

No medal, but so much more

McEachran finishes fourth at Dumont Cup against world-class slopestyle field

By Herb Garbutt
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It is the result no athlete wants. One step off the podium, a medal tantalizingly within reach, fourth place means you are the best of those coming home empty-handed.

Evan McEachran has stood atop the podium twice this year in Association of Freeskiing Professionals (AFP) slopestyle events. He said it's an addictive feeling and once you've done it, "you want to get that feeling more often."

Yet Sunday's Dumont Cup competition in Sunday River, Maine left McEachran feeling better than after any of his wins, despite finishing fourth and missing a medal by three points.

It could have had something to do with the depth of the field. It could have had something to do with the fact that two of the skiers on the podium — Americans Gus Kenworthy and Nick Goepper — had occupied similar spots six weeks earlier in Sochi, Russia. Sunday's bronze medalist, Bobby Brown, had also turned in a top-10 finish at the Olympics.

Meanwhile, with a score of 89.0, McEachran finished ahead of Olympic gold medalist Joss Christensen as well as a host of other pros and X-Games veterans.

"It was pretty intimidating at first," said McEachran, a member of Canada's development team, "but then I decided to look at it as more of a challenge, to see how I rank up against these guys. The course was way harder than any other and I had to step it up way more."

The course was praised for its challenge, in particular, the rail section, which McEachran says is his strength and where he's made the most improvement.

"Last year I only had one double," he said. "This year I'm doing three in a row in the rail section."

McEachran began skiing at the age of six at the Craigleith Ski Club near Collingwood. But while the family was skiing, McEachran was always off to the side making jumps.

"I was breaking four pairs of skis a year so my parents pushed the club to have a free-style area," he said.

He began skiing moguls but there was still something missing. Once he got his first look at a terrain park, he discovered what it was.

Suddenly, there were no limits except your imagination and gravity.

He competed in this first World Cup event two days before his 15th birthday. He joined the national development team the following season and earned a silver medal at a Nor-Am event — the top development circuit — in Idaho. He capped the year with a ninth-place finish at the Dumont Cup, an event organized by one of the sport's pioneers, Simon Dumont, that brings the top pros and amateurs together to compete.

The 17-year-old continued to make big gains this season. In January, he scored his first AFP victory at the North Face Pipe and Park Open Series in Whistler, B.C. In addition to his usual strong showing on the two rail sections, he landed a switch 900 and two double corks, including a right-side 1260 on the final jump.

It was followed by a string of impressive results, including a second at the Aspen/Snowmass Freeskiing Open and another win earlier this month at the SnowCrown Ski and Snowboard Festival at Blue Mountain, not far from where he got his start.

This summer, McEachran will continue to work on his jumps. He hopes to add a switch double misty 1440 — a jump he enters backwards, flips backwards twice while doing four full rotations.

He worked on it prior to this season but had to put it on hold once competitions began. He'll pick it up again training on water ramps in Quebec before returning to the slopes in Whistler and New Zealand toward the end of the summer.

His recent success already has the Grade 11 Oakville Trafalgar H.S. student thinking about 2018. McEachran still remembers hearing the news that slopestyle would be joining the Olympics.

"It was really cool," he said. "I was up on a glacier (in Whistler). Sarah Burke, who passed away a couple of years ago, worked so hard (to have freestyle ski events included), it was awesome to see it in the Olympics."

McEachran said federations in other sports work toward conformity. But watching the Olympic competition, he said it was great to see slopestyle stay true to its roots.

"We have different styles, different clothes, poles, no poles, grabs, no grabs," he said. "You just do what feels right."



Evan McEachran



Tigers goalie Ian Arnott (above) hoists the championship trophy over his head following his team's 3-2 overtime victory over the Golden Hawks in the tyke blue final at the Minor Oaks Hockey Association house league championships. Christian Markakis (right) celebrates his goal, which put the Tigers on the board and later (below) the team celebrates its victory. MOHA crowned champions in 29 divisions from tyke to juvenile over two days at Sixteen Mile Sports Complex.

| photo by Graham Paine — Oakville Beaver

