

# 'BACK WHERE I NEEDED TO BE'

## SNOWBOARDER BOUNCES BACK FROM INJURY TO MAKE OLYMPIC TEAM

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Jasmine Baird couldn't help but feel like the competition was leaving her behind.

As she watched snowboarding contests online, she saw her peers pulling off new tricks, raising the bar for the sport. And there wasn't much Baird could do about it.

In August of 2019, while preparing for the upcoming slopestyle season, Baird didn't have enough speed going into a jump. Unable to rotate enough to get the board under her for the

landing, it caught the snow. Baird's left knee took the brunt of the impact, tearing the anterior cruciate ligament.

As the Georgetown snowboarder rehabbed her knee, the season went ahead. She worked hard to get back on her board and was ready for her target date — March 2020. But days away from returning, resorts began shutting down due to COVID-19. Soon, there was nowhere for Baird to train.

It would be another seven months before she was back on the snow. By the time she returned to competition, it had been 22 months since her previous contest.

While her fearlessness had always been a strength, Baird couldn't help but be concerned.

"I was more cautious,"



Chris Witwicki/Canada Snowboard

Olympic snowboarder Jasmine Baird will compete in both slopestyle and big air.

she said. "I was scared that my knee wouldn't hold up."

It showed in her results, with her top finish on the World Cup circuit being 15th place.

For someone who had won a World Cup bronze

medal and finished sixth at worlds just before her injury, it was a tough pill to swallow.

Childhood dream

"The Olympics has always been a dream of mine," Baird said. "I re-

member watching on TV and the features were so massive compared to what I was hitting at that age. It was like, I could never do that. But you keep gradually working toward it, getting a little closer."

That dream will become a reality very soon after Baird was named to the Canadian team this week.

She didn't let the 2021 season discourage her. Instead, she came back more determined and with the time to properly prepare for the season. She made good use of her time away from the hills, studying what runs scored well to see what judges were looking for.

At the season-opening World Cup in Switzerland in October, Baird won a bronze medal in big air. Her score of 148.75 left her just 1.25 points behind reigning Olympic champion Anna Gasser.

"That was huge because it showed me I hadn't fallen behind," the 22-year-old

said. "I was back where I needed to be and riding better than I did before the injury."

But before the results came, Baird drew reassurance from an unlikely source.

"It was the falls, the mistakes, that gave me confidence," she said. "That let me know my knee was going to be OK."

Baird followed up with a sixth-place finish in December that all but assured her a spot on the Olympic team. She still had to wait for the final World Cup competitions to finish before having her spot confirmed and getting the news she had been waiting for.

"I'm so excited," said Baird, who will compete in both slopestyle (Feb. 5-6) and big air (Feb. 14-15) in Beijing. "I thought I might have fallen too far behind, but it never crossed my mind to give up snowboarding. I just tried to keep a positive outlook through my recovery."

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