

# Competition



IT IS LIFE'S FOUNDING inspiration. The endless struggle to rise above, to vanquish all foes by responding to challenge and stress in superior ways. Because it's such a big deal, competition is commonly referred to as a main proponent of evolution. Charles Darwin recognized that within a local population, the individual possessing the sharper claws, the longer teeth or the thickest beard has a better chance of surviving and reproducing, consequently passing on these advantageous traits to new generations. Beyond the obvious physical elements, competition also penetrates our social dynamics. Social Darwinism, as it's called, explores the concept of competition among individuals, groups, nations, or ideas as the main contributor to the social evolution of all human societies.

No surprise then, that the concept of competition has entrenched itself in the core of our daily lives — well beyond the intrinsic needs of evolution. Whether we like it or not, it's always in the back of our minds. A leisurely chat with a friend about the latest gear technology turns into a who-knows-more. First to the hill in the morning means first tracks. Bigger lungs means one more lap on the skintrack. We just can't help it. We compete against each other and ourselves in a constant battle of superiority that jump-starts our hormones.

In its truest form, competition is a fairly brutal act. It can hurt: physically, mentally, emotionally. Sure, it makes us stronger, faster and more efficient. Competition in our current society forces media, business or individuals to raise their standards or drop their prices or be accountable. But it's also what feeds the unending violence of global war and the environmental catastrophe, often referred to as the "tragedy of the commons." And if we fight to win at all costs, we invite dishonesty, extended rivalry and bitterness, attitudes that can prompt harsh reprisals when defeated, as has been the case in corporate capitalism.

Fortunately, here in the Kootenays, the true nature of competition seems watered down somewhat. Far from the rush of perpetual progress, we seem to have equal measures of competition *and* cooperation. Perhaps it comes from a tradition of isolation, living in harsh mountain environments where instead of rising as individuals, we're forced to unite as communities. Especially in winter, when snows fall deep and the temperature plummets, maybe we finally feel a time where harmony supersedes victory. Truly, the biggest competition in mountain culture should be the age-old battle for fresh tracks.

On the following pages, we submit to British Columbia's grand celebration of competition in a decidedly Kootenay way. Yes, competition surrounds us. It's not going away — especially this year, when nearly 5,500 athletes will travel from around the world to test their mettle in the woods, snows and ice of our fair province. Let the Games begin.