

U.S. slopestyle, halfpipe teams named

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. -- With a host of new action sports events on the docket for the 2014 Olympics in two years, the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association formally announced 2011-12 U.S. Snowboarding and U.S. Freeskiing teams Friday.

The announcement includes first year teams in slopestyle snowboarding and skiing, as well as halfpipe skiing – all the result of decisions by the International Olympic Committee earlier this year to bring the events into the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The USSA named 21 athletes to U.S. Snowboarding halfpipe and slopestyle teams, and 17 to U.S. Freeskiing.

Halfpipe athletes have had outstanding training in Copper's early-opening 22-foot pipe preparing for the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix opener this weekend at the Colorado resort.

Olympic halfpipe bronze medalist and multi-event threat Scotty Lago, along with Sprint U.S. Grand Prix and Euro X Games winner Chas Guldmond of Reno, were among those selected. Holding the coaching reins for the 2012 slopestyle crew is former U.S. Snowboarding athlete Bill Enos, who comes to the team from Waterville Valley.

One of the most recent sports to be added to the winter Olympic lineup, slopestyle snowboarding features a stylized course featuring kickers, rails, boxes and other freestyle features that riders will incorporate into their runs.

The team roster includes a group of athletes known for their slope abilities including Dew Tour slopestyle champion Sage Kotsenburg, X Games silver medalist Eric Willett and 14-year-old slopestyle phenom Ty Walker on the women's side.

The season kicks off for slopestyle snowboarding Dec. 15 when the Winter Dew Tour touches down in Breckenridge. Key events in the season including the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix in Mammoth Mountain, X Games, Dew Tour and the Feb. 10-19 TTR World Championships in Oslo, Norway.

Four Olympic medalists headline the U.S. Snowboarding Halfpipe Pro Team. In addition to his slopestyle team spot, Olympic halfpipe bronze medalist Lago heads a talented U.S. men's halfpipe team joined by fellow 2010 Olympian Greg Bretz of Mammoth Mountain. The U.S. women boast one of the strongest groups in snowboarding history with Olympic and X Games gold medalist Kelly Clark, four-time X Games gold medalist and Olympic silver medalist Gretchen Bleiler and Olympic and X Games champion Hannah Teter of South Lake Tahoe leading the way. Clark was the dominant force in the sport last season, taking down all the major titles.

Joining them for her second year on the Pro Team is 2010 Euro X champ Kaitlyn Farrington, who picked up an opening win in the Copper Grand Prix a year ago as well as second in X Games, plus two-time Olympian Elena Hight of South Lake Tahoe. Matt Ladley moves up from Rookie to Pro Team following his big win in the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix in Mammoth Mountain.

The Pro Team opens its season in the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix this weekend. In addition to the Grand Prix, the comp lineup for the season will be the Dew Tour, X Games, U.S. Open and other major international competitions.

Nine athletes were confirmed on the U.S. Freeskiing Halfpipe Pro Team including X Games champions Jen Hudak and Simon Dumont. The IOC gave the green light to halfpipe skiing last April.

In slopestyle, 10 athletes were confirmed to the U.S. Freeskiing Slopestyle Pro Team. The inaugural team is headlined by AFP Slopestyle Tour Champion Bobby Brown, World

Championship gold medalist Alex Schlopy, World Championship bronze medalist Keri Herman, X Games gold medalist Sammy Carlson, Dew Tour winner Tom Wallisch and reigning U.S. halfpipe champ Devin Logan.

Slopestyle skiing was incorporated as an Olympic sport this past July. Athletes are judged on runs in which they perform tricks on a series of jumps, rails, boxes and other features of a manmade slopestyle course.