

Nationals at stake in adaptive race at Sierra

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Riding the same boardercross route that has enabled Joanie Anderson to become a world-class athlete did not deter or intimidate these riders. This particular group went up and over the rollers on Friday like they may follow in her footsteps.

The only difference is they will be doing it with prosthetics.



Mike Shea and Evan Strong are ready to tackle the boardercross at Sierra. Photos/Kathryn Reed

“It’s my first time to ride with other amputees. You learn from each other,” said Mike Shea, who lives in Castaic in Southern California. He comes to Lake Tahoe a few times a year to snowboard.

He was an able bodied snowboarder until a ski rope wrapped around his leg when he fell out of a boat severed his leg. Shea was back on the slopes a few months after the

debilitating accident, but he admits he had to relearn the sport.

Brady Gunsch, who is a coach at Sierra-at-Tahoe, dispensed advice to the adaptive riders in advance of today's race. Adaptive boardercross is part of the USASA's list of events today at Sierra.

"They won't change the rollers, but they'll put a little more lip on it (for the race)," Gunsch told the handful of riders at the top of Smokey.

He told them they can rub against another rider, but pushing is not allowed.



Mike Shea, right, listens to Coach Brady Gunsch.

Evan Strong of Nevada City has been competing in skateboarding for years – even before his accident – so transitioning to snowboarding competitions has not been too difficult. This is his third winter on a board.

"I want to inspire abled and disabled to feel passionate about anything. To be alive," Strong said.

He wants to see how far he can go with snowboarding.

Strong is headed to Vancouver in March to be part of the Paralympic Games. He'll be in a skateboarding exhibition during the Opening Ceremonies in Vancouver. One day he'd like

to compete for a medal in the Games.

All of these athletes came together because of Adaptive Action Sports. This group was founded by Daniel Gale and Amy Purdy to encourage people living with permanent physical disabilities to get active.

“The goal is to get people to qualify for the USASA Nationals (in April),” Brent Kuemmerle, the organization’s winter program director, said of today’s event. “We picked Sierra because they have a long standing tradition of putting out Olympic athletes.”