Anderson 5th at Olympic test event

By USSA

Just one week after the Milan Big Air, snowboarders headed to PyeongChang for the big air Olympic test event on Saturday. Ryan Stassel (Anchorage) and Julia Marino (Westport, Conn.) grabbed podiums for the U.S. team.

Jamie Anderson of Meyers took fifth.

On the tallest big air scaffolding ramp in the world in the heart of PyeongChang's Alpensia resort, reigning slopestyle champion Stassel threw down huge jumps with a variety of tricks—including a switch backside 1260 and a backside triple cork 1440s—to take third. He finished behind Canadians Mark McMorris and Max Parrot.

After winning the Big Air at Fenway last season, Marino showed that she's here to stay in big air, landing on the podium in second place. She finished behind Austrian Anna Gasser and ahead of Katie Ormerod of Great Britain.

"We are fortunate to have a U.S. team full of such bold, courageous and talented riders," said Head Coach Mike Jankowski. "Momentum is on our side as we transition into our Olympic prep season and the team is ready to keep charging ahead towards 2018."

Washoe Lake State Park planning winter events

Washoe Lake State Park has a slew of events planned for December.

They include:

- Dec. 11: Intro to Washoe Lake

Learn more about Washoe Lake State Park during this 45-minute indoor presentation starting at 1pm at the park office.

- Dec. 13: Full Moon Hike

This will be a super moon; the moon is at its closest point to the Earth in its orbit so it is larger and brighter than normal. The event starts at 6pm. Meet at the sand dunes along the Dune Trek Trail. Reservations are required; call 775.687.4319. Participants should bring a flashlight, dress for the weather and wear good hiking shoes.

- Dec. 21: Winter Solstice Hike

Bundle up for a night hike on the longest night of the year. This hike, which follows the South Loop Equestrian Trail, is relatively flat and is approximately three miles long, with great open views of the night sky and surrounding area. Park staff will discuss winter constellations, weather permitting, and wildlife in the park. Meet at 6pm at the Equestrian Pavilion. Reservations are required; call 775.687.4319. Red lights are recommended as they do not negatively affect night vision. Participants should dress in layers for the weather and wear good hiking boots.

These events are included with the park’s entrance fee of $7/vehicle. Nevada residents receive a $2 discount. For more info, call 775.687.4319 or email washoelake@hdiss.net.

Great grades result in free ski days at Sierra

By Susan Wood

OK kids – get perfect grades and your success could lead to being graded at the Winter Olympic Games one day.

And you'll be in good company.

Gold medalist Maddie Bowman of Meyers, who told *Lake Tahoe News* she plans to compete in the Pyeongchang, South Korea, Olympics Games in 2018, started her skiing career at Sierra-at-Tahoe. She achieved a 4.0 grade point average and took full advantage of a program there that provides a free season pass for students of Lake Tahoe Unified School District. She used the program for seven years from middle school through high school.

The benefit started out in 1999 with the ski resort 12 miles west of Meyers giving away nine passes. Sierra now averages about 300 a year. A few years ago, the community-minded ski resort ended up with a record 377 doled out.

"I would attribute a lot of my career to my ski time at Sierra," Bowman, 22, told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Maddie Bowman went from straight A student to Olympic gold medalist with Sierra-at-Tahoe's help. Photo/LTN file

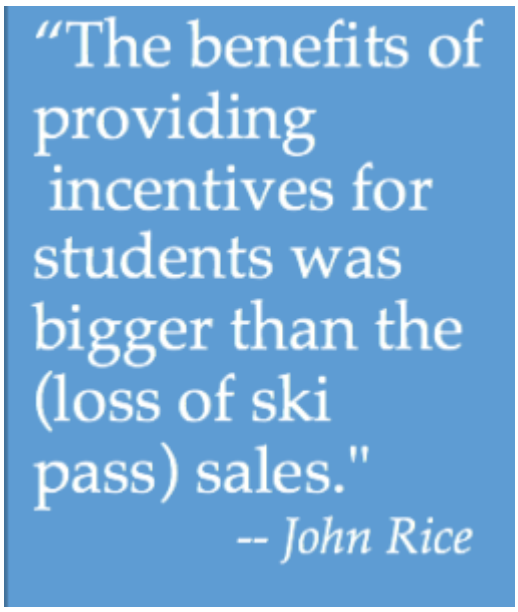
The freestyle skier is known for her death-defying feats on skis in the superpipe. She won gold in the Winter X Games from 2013-16 and more of the metal at the 2014 Winter Olympics at Sochi in the halfpipe.

