

OLYMPICS NOTEBOOK**PAIN AT PEAK OF PODIUM**

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The skinny on skeleton is that Canada is the country to beat at the Turin Olympics.

One day after teammate Mellisa Hollingsworth-Richards of Eckville, Alta., won the women's overall World Cup title at Altenberg, Germany, Calgary's Jeff Pain copied her, zooming to his second consecutive World Cup crown with his second consecutive gold-medal drive.

"I don't know if Canada winning both the men's and the women's titles makes a statement going into the Olympics, other than that we're still around," Pain said, playing down the "favourite" label.

"We've had a strong team with this crew of people for a while now. Hopefully, it means we have the momentum going in."

He has both momentum and quickness for an athlete who stands a towering 6 foot 3 in a sport where compact frames are more common. He flies down the course with an emblem on his helmet that is both comical and fearsome -- a large-toothed, angry beaver.

When Jimmy Shea won the skeleton gold at Salt Lake City in 2002, his helmet bore an American eagle, which he brandished for the crowd. This time, Canada's raging rodent is the one to follow.

Pain set a track record for the second week in a row on the tricky Altenberg circuit, 57.49 seconds in the second heat. His two-run time for the gold was 1 minute 55.08 seconds. Germany's Sebastian Haupt took the silver medal in 1:55.78. Pain won the points race with 580, well ahead of Switzerland's Gregor Staehli at 425.

"It feels pretty good to do it twice in a row. It was a really good race for me on a track that's kicked my butt in the past," said the 35-year-old father of two who runs a landscape business the eight months of the year he isn't risking his neck in the face-first sliding sport.

Yesterday's gold was Pain's fourth medal, and third gold, of the seven-event circuit. Pain also has a silver, one fourth-place finish and two sixth-place showings.

In the overall individual rankings, Calgary's Paul Boehm and Duff Gibson, both of whom will join Pain in Turin next month, finished sixth and 14th with 344 and 223 points, respectively.

Drug sleuths**on fresh trail**

A new designer steroid drug has been detected in the urine samples of a half-dozen Canadian athletes sent to the Montreal lab of Dr. Christiane Ayotte.

"We cannot speak, technically, of positive cases yet, because the molecule hasn't been completely identified, but we are doing follow-up tests," said the director of one of the world's top investigative labs, the Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique, which is accredited by the World Anti-Doping Agency.

"Definitely, Canada will have to answer questions," Ayotte said in an interview with an Edmonton newspaper.

The samples are numbered and not named, but Ayotte knows some of the positives came from a batch originating at a competition in Western Canada involving only Canadian athletes.

Ayotte said she wasn't looking for the specific steroid she found, but an odd peak showed up in a profile during analysis of urine samples with a gas spectrometer. She said the raw materials in designer steroids come from China and are manufactured into pill form in the United States.

WADA president Dick Pound said anti-doping officials have identified a number of new designer steroids but have not made the news public.

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