

Bowman takes gold in halfpipe skiing



Maddie Bowman of Meyers celebrates her gold medal in the women's ski halfpipe at the Rosa Khutor Extreme Park on Feb. 20. Photo/Charlie Riedel/AP

By AP

KRASNAYA POLYANA, Russia – This one was for Sarah.

Braid spinning in the chilly mountain air, Maddie Bowman of Meyers soared to the inaugural gold in women's Olympic halfpipe skiing, edging Marie Martinod of France in the final on a night the sport paid tribute to late Canadian freestyle skiing icon Sarah Burke.

Burke, a leading advocate to have several events – including halfpipe – added to the Olympic program, died following a training accident in 2012. Her parents, Gordon Burke and Jan

Phelan, watched as Bowman made history.

The 20-year-old put together a pair of athletic runs in the finals. Stringing along dizzying series of spins and grabs, Bowman performed the two highest-scoring runs of the finals.

Her first one, an 85.80, put pressure on Martinod, who led qualifying. Bowman's second run was even better. She clasped the side of her helmet in disbelief then sat and waited to see if Martinod or American teammate Brita Sigourney could top her.

Nope.

Sigourney, who washed out in her first finals run, appeared ready to threaten Bowman before her backside skimmed the snow with only one jump off the 22-foot halfpipe left.

That left Martinod, who retired in 2007 but returned to the sport in 2012 at the urging of Burke. The 29-year-old Frenchwoman was one of the oldest performers in the 23-skier field and her introduction included a series of outtakes with her young daughter.

Martinod was clean but not spectacular. Her 85.40 earned silver but didn't really come close to bumping Bowman from the top of the medal stand.

There were several hard crashes during qualifying, the worst coming when Anais Caradeux slammed into the ice during her second run. The 23-year-old Frenchwoman lay motionless for several seconds before being tended to by medics.

Caradeux sustained lacerations on her face but managed to ski down the halfpipe to the medical tent. She qualified ninth but didn't compete in the finals. Caradeux said afterward she blacked out for "10-15 seconds" and sustained some short-term memory loss.

Then again, Caradeux was hardly alone on a sometimes bruising

night. Sigourney took a rough fall during her first finals run, with Bowman sprinting up the halfpipe to help her up. She recovered in time to take a second trip down the slope but it wasn't nearly good enough.

Sigourney blinked back tears of disappointment, though they were soon cast aside during an event that served as a celebration of Burke's legacy.

"A lot of girls were really pushing themselves," said Rosalind Groenewoud of Canada, who finished seventh. "I wish (Sarah) could have won tonight if it wasn't me."