"I think the free pass did motivate me in school, and it was a nice reward," Bowman said. "I struggled with English. I still do."

After leaving South Tahoe High School, she's attending her third year of college at Westminster University in Salt Lake City.

Although Bowman's professional, competitive skiing career has taken her all over the world, her heart is anchored in Tahoe as reflected in numerous Facebook posts from all seasons.

But it’s Bowman sliding on the slopes that captured the hearts and minds of young and old – especially in Tahoe. The ski area hosted a huge party for Bowman and fellow Olympic “golden girls” Jamie Anderson and Hannah Teter.





“It’s hard to put the whole experience into words. The skiing is amazing. There is all sorts of terrain for everyone, and

you can get pretty creative with it," Bowman said of her home resort. "Sierra was a second home to me. It's like a big family up there, and the people and mountain teach you a lot – not only about skiing, but about life. I was lucky to grow up there."

And there you have a spilling of the heart partly because of the unique influence of general manager extraordinaire John Rice.

The straight A season pass program began as a personal gesture from Rice to his sons, Ian and Brendan, when they were attending Meyers Elementary School in the fourth and fifth grades, respectively.

"They came home with A's and B's, and I asked them what it would take for them to get all A's," Rice said, adding: "…something their father only did one semester in all of school."

Smart kids. They countered with asking what they would get.

"I told them: 'Anything you want'," Rice recalled.

"Anything in the world?" the boys tested their dad.

The prize was agreed upon – BMX bikes. And the boys consequently pulled in straight A's.

Of course, they didn't want the slap-together, inexpensive Walmart variety, Rice noted.

"They wanted Specialized, single-crank, aluminum 360 handlebar, high-end $600 bikes," he quipped.

"I was amazed at how the extra motivation made them try that much harder, and I shared with their teachers that if any kids in their class got all A's, Sierra would give them a season pass," Rice dictated.

The word spread like wildfire after that first year. Soon, every teacher in the school participated. Then, calls came in from Tahoe Valley, Bijou and Sierra House, to which Sierra-at-Tahoe offered the same deal.



Sierra rewards about 300 students a year with free passes based on their grades. Photo/LTN file

The program has been extended to private schools, home schools and others that fall under the education umbrella.

“The benefits of providing incentives for students was bigger than the (loss of ski pass) sales,” Rice said.

Through the years, the straight A program has even crossed the state line – with Zephyr Cove Elementary and Whittell High School joining in the quest.

The ski-pass program – which amounts to a value of up to about $300 – is so popular, Sierra-at-Tahoe was forced to draw boundaries as the requests expanded into Carson City, Reno and even to the San Francisco Bay Area.

“Sierra recognizes that not all students have the same resources to achieve the goal of straight A’s. In the past, we have given teachers day tickets for students who have made quantum leaps in their progress. Not all who earn free passes can afford to ski, but you better believe they come up and get their pass,” Rice continued. “The program has been successful beyond our dreams, and I have a stack of thank you cards and letters to prove it.”

A note of gratitude was offered from LTUSD, which embraces the program.

“The program encourages students to do their best work and shows them that hard work pays off,” district spokeswoman Shannon Chandler told *LTN*.

“A lot of our families are unable to afford (ski passes). Even if just one person in the family earns a ski pass from Sierra, it’s a huge help toward the purchase of passes for the whole family. The program also promotes parent involvement in their child’s academic career,” said Chandler, who added personally that she continues “to stay on” her children to strive for “that golden ticket.”

And while not every straight A student will have the successes on the mountain Bowman has had, time on the slopes will only make youngsters better skiers and boarders.

