

# Olympic medal the 1 trophy Holland is missing

*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 – With 16 medals under his belt, it's difficult to imagine this self-assured family man who snowboards for a living insisting on needing to fill a void in his life.

But Nate Holland isn't your ordinary athlete.

The Truckee snowboarder wants an Olympic medal – sooner than later. He will be 39 on Nov. 8. So, as he prepares to work toward the PyeongChang Games in South Korea in February, he'll aim for the podium when he roars full-throttle down the snowboard cross track for the one thing that's eluded him.



Truckee's Nate Holland is eager to add Olympic medalist to his resume. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Even with eight X Games gold medals and three Winter Olympics appearances behind him, he came up empty-handed in 2006, 2010 and 2014. In Vancouver, he even came in fourth, with toes almost reaching the bronze podium. To this day, he laments about having control in the first three turns, then missing the notorious Turn 4.

This time, the steely look in his eyes matches his good health. And if a sense of humor contributed to the medal criteria, he'd win gold hands down.

He pokes fun at his youthful competitors' ages, believing being the elder statesman is actually an advantage despite the sport attracting more and more young bucks.

When they're staring at their Fitbits and describing their intakes and outtakes with energy concoctions that sound like something out of a sci-fi movie, he shrugs it off.

"I just have Advil, coffee, a hot tub and a good breakfast,

man," he quipped. Of course, a workout that inflicts some pain is incorporated in that routine. The fierce athlete knows he's of a certain age to where he can't "roll off the coach" and tax his body without solid conditioning.

But what his competitors may not know is the competition for Holland can be waged in a verbal exchange to psyche them out.

"One of my strengths is my mental warfare. They know that when I was competing, they were eating popsicles," he joked during an Olympic media summit roundtable discussion earlier this fall.

He gains insight from other older athletes.

"Look at Tom Brady, Aaron Rodgers," he listed the New England Patriots and Green Bay Packers quarterbacks as examples.

The athlete who traded in a freestyle career for snowboard cross in 2006 is banking on his "closure" ability. This is huge based on the physics of his sport. A handful of snowboarders race alongside one another on a track with jumps and banks. Collisions and mishaps are frequent. And like a bike race, successful riders will draft on each other until they make their move like a slingshot around the competitors.

Besides the strategy, there's the sheer thrill of it all.

"When you're going 60-plus miles per hour, there's nothing better than big air," he said. It's also a risky time to land wrong and blow half a year's or half a lifetime's training.

But that's Holland – all or nothing.



Nate Holland, center, is the senior snowboarder for the U.S., with Alex Deibold, left, eight years younger and Ryan Stassel 15 years his junior. Photo/Kathryn Reed

This may be it for the longtime rider from Idaho, who grew up practicing then honing his craft on a small hill near Sandpoint with his buddies.

From there, Holland said their mothers got tired of “driving us around” and hired a ski coach “as a chaperone.” The rest is history.

He moved to Squaw Valley in 1999 to pursue his snowboarding career, and has called Truckee home ever since.

“I’m taking it one day at a time, one year at a time,” he said.

So far, he likes what he sees in his chances in South Korea. The track is big to his liking, as witnessed with his test run there last year with other Olympic athletes.

“My biggest challenge is getting there and making the team,” he said. “Once I’m there, I know that track suits me.”

Plus, some could argue the adrenaline may build off the course as well.

**Given the tensions** with the United States between South and

North Korea, he wonders whether the Games will be secure. During the test run, F16 military jets were “flying over every 15 minutes.” He made light of the spectacle then by telling his teammate: “Dude, I love you man – if it’s all over.”

These days, he questions whether his daughter should be there at the grand global event. His wife, Christen, insists their daughter see her dad compete.

“Then, I thought if we’re going down, we’re going down together,” he said. Holland was sarcastic, but honestly blunt.

He’s also sentimental when it comes to his family.

“Fatherhood is the coolest thing I’ve ever done,” he said of his 2-year-old daughter, Lux.

Still, despite the bout of parental responsibility, Holland has shown he knows how to have fun.

He not only looks forward to his time on the course. He is eager to immerse himself in the culture, informing *Lake Tahoe News* at a press conference that he plans to “brush up on a few more songs” for the local karaoke bar.

Holland thoroughly relishes his time with the South Korean people.

“There’s no other place like it. Every time I get on a (chair) lift, they give me a double hand wave and a big smile,” he told *LTN*.