

Kevin Bolger reaches top 20 in Beijing

Finishes 17th in men's sprint free

Brett LaBore
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

The time had finally come. After years of training and months of preparation leading up to the Winter Games, Kevin Bolger made his Olympic debut.

Bolger competed in the men's sprint free at Zhangjiakou National Cross-Country Skiing Centre Tuesday. It was a sprint 1.5 kilometer race. The race took place at about 2:50 a.m. central time.

Ninety athletes competed in the men's sprint free. Out of those 90, the top 30 fastest skiers would qualify for the quarterfinals.

Bolger finished 22nd with a time of 2:52.5, qualifying him for the quarterfinals. Bolger was 7.47 behind first place. Lucas Chanavat of France won the qualification round with a time of 2:45.03.

"I think it was just mind-blowing for us. For me I was a wreck yesterday and emotional," Kevin's mother Sandy Bolger said. "I was so nervous ... and when he made (the quarterfinals) ... we were over the moon."

"Just to get (to the Olympics) was one (of Kevin's goals) and to be top 30 was his next big goal and once he got that, we knew... he definitely had



DEAN HALL/LAKELAND TIMES

Lakeland community members of all ages gather together to watch hometown athlete Kevin Bolger compete with Team USA in the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics on Tuesday, Feb. 8, at Torpy Park in Minocqua. The viewing party was sponsored by the Lakeland Nordic Ski Team and the Let's Minocqua Visitors Bureau + Chamber of Commerce.

checked that off and he had that exciting quarterfinal race," Kevin's father Mike Bolger said. "It's indescribable to watch your son ski in the Olympics."

Bolger's teammate, Luke Jager, was the final skier to qualify finishing 30th with a time of 2:54.44.

About two hours separated the qualifying round and the quarterfinals.

"(The two hours allows them) to re-prepare the skis and get them ready," Mike

Bolger said.

There were five quarterfinal races in the next round. The top two athletes in each heat and the fastest two remaining athletes, or lucky losers, would qualify for the semifinals.

Bolger finished fourth in the third quarterfinal with a time of 2:58.54. Richard Jouve from France won the quarterfinal with a time of 2:57.92. Norway's Haavard Solaas Taugboel took second with a time of 2:57.93.

Jouve and Taugboel both qualified for the semifinals.

"So often in America, they gauge it by if you win a medal or not," Mike Bolger said. "They have a race plan and (Kevin) executed it brilliantly."

"(All the skiers) are bringing their best to the table. It's amazing. It was a really good race to watch," Sandy Bolger said.

The two lucky losers were Sweden's Oskar Svensson with a time of

2:52.26 and Ben Ogden of the United States with a time of 2:53. Both skied in the first quarterfinal.

Ogden was the only American to advance to the semifinals. He finished sixth in the first semifinal with a time of 2:53.41 and did not advance to the finals.

Johannes Hoesflot Klæbo of Norway won the gold medal with a time of 2:58.06 in the finals. Italy's Federico Pellegrino won the silver. Alexander Terentev of the Russian Olympic Committee took the bronze.

Bolger's final placement came in at 17th place, the third highest American. James Clinton Schoonmaker finished 15th for the United States and Ogden 12th for the United States.

It is unknown if Bolger will compete again in these Winter Games. It could come in the men's 4x10km relay Feb. 13.

"We're waiting to hear. (There is) one or two races he could get named too but a lot of the times they wait for results of these races," Sandy Bolger said.

"We'll be talking to him tomorrow and hopefully in the next day or two he'll get another race," Mike Bolger said.

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Strong third period sends Thunderbirds to GNC tournament championship game

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Lakeland boys' hockey had their eyes set on a berth in the GNC tournament championship game. First, they had to get by a gritty Waupaca team.

A strong third period helped the Thunderbirds beat the comets 6-1 Thursday night.

The game was tied at 1-1 heading into the third period.

Brayden Warchol went to the penalty box just 13 seconds into the third period for a two-minute minor for elbowing.

That's when Cooper Fink took over. Fink skated with the puck towards Waupaca's end of the ice. Fink made a move and shot it by Waupaca goalie Hagen Rasmussen. Teag Wagner got the assist. Lakeland led 2-1 with the short-handed goal.



BRETT LABORE/LAKELAND TIMES

Gray Wagner shoots it by Waupaca goalie Hagen Rasmussen for a goal in a GNC tournament semifinal win Tuesday, Feb. 8 at Lakeland Ice Arena in Minocqua. Wagner finished with two goals to help lead the Thunderbirds to the GNC tournament championship game.

About a minute later, Fink had a breakaway chance with a loose puck. He skated down the ice and buried it in the back of the net. Just like that Lakeland had a 3-1 lead with two short-handed goals by Fink. "Yeah I think I knew I

had to step up and do something. I didn't know what it was going to be, if it was going to be a hit or something, but I knew I had to do something," Fink said. "I got a chip in the neutral zone, put my head down and took it to the net

and good things happened."

The momentum completed turned to Lakeland's side. The Comets took a timeout.

Later, Tyler Godfrey and Gray Wagner made a run at the goal. Godfrey passed it to Gray

Wagner who made a move and scored.

"Godfrey knew what he was doing off that shot," Gray Wagner said. "We have that play in practice so it was good to see that work out in a game."

Lakeland led 4-1.

Things didn't get better for Waupaca when Sawyer Mielke went to the box for a five-minute major for boarding. He also got 10 minutes for misconduct.

The Thunderbirds took advantage with two power play goals. Cody Olson took a long shot that found its way through traffic for a goal. Matt Haggart got the assist.

Next, Mike Kosmen, Godfrey and Gray Wagner all put pressure on Rasmussen. Gray Wagner found a loose puck for his second goal of the period. Thomas McCumber got the assist. "We were on the

power play so we were all screening and the goalie didn't see it and it was just sitting in front of the net," Gray Wagner said.

Lakeland outshot Waupaca 19-5 in the third period.

It was a scoreless first period. In the second period, Warchol scored 2:54 into the period with the assist to JJ Albee. Waupaca tied the game about 30 seconds later with an even strength goal by Braeden Ryan.

The Thunderbirds had a 5v.3 advantage late in the second period, but could not get a goal in.

"I think we really let our emotions get the best of us, we were getting frustrated with each other. I think it wasn't necessarily our worst game, but we weren't capitalizing on our opportunities. We played a little selfish and we just