Note: *Sierra-at-Tahoe opens today for the 2016-17 season.*

Scientists to map aquatic

species in western U.S.

By Keith Ridler, AP

It sounds like a big fish story: a plan to create a biodiversity map identifying thousands of aquatic species in every river and stream in the western U.S.

But scientists say they're steadily reeling in that whopper and by next summer will have the first Aquatic Environmental DNA Atlas available for the public.

Boise-based U.S. Forest Service fisheries biologist Dan Isaak is leading the project and says such a map could help with land management decisions and deciding where to spend limited money and resources.

"It's kind of the Holy Grail for biologists to know what a true biodiversity map looks like," he said. "To have that formatted digitally so you can do lots of science with it will be transformative in terms of the quality of information we'll have to conserve species."

Isaak said annual surveys could provide snapshots so scientists can see how biodiversity and ecosystems change over time. Because of the project's immense scale, he said, sample collecting likely will require help from many entities, including citizen scientists.

The map eventually will include everything from insects to salmon to river otters. It's possible because of a new technology that can identify stream inhabitants by analyzing water samples containing DNA. The technology also can be used to identify invasive species.

That technology is evolving, said Michael Schwartz, the Forest Service's director of the National Genomics Center for Wildlife and Fish Conservation in Missoula, Montana.

Currently, he said, scientists can detect only one species at a time in a stream sample. He said the goal is to identify multiple species in a single test from one sample. A rough estimate for when that might be possible is about a year, he said.

The trove of information has the potential to be so vast that questions not presently imagined might arise.

“Any time science undertakes large projects like this, the payouts can be in directions you don’t expect,” Schwartz said.

Ultimately, he said, the publicly available information could be used by someone with an iPad or other device who could go to a section of river and see what species it contains.

The Aquatic Environmental DNA Atlas for the western U.S. has its genesis in a smaller-scale project called the Bull Trout Environmental DNA Atlas involving five states – Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington – where the federally protected fish is found. That effort, Isaak said, has discovered bull trout in areas where they were thought not to exist.

Isaak also has been working on something called the Cold Water Climate Shield to identify streams that could serve as a refuge for cold water species, such as bull trout, if global warming continues. That map uses millions of temperature recordings going back decades and has expanded to include most of the western U.S. Stream temperatures in lower elevations have risen several degrees over the past 30 years, Isaak said. The DNA Atlas has been confirming the kind of species present as predicted by the Cold Water Climate Shield, Schwartz said.

What scientists ultimately hope to do is combine all the information from stream temperatures, DNA Atlas sampling, topography and weather patterns to get more insights into species distribution patterns and even how entire ecosystems function.

“The data sets can be bigger because computers are bigger,” Isaak said.

Even for Isaak, who is called a visionary by his colleagues, the leaps in technology that make his ideas possible can be mind-boggling.

“It’s just been an ongoing revelation,” he said, recalling 15 years ago using pencil and paper to make streamside observations. “It still seems like magic to me that you can go take a water sample and you have instruments powerful enough to discern what species are present.”

Free-climber scales Yosemite rock wall in record time

By Scott Smith, AP

Gripping tiny slices of sheer rock and hoisting himself up 3,000 feet with only his strength, Adam Ondra quietly inched his way up one of the world’s most challenging rock walls and into the record books, a spokesman for the climber said.

Ondra, a 23-year-old from the Czech Republic, took eight days to finish the free-climb up the Dawn Wall of the famed El Capitan in Yosemite National Park.

He completed the second-ever free assent of the wall Monday, said John Dicuollo, a spokesman for Black Diamond Equipment, which sponsors Ondra.

Nearly two years ago, U.S. climbers Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson were first to chart and conquer the route, a feat that took the pair 19 days.

“It’s like being a proud parent, in a way,” Jorgeson said Tuesday, honored that Ondra was drawn to the challenge. “That’s the point: To raise the bar so someone else can do the same thing and stand on our shoulders.”

Unlike climbers who need more elaborate equipment, free-climbers use their strength and ability to grasp tiny cracks and lips on the granite rock with their fingertips and toes. They use ropes and harnesses only for safety to catch a fall.

