

Tahoe's Smaine wins freeski halfpipe

By Tom Kelly, U.S. Ski and Snowboard

On a night when it really counted, Brita Sigourney (Carmel) came through with a Toyota U.S. Grand Prix win in the Visa freeski halfpipe at Mammoth Mountain and a ticket to PyeongChang. California crowd favorite Kyle Smaine (South Lake Tahoe), the 2015 World Champion, finally nailed his run on the third try to take the victory for the men.

Sigourney, who stepped it up last weekend at Aspen-Snowmass to finish second, was strong and consistent all night, putting down a 91.20 on her second run for the victory over Olympic champion Maddie Bowman (Meyers) and Devin Logan (West Dover, Vt.). All three qualified objectively for PyeongChang. It will be a repeat Olympics for Sigourney, who was sixth in Sochi. Bowman won gold in Sochi, while Logan won silver in Slopestyle. It will be Logan's first Olympic halfpipe appearance.

"I don't know, I just have been feeling really good," said Sigourney, looking back on her last two weekends of qualifying. "I think it's all just confidence. I got a couple good results and I think it goes a long ways."

Sigourney joins a very strong team anchored by Bowman, who won gold four years ago. "I am so stoked on our team that qualified," she said. "Devin and Maddie are my best friends, so couldn't be happier to be going with them."

Smaine came through on his third and final run to lay down a 92.20, winning over Alex Ferreira (Aspen, Colo.) and Torin Yater-Wallace (Aspen, Colo.). All three had their podium performances on the third run. Ferreira and Yater-Wallace will

join Olympic champion David Wise of Reno to the Olympics, qualifying objectively. It will be Ferreira's first Olympics. He set himself up well with a win in the Dew Tour a month ago. Yater-Wallace will be going back for his second Olympics.

"I can not believe it, I seriously can not believe it," said a jubilant Ferreira, who narrowly missed out on the 2014 team. "I am the happiest human in all the land and so happy to be here and along for the ride."

What made it even sweeter for Ferreira was that his longtime Aspen friend Yater-Wallace was coming along too. "It's really special to be going with Alex to the Olympics," said Yater-Wallace. "Unfortunately last time around he was skiing insanely well, but so was the rest of the field. Being his first Olympics, it's just an unreal feeling, I am just really proud of him, it's been a long time in the making of Alex really blowing up in the scene and he's capitalizing now. He's proved that he has at the top level and he's been getting podiums."

Yater-Wallace had a lot to reflect on himself with the medical challenges he has endured over the last few years.

"It's a very special night locking in my confirmation to the Olympics team," he said. "It's really an honor to get one of the first three spots this time around vs a discretionary position like Sochi. That was one of the big things in my head was to actually prove that I could ski and get there. For myself, it's been kind of a tough year, there was a lot of pressure being as I won the first selection event, and since we have had a lot of strange halfpipes working against us with the lack of snow along with a slight foot injury that I have been working on, I am just so glad it all came together and couldn't be more thankful. I am really happy to be feeling better and skiing like myself again."

Logan came away from Sochi with slopestyle silver, but had

really wanted to double up in halfpipe,. “It’s definitely a relief,” said Logan. “Four years ago I didn’t make the pipe team and I was so close and really wanted it. Now I’ve come out four years later and will be headed to the Olympics for pipe. Slope is still undecided, but this is definitely weight off the shoulders, I am feeling confident and hopefully get another spot and go for two.”

She was optimistic about the upcoming Olympics, with the opening ceremonies just three weeks away. “I am so excited to go back to Korea – the people, the culture, it’s all amazing there,” she said. “It was the best pipe I have ever ridden, and last year I got 2nd in the test event. Hopefully I can take this confidence into the Olympics and keep it all rolling.”

A possible fourth spot for men or women may be announced next week. On the men’s side, the competition was fierce and deep with both 2014 Olympian Aaron Blunck (Crested Butte, Colo.) and Youth Olympics Games medalist Birk Irving (Winter Park, Colo.) made strong bids.