

SPORTS & LEISURE

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Travis Gerrits reaching new heights

Promising freestyle aerial skier to serve as 'forerunner' at Olympics

By **STEVE LEBLANC**
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To suggest Travis Gerrits is eagerly awaiting next month's trip to the Vancouver Games would be a staggering understatement.

But where most 18-year-olds in his position would likely let excitement run away with them, the Acton resident seems poised to meet the experience with big-picture maturity. After all, if the progress he's made over the past few years is any indication, the 'forerunner' role he'll play out west will be merely a stepping stone to his Olympic dreams - not the pinnacle of them.

"My time will come," assured the freestyle aerial skier, referring to his ambitious but very realistic goal of competing at the 2014 Olympics in Russia. "It was a little early in the game for me to have had a real shot at these Games, especially with everyone on the national team jumping so well these days. I've still got plenty of time. 2014 will be my

Olympics."

Sharing that lofty prediction is four-time world champion turned Canadian development team head coach Nicolas Fontaine.

"We're looking for Travis to medal in 2014, not just compete," said Fontaine, who first identified Gerrits' potential eight years ago, when the then 10-year-old took third among a group with much older competitors at a meet in Quebec— where the bulk of his training is done. "He's got a real good chance to do that, since he's already ahead of many skiers in their early twenties."

In fact at times, Fontaine and his coaching cohorts have had to reign in the promising Actonian, who with a fearlessness for freestyle skiing has occasionally been a bit too eager to tackle a new trick or challenge. Case in point was last season, when the former gymnast became one of the youngest Canadians to ever complete a triple back-flip.

And while it was only done on a simulated water ramp in Quebec, the triple back flip with five twists

he pulled off this past summer was another huge indication that Gerrits is performing well beyond his years. But with his latest freestyle skiing strides has also come a newfound appreciation for a sure-but-steady approach to his overall development.

"I've got to take it slow and really work on all the small stuff," said Gerrits, who claimed silver at the recent NorAm meet in Park City, Utah and heads into his first World Cup event of the season this weekend in Calgary. "I've always been naturally athletic, but there's a lot more that goes into this sport. There are so many elements to it."

That mindset is especially encouraging to Fontaine, who sees his young protégé as one of the cornerstones of the next wave of top Canadian aerialists.

"He's starting to understand that you can't go too fast, that you have to learn all the different aspects of the sport."

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Travis Gerrits gets in some practice jumps on Apex Mountain in B. C. last month. The Acton resident has his sights set on the 2014 Winter Olympics but will get a taste of the big stage next month when he serves as a forerunner at the Olympic Games in Vancouver, testing the ramps for the competitors.

Photo by Rob Gerrits

Charger comeback sinks Raiders

For the first time during this Ontario Jr. A Hockey League season, the Georgetown Raiders have lost three consecutive games and their latest defeat was likely the most painful.

The third-place Raiders led the lowly Mississauga Chargers 4-3 in Port Credit Monday night with just 30 seconds left in regulation, but conceded the equalizer and gave up the winner while shorthanded early in overtime.

Now 32-8-4, Georgetown has dropped five of its last seven games and the busy slate continues with road games Thursday in Brampton and Friday in Trenton before hosting second-place Oakville Saturday begging at 7:30 p.m. at the Alcott Arena.

Scott Wilson, John Girman, Chris Borges and Kyle Essery tallied for the Raiders, with Michael Nishi taking the loss in goal.



Georgetown Jr. A Raider forwards Evan Rodrigues and Jeremy Wick sport the pink jerseys they'll be wearing this Saturday when the Oakville Blades visit the Alcott Arena as part of a fundraiser for breast cancer research. Game time is 7:30 p.m. The outfits will be auctioned off afterwards and bids have already totalled close to \$2,500 so far. The Raiders will also donate \$1 from each Pink In The Rink game ticket to the cause.

Photo by Eamonn Maher

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