

Experience is Mancuso's secret weapon for S. 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 – Experience counts in most facets of life.

So at age 33, alpine skier Julia Mancuso is counting on that theory to take her onto the podium in February in South Korea for the Winter Games.

Through the years, the four-time Olympian who hails from the Lake Tahoe area when she's not in Hawaii has racked up 100 career victories in her sport. At the Games of 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014, she's taken home one gold and bronze medal each as well as two silvers in various skiing disciplines. But from first glance at an Olympic media summit in Park City last month, she's not done.

Her gym in Truckee is thriving. She's happily married. And she took a bit of a respite coming off a hip injury that forced her to skip the Audi FIS Women's World Cup she helped her home resort Squaw Valley to host.

But the flame is still within Mancuso.



Julia Mancuso is eager to participate in her fifth Olympics. Photo/Kathryn Reed

When asked at a press conference what it meant to her to win Olympic gold, she beamed.

“I passed those Olympic rings every day on my way to school – to see the flame burning,” she said of her childhood in Truckee where her skiing career started. She knows it’s special to grow up in a town that once hosted the Olympics.

But don’t kid yourself. The thought of whipping down a slippery mountain slope with two planks attached to her feet at speeds some people drive on a highway can be taxing physically and mentally. It’s not easy.

“It’s been difficult coming back with my hip. But I’m training and getting stronger,” she said of her surgically repaired joint. Mancusco has hip dysplasia and has fought off the pain. She remained on crutches for half the year.

Now as she approaches the Games in PyeongChang, it’s a new

day. Therein comes a new outlook. She even got to do a test run last year, enjoying both “the course and the culture.”

“Skiing is actually easier than walking,” she told *Lake Tahoe News*. But for other racers on the conference stage such as superstar Mikaela Shiffrin of Colorado, she warned them not to expect she’d somehow be handicapped.

“Don’t be fooled,” she quipped.

“I love skiing as fast as possible. There’s no judge on how to get there. Just the clock is the judge,” she said.

Her wisdom through adversity has provided a new lease on life. In some respects, it’s therapeutic helping other injured athletes as she does with her support of the High Fives Foundation. The Truckee-area nonprofit was founded by Roy Tuscani in 2009 to help with injury prevention awareness and help for those severely injured.

She knows the anguish of coming off an injury far too well.



Squaw Valley's Olympic rings from 1960 still inspire Julia Mancuso.
Photo/LTN file

"It's been hard. I just wait for the day when I wake up, and it gets better. Everything has its peaks and valleys," she told *LTN* during a roundtable discussion. "But I know anything's possible. I just want to stay positive. I have the desire to ski fast. I just expect my body to keep up."

Indeed, this is a racer with five World Cup medals to complement five Olympic versions.

Now as the season approaches, Mancuso has considered improving

with baby steps. She hopes to shave off seconds when considering making the team. With a short window, some athletes will discover they qualify within weeks of the Olympics.

And at this Olympics, there are new additions to the repertoire of ski events. In particular, alpine skiing comes up as a team sport. Male and female skiers have an equal role to play. With the event moving away from an individual focus, skiers will be working together and pooling their efforts. The winners of each heat advance to the next round. The two teams left standing slug it out for gold.

Mancuso commended the expansion, but for purist alpine racers, the team skiing event is described as more of a spectacle for viewership.

It will be the first time South Korea has hosted the Winter Olympics – thus launching a spate of Asian Olympic Games. Tokyo will host the 2020 Summer Games. Then, Beijing will bring on the 2022 Winter Games.

Next year's Games are slated from Feb. 9-25.