Throughout the climb, Ondra took to social media to post about the cold, soaking rain and the pain from the granite wearing down the skin on his fingers. He also celebrated victories.

“Hard to find the words to describe how I feel,” he wrote on Instagram as he neared the top. “We made it up to the Wino Tower and no more hard pitches guard my way to the top. I could not have asked for a better day.”

Ondra, pictured in jeans and a T-shirt pumping his arms after completing a difficult stretch of the climb, was not available for comment. Dicuollo said Ondra’s cellphone was off as he celebrated by resting.

Ondra completed the climb in his first visit to Yosemite Valley. He arrived in mid-October, spending several days practicing some of the wall’s most harrowing sections, before launching the formal climb on Nov. 14.

To rest, Ondra and his team pitched tents suspended on the wall’s sheer face towering hundreds of feet above Yosemite Valley. The park — famous for its grand views, giant sequoias and pristine meadows — is known for attracting daredevil adventurers from around the globe.

Ondra had already distinguished himself as the first to hold two world championships in climbing, his sponsors said. Earlier this year, he also completed his university degree in business management.

He closely monitored Caldwell and Jorgeson’s accomplishment in early 2015, drawing on inspiration from their climb to attempt his own, his sponsor said.

Yosemite climber and historian Ken Yager said there is no doubt that Ondra is the strongest climber alive today. Yager, however, credits Caldwell for taking years to chart the path up the Dawn Wall, the most difficult of several routes that climbers can take up El Capitan.

“Hopefully, Adam, with his skills, will come back and pioneer his own route,” Yager said. “He can push it to his own level. He’s got the skills to. It’s whether he has the desire, too.”

Douglas County SAR preps for winter

Douglas County Search and Rescue participated in training which included a segment with CareFlight.

The training included topics of emergency locater transmitter search, dealing with multi-casualty patients from a mock vehicle roll over, patient packaging, and loading of a patient onto CareFlight.

CareFlight personnel also gave instruction on the safety aspects of working with helicopters in search and rescue operation.

As winter approaches, search and rescue calls involve lost or injured skiers, snowboarders, cross country snowshoers, ice climbers and those riding a snowmobile. Most of the calls occur during the dark hours and bad weather.

Enthusiastic snow lovers flock to Heavenly



Snowboarders and skiers enjoy good coverage on limited terrain at Heavenly on Nov. 23. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

It didn’t matter that only one run was open. Hundreds of people were taking lap after lap after lap at Heavenly Mountain Resort today.

It was opening day after all and people had pent up energy having not skied since April.

Not everyone, though, was on the mountain to ride.



Playing in the snow instead of skiing is more fun for some people. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“We were both off all week and we said let’s go somewhere we’ve never been. And here we are,” Heather Toxey of Birmingham, Ala., told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We paid 100 bucks to ride the Gondola up to see what it was all about.” And she had no regrets.

Toxey was all smiles talking about the snow, what she has seen in Tahoe – and now she plans to come back in the summer.

Neither she nor her husband, Derek, ski. They were perfectly content to hang out in the Tamarack Lodge.

The lodge was full. And like most holiday periods not everyone had ski or snowboard boots on. It was just about getting that vibe of being in a ski lodge. For some youngsters they were more interested in building snowmen and throwing snowballs outside of the lodge.



Hundreds of people turn out for the first day of the 2016-17 season. Photo/Kathryn Reed

For the more serious they were getting off the gondola while others were still buying their ticket. Martin Hollay, who is in his mid-90s, was departing the gondola about 10:30am Wednesday. (The legendary skier from Hungary was instrumental in designing the cross country course on the West Shore for the 1960 Squaw Valley Olympics.) He is at Heavenly nearly every day.

On the other end of the age spectrum was a 2-year-old in the season pass line with mom who was holding the little one's skis.

For Allan Zhang, 15, he got in a little late Tuesday night with his family so he was trying to catch some zzzzzzs at lunch in order to be ready to go back out for some afternoon runs.

He and his dad, Eric, drove up from San Jose for a couple days.



Allan Zhang of San Jose rests before heading out later Wednesday afternoon. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“For the first day it is very good. We want to start early and enjoy the entire season,” Eric Zhang said.

