15km Classical, ahead of 5 fellow competitors. "I guess it is still weird for people to see a Kenyan on skis – after all, I grew up on a farm where my parents kept cows," said Boit. "Once, when I took my carbon fiber poles home from Finland to Kenya, a friend from the Kenyan Olympic National Committee wanted to know where I had gotten such fine cattle prodders! Skiing is quite a foreign concept at home, but someone will find their way to the mountains if they really want to."

This year, not only did Boit have to overcome living in a country where there is no snow and no other skiers to train with, but his country was in a state of extreme political unrest following an unsettled election that led to tribal warfare and more than 1,000 lives lost. His hometown was a hotspot for violence, and although his family managed to stay out of harm's way, they witnessed unthinkable violence, and lost their annual family income when Boit's crops were burned just one week before his arrival in the Methow in mid-February.

Because of his limited training and travel budget, Boit was hosted during his six-week stay in the valley by the Methow community through MVSTA. He stayed with local families who live near the ski trails, and he was offered lots of training support through MVSTA, Winthrop Mountain Sports, the Winthrop Gym, and local competitive skiers and coaches. The Methow Valley Nordic Club, moved by the story of his experience, established a fundraising campaign to try to raise money to help Boit with his

upcoming training/travel expenses. For more information, contact MV Nordic Club President, Midge Cross at [sandm@methownet.com](mailto:sandm@methownet.com).

Boit will likely be joined by other national teams next year. MVSTA has been contacted by a number of national teams who are looking for a training base for the Olympics. The Methow Valley is a similar elevation to the Nordic ski venue near Whistler, and the varied terrain, daily grooming and reliable, dry snow makes it a great training option.

Boit loves sharing his story, and will be available to visit schools and other interested groups to speak and answer questions about his experience during the 2008-2009 season. To set up a presentation or offer to host, contact Danica Kaufman at [danica@mvsta.com](mailto:danica@mvsta.com).

**Philip Boit, Kenya**

