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Dunlop named Canadian coach for Korea 2013

Special Olympians trained by Kincardine coach for World Winter Games

By Josh Howald

It takes a special effort to prepare the world's best Special Olympians.

And Julie Dunlop is up for the job.

Kincardine's Dunlop has been named head coach of Canada's figure skating team at the 2013 Special Olympics in Korea.

"I actually found out in December, but I wasn't allowed to tell anyone," said Dunlop early Friday afternoon.

"It was a bit of a shock when I got the call."

There are 17 coaches Canada-wide who report to Dunlop, detailing the progress of each

Special Olympic skater. It shouldn't be a problem - Dunlop is hardly new to the scene. She has coached at the national level five times previous, and is ready for the

challenge.

"I think my application was about 16 pages long," she said, prior to beginning the interview process with Sport Canada and a variety of managers.

"It's a great opportunity, and I'm looking forward to seeing how the athletes mesh together and hopefully perform at their best."

Dunlop wasn't allowed to share the news or her appointment until the team for Korea 2013 was selected last week.

Her on-ice role will be limited, but Dunlop doesn't mind. The Level V coach had to sacrifice

elite level coaching when she moved to Kincardine with husband Chris and their children Payton and Bailey. This job is a good fit - she can continue to coach at a na-

tional level, be involved with multiple athletes as they seek gold, and still be on the ice with local skaters.

The plane won't take off for Korea right away. She has planned workouts, on and off-ice that increase in frequency and intensity as summer continues.

"We all sign in (to a web tool) once a week, to enter training data and compare what the athletes have been doing," she said, adding the coaches agreed to undergo fitness testing alongside the athletes before leaving for Korea. They are keeping tabs on each other, too.

"I just want everybody to have a personal best," said Dunlop. "Some (athletes) have never been to an international competition, and if they have competed at that level, I want them to top their last performance."

Dunlop will host one more training session this summer - in her hometown of Alliston. That allows her to involve her family, both in

Kincardine and Alliston, in the experience. Team Canada will meet for a last-minute session prior to the World Winter Games, which open Jan. 29, 2013.

There are unique challenges to coaching Special Olympians. Holding the athletes to a proper nutrition plan may be a challenge in Korea, and Dunlop said none of the athletes will be ready for the media. Security is airtight at an international event, and media members create a zoo-like atmosphere.

But she isn't worried about her team.

"It's no holds barred, do-or-die for them," she said. "They are there because they love to skate. It isn't a disability but an ability. They

are proving what they can do, as opposed to what they can't."

Canada is taking teams in six disciplines to PyeongCheng 2013, including entries in floor hockey, skiing

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Kincardine's Julie Dunlop will lead Canada's Special Olympics figure skating team into the World Winter Games. (Josh Howald photo)



SKATECANADA

Special quality in Olympians

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and snowshoeing. One of her skaters has a degree in physics - but can't count money. Another speaks a bit of Korean, while another has made his own radio to listen to the radios of planes.

"There is a special quality in all athletes, and something else different here," Dunlop explained. "It's fascinating. It's so interesting to find out what they like, what they do."

When it all comes together, it's rewarding for everyone.

"There are a lot of tears - all of the moments that are the essence and purity of sport...at that level, there is just an 'oh my' feeling. You may have spent two and a half weeks monitoring an athlete, or trained them all year, and a moment comes when the screen says first place...it's surreal, the feeling is like no other."

And that's the reason Dunlop does it. Team Canada's coaching staff is comprised of unpaid volunteers, though they will have their trips covered. While she loves what she does, not many realize there have already been 15-hour scouting sessions and four hour phone calls.

"It hit me at training camp that not too many people have ever held this position. People don't put it together, and I don't mind. It is

what it is."

"Mom goes away and comes home with another new coat," she laughed.

The Independent will check in with Dunlop periodically as she prepares Team Canada for Korea 2013.

"It only gets more interesting from here," she said.

"It's pretty exciting, something more to look forward to for this year - but at some point I need to be a hockey mom