
Squamish athlete chosen for Canada's Paralympic ski team

Alex Cairns expected to be competing in the giant slalom and slalom events

Steven Chua / Squamish Chief

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A local athlete will be representing Squamish at the Paralympics in PyeongChang this year.

Alex Cairns has been chosen to join Canada's para-alpine ski team. He's expected to be competing in the giant slalom and slalom events.

"It's a wild feeling for me," said the 26-year-old, who's scheduled to head to Korea on March 4.

There was a little bit of suspense in the time leading up to qualifying for the Games, which Cairns will be competing in for the first time.

He said leading up to the Games, a number of world cups were cancelled, which made it challenging for some to advance their world rankings.

Cairns was able to qualify, but he said he was still quite nervous about his chances.

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“You kind of look at how far you’ve gone and where you’re at,” he said. “It’s worth sticking out.”

The road to the Olympics has been a long time coming.

Cairns was born with spina bifida, a condition where there is incomplete closing around the backbone and membranes around the spinal cord.

This has resulted in paralysis at the two lowest vertebra in the lumbar spine.

However, Cairns has quad strength, so as a youth, he cycled and wound up competing in some provincial downhill races.

However, at age 16, a torn knee put an end to biking. However, a new interest was eventually born. After looking at YouTube videos of athletes pulling off freestyle sit skiing tricks, Cairns decided to take to the slopes as well.

Since then, he’s been travelling the world competing and training.

Most recently, he’s been training abroad in places like in Switzerland and Austria.

“Most of what we do really is getting ready for that minute-and-a-half,” he said.

In addition to skiing, Cairns loves to explore the surrounding area he’s competing in, which is something he admitted — with a chuckle — can work against him.

In a single day off, he described going from Saas-Fee in Switzerland all the way to Chamonix, France, just to get a 15-minute glimpse of what it’s like to be on Mont Blanc — and then going back all the way to Switzerland.

“Something to check off the list, I thought,” he said with a laugh.

The PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Winter Games start on March 9 and finish on March 18.

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