

Music career went on ice for Lauscher

Olympic dream still strong after dual surgeries

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Two-time Canadian Olympian Regan Lauscher took up the sport of luge on the suggestion of her Grade 7 band teacher, of all people.

"Mr. Glen Traquir," Lauscher said Thursday after rocketing down the hill at Canada Olympic Park. "I played the trumpet.

"He thought I might like luge and it just sort of snowballed from there."

Did it ever. Mr. Traquir must be happy to know his prized pupil is still making music, albeit of a different kind, in her quest to win Canada's first Olympic medal in luge.

Cue the inspirational soundtrack. Lauscher is determined, against the odds, to knock the mighty Germans off the podium in a discipline she sees as a natural pastime in Canadian winter.

"At first, I had no idea what luge even was," she said. "But when you think about it, everybody has, in some way, lugged. Everybody has gone on a toboggan. Everybody knows what it's like to go down a hill.

"We just take it to the extreme."

That's a understatement. Now 28, Lauscher's body has absorbed an extreme pounding through more than a decade of hurling her body down canyons of ice at speeds reaching 130 km/hr.

As such, Lauscher underwent surgery on her left shoulder last February. She had the right one repaired in May.

The doctors say she is genetically predisposed to shoulder troubles, but her chosen occupation certainly sped up things.

"Just a little bit of wear and tear," she said. "I'm getting a little older, and that's just how my body is."

Yet here she is, just five months after the latest surgery, back on the sled and pushing towards her goal.

Time is of essence, with the 2010 Winter Olympic Games opening ceremonies



CREDIT: Grant Black, Calgary Herald
Regan Lauscher hopes to beat the all-powerful German luge team at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

just 475 days away at B.C. Place Stadium.

"I'm already in a better place," she said. "I'm more confident than I was before in my ability to legitimately compete in the 2010 Games."

With two wounded wings, she hit the Olympic track earlier this month in Whistler, B.C. This week, she's whipping down the track in Calgary at the Canadian team selection trials.

"Right now, I'm just trying to focus on the things I can do," she said. "But some days, it's tough not to focus on the things I can't do."

Lauscher plans to race on the international stage this season, but in limited fashion. Her immediate goals are to take part in the world championships and the World Cup in Whistler, both set for February.

"I don't like to sit out," she said. "Nobody wants to sit on the bench, but I just have to keep the bigger picture in mind, which is the Olympic Games."

Lauscher placed 12th at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. She moved up to 10th four years later in Turin, Italy.

The Mount Royal College journalism grad is the only Canadian to have ever captured a World Cup silver in luge, a feat she accomplished four years ago in Lake Placid, N.Y.

"She is one of the best sliders on the circuit, by far," said Meaghan Simister, the 21-year-old Calgarian who placed ninth last year at the world championships. "I look up to her, and I try to learn from her."

When Lauscher started sliding, she had no other Canadian women to look up to on the track.

"I was by myself with no other girls in the start house," she said. "At the time, I really wanted more guidance. I was so young."

In 2002, she was the only female member of the Canadian luge team in Salt Lake City.

"Looking back, I think it forced me to figure things out," she said. "It forced me learn to pay attention to things

"I was out there by myself. I knew I had to get down the hill myself. It was my responsibility. It was up to me to figure it out."

And figure it out, she has -- although she always has the trumpet to fall back on.

Take a bow, Mr. Traquir.

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