

## Coach Stephen Collins helps create competitors at Spray Lake



Spray Lake Watersports and Activity Centre is a one of a kind facility with a freshwater lake located in King Township. It was created with the vision to "provide customers a unique watersport experience, just a step outside Toronto!?"

One of the center's partners, Stephen Collins, head waterski coach, has worked hard to realize this vision for the sport of waterskiing. In just four years, Spray Lake has managed to cultivate an unusual and exciting mix and range of water-skiers, from beginner to world class. Many come to the lake asking for "Stevie" to take them for a waterski.

Stephen's focus is on development regardless of ability or athletic goal. He provides each individual he coaches with strategies tailored to their needs and overall growth. For Stephen, this is not just a sport, but a way of life because through skiing, he believes there are valuable life lessons to learn and master, especially with his young students. Stephen always encourages a balance between being respectful and having fun, as well as, between sports and life.

Stephen's passion for the sport is personal. He was a member of the Canadian national team and at one point was ranked in the top 15 in the world in jumping and as an overall skier, participating in all three skiing events of slalom, trick and jump. He has insider knowledge of the experiences of skiers from beginner to professional as he has worn all the hats. Stephen has seen the sport from many different lenses from being a two-time Canadian Overall Men's champion, to an athlete trying to come back to compete after a devastating neck injury. It is his comprehensive and well-rounded approach, as well as his unparalleled passion about the sport that makes Collins so effective.

Never satisfied with the status quo, or successes his athletes are realizing, Stephen works diligently to network and confer with the pros and veterans of the sport to fine tune his craft and to constantly gain new perspective. The most important thing to Stephen is to breathe new air into water skiing and this air comes in the form of developing new competitive skiers from the grass roots of the sport.

Since Spray Lake's inception, Stephen has worked with skier Thomas Daigle. Like his coach before him, Thomas is a three-event overall skier. Thomas is from Quebec and travels to King Township each summer to ski at Spray Lake. Thomas has spent four years with Stephen learning new tricks, jumping farther, and learning new techniques to advance his slalom skiing. He has recently been named to the Canadian national junior team and for the first time skied in a pro event in Edmonton with top podium finishes in each event.

At the recently completed Canadian waterski championships held in Winnipeg, Thomas competed in his own age division and was also invited to ski in the Open Men's event; a significant accomplishment for an athlete who is only 16.

In recent years, Spray Lake has become home to another great talent and respected coach. Janice Stevens, 21, is a three-event skier from Morrisburg, Ontario who has chosen to work at Spray for the past two summers, to be able to be coached by Stephen. This year in the Canadian Waterski Nationals Janice won four gold medals in the women's division.

The newest additions to the unofficial water ski team at Spray Lake are Ty, 9, and Leo Bigourdan, 10. These two young brothers from King Township have learned to run the slalom course and have been inspired to compete at a provincial and now national level. Leo has been competing for two years and Ty for one and both have medaled in different tournaments. Recently, Leo and Ty have added trick skiing to their resume with plans to start jumping next season; making this duo the next generation of overall

three-event skiers.

It is worthwhile noting that the skiers described above are a few of the many celebrated skiers at Spray Lake. Ben Wheeler, aged 10 from Toronto, finished first in the Under 10 boys division and Ilan Klein, 13 and also from Toronto, finished second in the Under 14 division at the 2016 Canadian championships.

In fact, Spray Lake is home to 14 competitive skiers who tirelessly work on their sport with Collins. Each have competed in tournaments throughout the summer, most recently the Canadian Waterski Nationals where they collectively won a total of 26 medals.

These athletes are a testament to the vision Stephen Collins has nurtured in his quest to help put waterskiing on the map. As important as his success as a high performance coach, Stephen has helped dozens of children and adults get up on water skis for the first time, overcoming their fears and returning to the dock requesting another ride. He has challenged his students to push their limits, to recognize their potential, to grow, and ultimately to allow each of them to reach whatever heights they have set out to achieve.