

Rahlves not letting dislocated hip stop him



By Matthew Piper, USSA

NORDEN – Casey Puckett (Aspen, CO) and Daron Rahlves (Sugar Bowl, CA) have had to fast track their recoveries from recent injuries, but their performances training in Rahlves' hometown have bolstered their coach's opinion that the pair should contend for medals.

"Daron and Casey have surpassed my expectations in many ways," said U.S. Olympic Ski Cross Head Coach Tyler Shepherd. "Both have been determined and motivated to get the job done in Vancouver."

The two-man Team is wrapping up an on-snow camp at Sugar Bowl, where the resort built a skiercross course just to give the Americans a chance for some final training before heading to Canada.

Shepherd said the veteran Olympians – the two have been to a combined 11 Games with the U.S. Alpine Ski Team – weren't pulling any punches despite making the trip to Sugar Bowl for "an easy tune up."

"These guys put that 'easy' to bed, and showed me they are in very good form," Shepherd said. "Considering that both are coming back from injuries, their recoveries have been outstanding. I'm not sure other athletes would be capable of such speedy recoveries, but these guys are extremely motivated.

"I stand by what I've been saying, and will say it again that

both Daron and Casey will be podium threats.”

Rahlves dislocated his hip by wrecking in the opening race of the X Games in Aspen, Colo., a little more than two weeks ago, but already he is back on the racecourse and feeling strong. He took fourth in his last World Cup event in Lake Placid on Jan. 24, following a second place in St. Johann, Austria.

“The recovery from my hip dislocation has been amazing,” said Rahlves, who has been doing four to six hours of physical every day, topped off with acupuncture and pool sessions. “The first week on crutches progressed to on snow by Week 2 with minor discomfort.

“Having an Olympic competition just three weeks out has been a huge motivator,” he added. “Staying positive and getting the most out of every day has worked well. On snow, I started off slow and ramped up my intensity on each run. My goal is to ski smooth, relaxed and focused.”

Puckett was hampered by a shoulder injury, but said he “turned a corner” in camp and will be ready when ski cross kicks off as an official Olympics event on Sunday.

Shepherd was grateful his athletes could have access to such a course so late before the Games.

“Sugar Bowl has gone above and beyond, and I can’t thank them enough for the tremendous training venue they have provided,” he said. “A full SX course that would rival any World Cup course, all to ourselves.”

Puckett actually arrived in Vancouver last week, marching in the opening ceremonies, then heading back to Sugar Bowl. He and Rahlves will arrive for a Thursday press conference, with training beginning Friday.