



Deaf, blind speed skater beats odds - and opponents

All eyes are on Turin this month as the world's finest athletes take part in the Olympics. But you don't have to be in the Olympics to participate in Olympic sports. With that in mind, reporter Laura Czekaj ventured in and around the capital to try her hand at 10 Olympic events. Today, long track speed skating.

A SWEATSHIRT hood covering his head, Kevin Frost blends in with the packs of competitive speed skaters crowding the long track at Brewer Park.

But Frost and his Olympic-sized ambitions are anything but ordinary — he is both deaf and blind.

The 38-year-old has Usher Syndrome type 2, a rare genetic disorder that progressively causes vision and hearing loss. He has only 8% of his vision, similar to looking through a hole the width of a pencil, and has 15% of his hearing, much like hearing through a pair of ear muffs.

But what most would consider insurmountable obstacles to leading a normal life, let alone taking up speed skating, has done quite the opposite for the Gloucester Concorde Speed Skating Club member. It introduced him to a sport which grew into a passion.

"When it's all said and done I want to accomplish a dream no one's ever accomplished before," says the devoted husband and father of three.

Breaking barriers

Frost is getting closer to achieving his goal of getting deaf-blind speed skating recognized as a Paralympic sport by 2010 and being the first to win gold.

But it is so much more than winning a medal. Frost wants to crash through the barriers imposed on the disabled and encourage others to follow.

Frost, who started speed skating about two years ago, competes against able-bodied speed skaters, many of whom have been skating for five or more years.

Just making it around the long track at first was a challenge for Frost, who has learned from coach Ron Guerard — whose father was an Olympic speed skater — how to watch his competitors to know when the race has begun and how to make out the cones that line the inside of the oval. "You learn how to count your strides and how to do it by feel," he says.

As we slowly glide around the oval and skaters equipped with impeccable sight and hearing zip past us, the only indication Frost is at a disadvantage is when he trips slightly



Errol McGihon

on an imperfection in the ice. Righting himself, he says his main focus is to provide a role model for other deaf and blind individuals.

"If you put your mind to something, you can do it," he says.

His mantra seems to be working. In his rookie year he picked up two silver and two bronze medals. He continues adding to the collection this season.

When he is not on the oval, Frost is in local classrooms, police training sessions and community rooms, educating and enlightening everyone he comes in contact with.

"I have come this far and I am not going to stop," he says.

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SUN REPORTER Laura Czekaj gets some tips on long track speed skating from Gloucester Concorde Speed Skating Club member Kevin Frost.

Getting up to speed

Olympic facts about long track speed skating:

■ The Netherlands is the birthplace of speed skating. The first known skating competition is thought to have been held in 1676.

■ Speed skating has been a part of the Olympic program since the first Olympic Winter Games in 1924. Originally only men participated, but women's events were included in 1960.

■ Speed skating at the Olympic Games consists of 10 events: 500m, 1000m, 1500m and 5000m

racers for both woman and men, 3000m race for women, 10,000m race for men and team pursuit for women and men.

■ All events are skated once, except men's and women's 500 metres, which are skated twice.

■ The final result is based on the total time of the two races.

■ Skaters race in pairs against the clock on a standard 400m oval. Athletes are timed to a hundredth of a second as they skate counter-clockwise around the oval.

■ Tomorrow: Laura tries some snowboarding