

Ganong confident Olympic medal in his future

Publisher's note: *This is one of a series of stories about Lake Tahoe area athletes who hope to compete in the 2018 Olympics in South Korea.*

By Kathryn Reed

PARK CITY, Utah – In a sport where fractions of a second can make the difference between being on the podium or not, what one wears can impact the final outcome.

“We were playing catch up the last few years with suit development. Now we may have something better,” Travis Ganong said.

Ganong, who was born in Truckee and calls Squaw Valley ski resort home, knows all about fractions of a second. At the Sochi Olympic Games in 2014 he placed fifth in downhill. He was 0.31 seconds from bronze, 0.35 from silver, and 0.41 from gold.

Will a better engineered racing suit make the difference? Maybe.

He and other U.S. Ski Team members were in North Carolina in August testing suits at the wind tunnel there. In a sport where speeds can reach 80 mph, aerodynamics and weight are the fine details that complement the athleticism required to compete at the most elite level.

Russia was Ganong's first Olympics. He also competed in super G, where he placed 23. Since then, he has been on the downhill World Cup podium four times.



Travis Ganong is more confident in his ability to medal at the 2018 Winter Games. Photo/Kathryn Reed

At the U.S. Ski Team media summit last month in Utah, Ganong talked about how much different the course will be in PyeongChang, South Korea, compared to Sochi. He called the 2018 course “mellow,” “not that steep” and “not scary.” He also said it’s fun, there will be no room for error and that it will look great to the television audience.

While there is a new team event for the alpine racers, Ganong is opting not to participate, but instead is focusing on downhill and super G.

This time around Ganong will have experience to count on. Tactically, he said, he now knows when to push and when to hold back. Before it was all about going 100 percent.

“The mental part is what separates athletes,” Ganong said. “Now it’s easy to flip a switch when I need to go faster.”

His girlfriend, who skis for the Canadian team, is one of his

sounding boards. "She's my best mental coach," Ganong said.

Teammates and those who helped define men's skiing in the United States are also integral to his development. While they will be competing against each other for a spot on the team going to South Korea in February, there is a solidarity between them.

Ganong's peers came up with the American downhiller vest. That jean vest circulates among the guys based on who placed the best. Patches and artwork have been added. It's a source of pride to wear it in public after a race.

"We are a band of brothers. We try to beat the Europeans. We work together," Ganong said.

Daron Rahlves, the most decorated male skier in the U.S. in downhill and Super G, calls with encouragement. He, too, lives in Truckee.

It is Truckee and Squaw that are still home to Ganong. He trains there in the off-season.

Skiing is what he knows. He was 1½ years old when he first hit the slopes. Today he wants to give back to the sport. He's doing so by being a mentor to athletes at the Squaw Valley Academy. There are also two scholarships in Ganong's name.

Ganong wants to instill in these youngsters a sense of enjoying the whole mountain and not just focusing on gates.

"I want to bring the fun back to ski racing," he said. While he doesn't see being a coach in his future, what Ganong does envision is "sharing the passion" of skiing and racing with generations to come even while he pursues his dreams to be the top downhill racer in the world.