

Bowman eager to defend gold medal in Korea

Publisher's note: *This is one of a series of stories about Lake Tahoe area athletes who hope to compete in the 2018 Olympics in South Korea.*

By Susan Wood

PARK CITY, Utah – The girl next door may become an even bigger household name.

Olympic gold medalist Maddie Bowman of Meyers is gearing up in a big way for the Winter Games next February in PyeongChang, South Korea.

At age 23, the humble, modest freestyle skier plans to return to the podium in half pipe skiing coming off the Sochi Olympics in 2014.

What new tricks are up her sleeve?

“I find a lot of inspiration when trying something new,” she responded to *Lake Tahoe News* at last month's Olympic media summit in Park City.



Maddie Bowman of Meyers is gearing up for her second Olympics in February. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Sometimes flying in the air and landing an acrobatic move can even be an accident – unintentional but inventive. She finds the fun of her sport being creative with her friends.

“I don’t just say I’m going to try something new for the Olympics,” she said, explaining the individual nature of the sport. “Everyone has a unique style.”

Bowman has no rituals. She cross trains on her mountain bike in the woods of Tahoe – Mr. Toads being her favorite route. (She even welcomes the sandpits.)

Bowman watched every Olympic Games she can remember as a child, and it’s left an indelible mark. Her father, Bill Bowman, was a racer for the U.S. National Alpine Ski Team, so ski competition runs in the family.

Now, she’s turning a corner in maturity – wanting to give back.

"I'm in a unique position that I never thought I'd be in. I hope I inspire the athletes of younger generations," she said.

Throw in what she calls a little "rebel vibe," and you've got quite a mix destined for greatness on and off the hill. Bowman is active in the Protect Our Winters organization. POW is an environmental advocacy group consisting of athletes who use educational means to warn of the dangers of climate change.

The celebrity athlete tours schools, spreading the dire message to students in the hopes a younger generation will save the planet and the snow continues to grace the Tahoe mountains.

With her busy schedule, Bowman took a break as a junior at Westminster College in Salt Lake City to prepare for the South Korea Olympics.

She feels exuberant about the upcoming Games, including the **security** of them despite the war of words exchanged between the United States and South Korea's neighbors 50 miles to the north.

"I do trust the State Department. They're not going to put us in harm's way," she said.

She also likes her chances at the event, especially since going out for a test run of the mountain last year. She likes how wide the halfpipe is, raising the bar for big tricks.

This year, the Olympic trials slated for December and January allow for a short window. But she'll be prepared to go and looks forward to the whole experience.



Maddie Bowman at the 2014 celebration at Sierra-at-Tahoe. PhotoLTN file

The Olympian who took the South Shore by storm more than three years ago has had a few bumps and bruises along the way. Her knees get battered, but a relaxed-looking Bowman insists she feels great.

Of course, there's much pressure to repeat her spectacular performance in Russia and numerous podium stands at the X Games and World Cups but "I keep it in check," she insists.

Not many athletes would make a better candidate for a Wheaties box.

Part of the self-assured quality comes from knowing an entire community is behind her.

When she and fellow Meyers gold medalist Jamie Anderson came home after their stunning performances, the community threw a huge **“Golden Girls” party** for them. The duo, with fellow Olympian Hannah Teter, rode from South Lake on a vintage fire truck on a route lined by hundreds of spectators. It ended 12 miles west on Highway 50 at the trio’s home resort, Sierra-at-Tahoe, where longtime General Manager John Rice greeted them with open arms.

Bowman grew up skiing at Sierra, even gaining a free ski pass when she got all A’s through an incentive program between the ski resort and Lake Tahoe Unified School District.

Skiing wasn’t the only sport she was good at. She was a member of the state championship-winning South Tahoe High School soccer team.

Perhaps that’s why she shared such a fondness for the U.S. Olympic women’s ice hockey team. She still has an appreciation for team sports.

“They’re spunky and funny,” she said.

Her legacy will be permanently cemented on the South Shore when she is inducted into South Lake Tahoe’s Champions Plaza on Lakeview Avenue later this year. She will join the likes of Anderson, Teter, Jonna Mendes, Glen Plake, Shaun Palmer, Kyle Smaine, Elena Hight, Travis Cabral and Travis Ramos.

“I’m honored and flattered. It’s so cool how the community has come together,” Bowman said.