



WinSport Mission: To provide excellence in winter sports facilities and training for Canadian athletes to **discover, develop** and **excel**, through a sustainable business model."

winSPORT WEEKLY

Friday, December 12, 2014



Our athletes up close

Alex Harvey
Cross-country

The 26-year-old native of St-Ferreol-les-neiges, Quebec, has hit the podium in a number of World Cup pursuit, skiathlon and sprint events over his career. He was a member of the Canadian team that finished fourth in the team sprint at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

Academy coach all about 'style

For nearly 15 years, Rex Thomas has been at the forefront of slopestyle skiing.

He was a professional freestyle skier and he coached at a high level in his native British Columbia. He watched the success of the Canadian team at the 2014 Winter Olympics and now he hopes he can have an impact on Canada's future Olympic success in slopestyle as the head coach of the WinSport Academy A team.

He says it was a no-brainer to take the job with WinSport when the offer came back in May.

"Honestly, it's the facility and just the capability to run a full-time program with athletes that would commit to a full-time program and parents that would

commit to a full-time program," said Thomas. "It's nice to see that there are people out there that have the same vision that I had in Vancouver, that this is now an Olympic sport and you need to treat it as such."

Thomas, who is originally from Golden, B.C., took up freestyle skiing in 1996. Two years later he was on the B.C. provincial team before graduating to the national

development team the next season. One year later, he turned pro in the Big Air, halfpipe and slopestyle disciplines.

After five years as a pro, he moved on to other ventures. He spent the past three seasons as the high performance manager for the Vancouver Freestyle Ski Club.



Rex Thomas

At the peak of his competitive career, Thomas was considered among the best in the world. He competed at the X Games from 2001 to 2005. Back then, that was the Olympics for slopestyle skiers.

This past February, the sport made its Olympic debut, with Canadian women winning gold and bronze.

"I think the success from the Olympics might have spurred some interest. But I think the interest has been growing and growing in slopestyle skiing for the last 15 or 20 years," said Thomas. "The success we had at the Olympics legitimized the slopestyle, big air, halfpipe aspect of the sport as legitimate, not just something my kid is going out to do to get them off my back."

Thomas, whose seven-member A team is currently in Mammoth, Calif., training, has a five-year plan in mind for his team. It's all about development.



Rex Thomas kicks up his heels during the X Games back in 2001.

"I am hoping to move athletes up to national teams on a yearly basis. But at the same time, I am looking to develop them as over-all athletes, making sure that their skill development comes back to balance," he said. "A lot of athletes right now have one or two

focusses and then everything else slides to the wayside. It works well at lower levels events, you can sneak by like that, but with the events we are going to attend, you can't get by only having one or two strong sides. You can't just be a one-trick pony."

Calgary contingent eyes home track triumph

The last time the FIL World Cup luge event was held in Calgary was three years ago.

On that chilly evening, Calgary native Alex Gough made history by becoming the first Canadian to win a World Cup luge race on home soil.

"I'm a little in shock and a little in awe. I'm so over the moon right now. It's incredible," she told reporters back then.

Fast forward to 2014 and Gough has had more than a doz-

en trips to the podium in singles and the team relay event.

She is back on the WinSport sliding track today for the Calgary stop on the World Cup tour, hoping

to hit the podium again. The only difference is that it is her season debut after skipping the first two stops of the season.

"I'm going to go out there and slide the best I can and see what happens," Gough told The Canadian Press. "It's



Alex Gough

always tough when you come in partway through the season or even the first race of the season,

which is usually in Austria, I have no idea where I'll sit.

"It makes it kind of unnerving in some ways, but it's good in some ways. I have no idea where I should sit so all I can do is focus on myself and get the best out of it that I can."

It will be Gough's first international event since the 2014

Olympics in Russia, where she finished fourth. Calgary's Kim McRae, who was fifth in Sochi, is also in action today (6 p.m.).

Justin Snith of Calgary and Tristan Walker of Cochrane are competing in doubles on Friday (3 p.m.) as well. They crashed in their season-opening race and were ninth in their second race.

Calgary's Sam Edney is competing Saturday (11:15 a.m.) for the first time since the Olympics after missing the first two races of the season due to a sports hernia.

DEVELOP

EXCEL

Speed skaters stay on roll on World Cup tour

Canada's speed skaters led the path to the podium this past weekend, with Ottawa's **Ivanie Blondin** and **Laurient Dubreuil** of Levis, Que., extending their World Cup medal streaks to three races.

Dubreuil was third in the 500-metre event Sunday at an International Skating Union World Cup in Berlin, while Blondin won silver in the women's mass start.

"Although I'm a little bit disap-

pointed after letting a chance for victory slip because of my very bad start, I'm quite satisfied with my overall performance," said Dubreuil.

Cross-country: **Alex Harvey** led the Canadian team in Lillehammer, Norway, with a seventh-place finish on Sunday in a 15-kilometre class-ski World Cup event to finish 10th overall in the mini-tour.

Harvey, who finished fifth on

Friday in a skate-ski sprint event, is seventh overall in World Cup standings.

