

Aurora's Livingston uses inspirational Sochi Olympics experience for the better



By Scott Wheeler

After participating in the Sochi Olympics, Aurora native Derek Livingston is using his adversity-filled story to motivate both himself and others.

It's a story that has taken him on a cross-Canada tour to visit schools from Ottawa to Red Deer to inspire young athletes.

It's a story he carried with him this past summer to Whistler's Camp of Champions, where he taught and motivated other snowboarders as their coach.

Above all, it's a story he uses every day as motivation in his own budding snowboard career.

It starts with heartbreak.

After breaking his collarbone just one qualifying event prior to the Games, Livingston felt his hopes and dreams come crashing down.

"I remember thinking that the last four years were all for nothing," he said. "I accepted that I blew my chances."

Initially, Livingston admits his head was in a "weird place" and that he was unsure of his future.

Despite the blow, Livingston stayed committed to doing whatever it took to ride in the final qualifying event before the Games.

One metal rod, 10 screws and two weeks of hard work later, Livingston participated in the qualifying event despite uncertainty looming around the strength of his shoulder.

"I had the idea in the back of my mind that if I fell on it again I could rip the screws out because the bone wasn't fully healed," Livingston said.

Refusing to let the injury stop him, Livingston put it aside and qualified.

Always humble, Livingston credits family, friends, teammates, support staff, physiotherapists and his surgeon for his quick recovery and "positive mind-set."

His four years of hard work, it turned out, were worth it.

The adversity didn't end after the collarbone had begun to heal though, either.

"I suffered a minor concussion a week prior to heading to Russia," he said, noting, "On top of it all I'd had problems with my shoulder dislocating."

Overcoming these issues were part of what made the entire experience that much more special, Livingston insists.

"The whole experience was surreal," he said, adding that he had never experienced anything like the Opening Ceremonies. "I think I had a permanent smile on my face the whole time."

It was at the Opening Ceremonies that Livingston says he received some of his best advice.

"Many of the returning athletes had good advice about how to deal with all of the pressure, treating it like any other contest and that the hard part was over, I had made it to the Games, now all I have to do is get through my runs."

Despite the words of encouragement from other athletes prior to his event, Livingston admits that the pressure may have been too much during his first run of the Qualification Round.

He had been in Sochi a year prior for a test event but there were no fans or media. "This time around it was crazy," he said, adding that not only were millions of people going to be watching but that there are little things that added to the stress too. "As soon as I walked out of the airport there were tons of photographers and journalists trying to get a quick interview."

"Nerves were definitely a factor," Livingston said of the feeling prior to his first run. "I remember standing at the top for my first run about to drop in and feeling my legs shake uncontrollably."

After posting a score of 34.25 in his first run, Livingston had one final run to give himself a chance at qualifying for the Semifinals. "Considering the halfpipe was in pretty bad condition, I decided to play it safe and treat it like any other event," he said.

Overcoming the pressure, Livingston would put together a solid second run. "I was pretty confident that my run was going to put me through," he said. "They took a really long time to give me my score. It was pretty nerve-racking."

His score, an impressive 70.25, would leave him one spot shy of the Semifinals. For the 23-year-old snowboarder however, the Games were about more than just the end result. They were a blessing, a testament to defying the odds.

"Even though I was one spot out from moving on, I am super happy with how I performed," he said.

Having conquered his injuries and his nerves in his first Olympics, Livingston is spending his summer working out and enjoying the time off in Whistler. He hopes to spend most of this winter training in Colorado.

His message to those he meets along the way?

"Don't let small setbacks in life get you down. If you believe in yourself and follow your dreams, no matter how big or small, you can succeed in life."