The only lift operating on Nov. 23 was Tamarack.

The roar of the snowmaking machines was loud. Visibility was limited in the morning. The weather was definitely better at lake level than on the mountain – but that wasn’t a bad thing because at times it was snowing. It is plenty cold to keep making snow.

Between the fake stuff and Mother Nature more lifts and runs will keep opening.

Just being able to snowboard on opening day was satisfying for Chris Conover. He moved to South Lake Tahoe four months ago from Fresno.

“I feel blessed we’ve gotten the weather we have. In Fresno we are out of water,” Conover said. “We should all be thankful; every day there is snow on the ground it’s a good day.”

Rain, snow, sun for Thanksgiving weekend in Tahoe

Thanksgiving Day is likely to be the best day to travel this weekend in the Sierra.

While a storm early today didn’t drop much white stuff at lake level, it did bring several inches to the higher reaches of area ski resorts.

Another storm is slated to move into the area late Friday. An even colder system will blow in Sunday.

Wind and cold are almost guaranteed by the National Weather Service in Reno, with snow and rain mixed in throughout the weekend.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Vegas venues would add oomph to Tahoe Olympic bid

By Sean Whales, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The Lake Tahoe area still dreams of hosting its second Winter Olympics. And the International Olympic Committee's new push for regional bids could give Las Vegas an important role in any Northern Nevada proposal to host the sports showcase.

"We believe that Lake Tahoe will be the site of the next Winter Olympics in the U.S.," said former Nevada Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, who has been leading the effort to bring the games to the state for more than a decade as chairman of the Reno Tahoe Winter Games Coalition. "It is our goal and our hope. But it is complicated."

Jon Killoran, chief executive officer for the coalition, said the IOC issued a policy called Agenda 2020, which urges bidding cities to minimize infrastructure costs through regional efforts.

Nevada's opportunity to host a Winter Games – perhaps as soon as 2026 – has been enhanced by the opening of T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, soon to be home of the city's new National Hockey League franchise, as well a potential new 65,000-seat domed stadium in the city.

Read the whole story

Daily fantasy sports rivals to merge

By Philip Marcelo, AP

BOSTON — Daily fantasy sports rivals DraftKings and FanDuel have agreed to merge after months of speculation and increasing regulatory scrutiny.

The two companies made the announcement Friday, saying the combined organization would be able to reduce costs as they work to become profitable and battle with regulators across the country to remain legal.

The companies have each raised millions of dollars through investors and sponsorship deals, but state attorneys general, lawmakers and regulators have questioned whether their online games — in which players pick teams of real life athletes and vie for cash and other prizes based on how those athletes do in actual games — amount to illegal sports betting.

The companies said in their statement that the merger, which still requires federal approval, would help them more efficiently lobby policymakers for a "standard regulatory framework" for the relatively new industry, which grew out of the traditional season-long fantasy sports competitions played by millions of Americans.

DraftKings CEO Jason Robins, who would take over as chief executive of the new company, said the merger also would help the companies develop a better product — like offering more varied contests, developing loyalty programs and improving their website features.

"Being able to combine DraftKings and FanDuel presents a tremendous opportunity for us to further innovate and disrupt the sports industry," said FanDuel CEO Nigel Eccles, who would

become the combined company’s board chairman.

The deal, which has been rumored for months, has raised questions among analysts about whether the merging of two companies that represent about 90 percent of the daily fantasy sports market would violate federal anti-trust laws. Larger companies like Yahoo, ESPN and CBS Sports dominate the broader fantasy industry, but are relatively small players in daily fantasy.

The companies didn’t address regulatory concerns in their announcement.

It’s also not yet clear how the merger will work on a practical level.

Financial terms were not disclosed Friday and the companies will maintain their separate brand names and operations until the deal is finalized, likely later in 2017.

The combined company is expected to be co-headquartered in New York and Boston under the agreement. DraftKings is currently based in Boston and FanDuel in New York.

And seats on the board of directors would be split evenly between the two companies, with three directors from DraftKings, three directors from FanDuel and one independent director.