Biathlon: Canadian biathletes are serving notice to the rest of the world that they will be a force this season, with Calgary's **Nathan Smith** finishing ninth on Saturday in the men's 10-kilometre sprint race in Oestersund, Sweden. Canmore's **Rosanna Crawford** was 12th in the women's 7.5-kilometre sprint.

WinSport's Dunn sets sights on Aussie bobsleigh success

When Simon Dunn arrived in Canada 13 months ago, he'd never even seen snow. And the only ice he was used to was in a cold beverage.

Since his arrival, however, the Australia native has embraced Canadian culture and winter sport. Part of the reason is because of his job with WinSport in a guest services capacity at the Performance Training Centre.

He is immersing himself in sport while training with the Calgary-based Australian bobsleigh team, hoping to land a spot in the two-man sled for the 2018 Olympics.

"It's definitely 2018 that's the goal, I would love to be there. But with four years to go, it's about being the best athlete I can," said Dunn.

When he initially came to Canada, the idea was to play a high level of rugby with the Calgary Canucks Rugby Club. He played the sport back home and was looking for a new challenge on Calgary pitches. However, after seeing bobsleigh up close and after chatting with Australian pilot Heath Spence – who trains at WinSport and drives public sleds in the summer – he decided to try it.

"When I started here, straightaway it caught my eye," said the 27-year-old Dunn, who is training as a brakeman for pilot Lucas Mata. Mata was a brakeman for Spence's sled that finished 22nd at the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

"There's a steep learning curve. It's the technique that I struggle with," said Dunn. "I'm used to rugby where it's all gung-ho, you get the ball and run into people, technique is not exactly the main point. Bobsleigh is still a similar concept to rugby, run straight and hard, but there's a lot more technique to it."

When Dunn's not working his



Simon Dunn, right, has teamed up with pilot Lucas Mata in hopes of a trip to the 2018 Winter Olympics as his brakeman.

shift at the Guest Services desk, he's training in the gym, on the track or in the Ice House. During the recent North American Cup at WinSport's track, he pulled 15-hour days to compete and to work his shift. (He launched an online campaign to raise funds for his season – click [here](#).)

He finds it easy to stay motivated given all the high performance athletes that surround him.

"It's definitely inspiring, because the people that I look up to in the sport, I train and slide alongside them," said Dunn. "It's not like rugby back in Australia. You've got club level and you've got elite level and you rarely cross paths. Here, with bobsleigh, because you have the club level, the elite level and national level all in the same place. Pushing next to them is definitely inspiring. You know that you have that goal to attain."

While Dunn is inspired, he also hopes to inspire others.

He has been the subject of media throughout the world as being the only openly gay athlete competing in bobsleigh. He came out nine years ago and is continuing to prove that sexuality doesn't matter when it comes to macho sports such as bobsleigh and rugby.

"I had an aha moment recently where I realized that I'm not just doing this for me," said Dunn. "I've had people write me letters just saying how amazing it is that an out gay male can do this sport. Similar to rugby, it's very hyper-masculine, so it's not really a sport that a gay man is associated with. It's good that hopefully I can break down barriers. If there is one kid out there that sees me doing the sport and then realizes they can also do the sport, then it's kind of a win."

Last week's top-10 results

Sunday Speed Skating World Cup At Berlin

3. Laurent Dubreuil, Levis, Que., men's 500m
2. Ivanie Blondin, Ottawa, women's mass start; 6. Kali Christ, Regina, women's mass start.
6. Denny Morrison, Fort St. John, B.C., men's 1,500m.
5. Robert Watson, Whitby, Ont., men's mass start.
- Cross-country World Cup At Lillehammer, Norway**
10. Alex Harvey, Saint-Ferreol les Neiges, Que, men's 15-kilometre classic-ski

Saturday Biathlon World Cup At Oestersund, Sweden

9. Nathan Smith, Calgary, men's 10-kilometre sprint
- Speed Skating World Cup At Berlin**
8. Denny Morrison, Fort St. John, B.C., men's 1,000m
4. Ivanie Blondin, Ottawa, Kali Christ, Regina, Josie Spence, Kamloops, B.C., women's team pursuit.
10. Ted-Jan Bloemen (Dutch-born, skating for Canada), men's 5,000m

Friday Cross-country World Cup At Lillehammer, Norway

5. Alex Harvey, Saint-Ferreol les Neiges, Que, men's sprint
- Speed Skating World Cup At Berlin**
2. Laurent Dubreuil, Levis, Que., men's 500m
8. Gilmore Junio, Calgary, men's 500m
7. Ivanie Blondin, Ottawa, women's 3,000m

Events at the Park

Ski and snowboard hill
Weekdays: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Weekends: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Markin MacPhail Centre
Friday-Sunday: Springbank Minor Hockey Association peewee tournament. Games throughout the day at all arenas.

Sliding track
Friday: World Cup luge, Doubles race at 3 p.m., women's race at 6 p.m.
Saturday: World Cup luge, men's race at 11:15 a.m., sprint race at 3:45 p.m.

CANADA'S SPORTS HALL OF FAME
Tuesday to Sunday: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

You Tube

In case you missed our most recent Ask Ian segment, find out what it takes to build our terrain park. Click [here](#) to watch.