



AN EXPERT EYE ON THE 2014 WINTER OLYMPICS

By Laura Daily



sochi.ru
2014 

For the first time during the Winter Olympics this month, every phase of competition during the 2014 Games will be shown live, either on an NBC television channel or at NBCOlympics.com. **Boys' Life** asked America's top medal contenders for their tips on how to tell if an athlete is doing great or is out of the running.

Eddy Alvarez



BIATHLON



Medalist Hopeful: Tim Burke

Watch: Target accuracy. "Biathlon combines cross-country skiing with rifle marksmanship. You ski a loop and then pause to shoot at an electronic target 50 meters away," says Burke, a 2013 World Championships silver medalist. "If the target turns white, it's a hit. For each miss, you ski a 150-meter penalty loop. That can cost you 25 seconds in a race where less than one second determines gold."

Fun to Know: Biathlon is the No. 1 televised winter sport in Europe.



Tim Burke



SPEED SKATING

(Short Track)

Medalist Hopeful: Eddy Alvarez

Watch: The relaxed skater. "The guy with his hands on his back, stroking efficiently in rhythm waiting to make a move — he's conserving energy, drafting off the skater in front. Watch how far he leans into the ice at the corners, pivoting off his left hand," says Alvarez. "When his right hand starts to swing, that signals he'll try to pass and get to the finish line first."

Fun to Know: When they announce his name, Alvarez touches his helmet twice, then points to his parents in the stands.



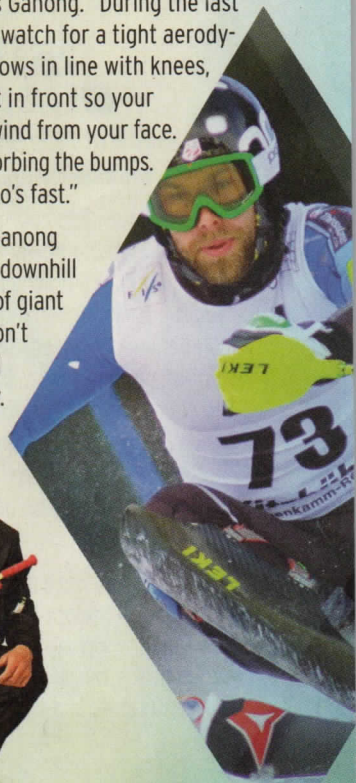
ALPINE SKIING



Medalist Hopeful: Travis Ganong

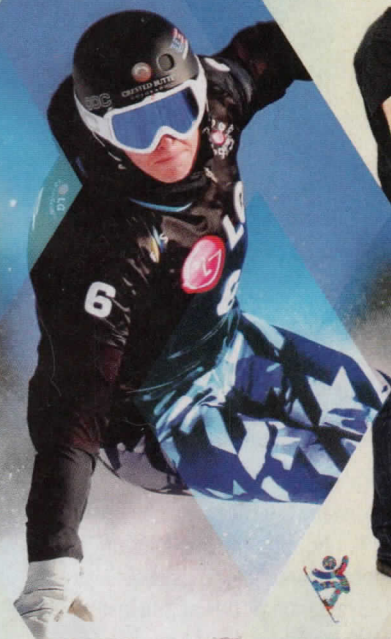
Watch: Snow pluming out from the back of the skis. "That means the racer is clean on his edges and not fighting the hill. A lot of snow spraying out from the sides signals he's losing time," says Ganong. "During the last third of the race, watch for a tight aerodynamic tuck — elbows in line with knees, arms straight out in front so your hands block the wind from your face. Skis on snow, absorbing the bumps. That's the guy who's fast."

Fun to Know: Ganong brings 10 pairs of downhill skis and 10 pairs of giant slalom skis. He won't decide which he'll use until race day.



Travis Ganong

Justin Reiter



SNOWBOARDING

(Parallel Slalom)

Medalist Hopeful: Justin Reiter

Watch: The racer who looks like Thor. "You need a powerful stance, chest up and open, ready to attack," Reiter says. "Your shoulders should be parallel to the fall line, and you need clean edges and smooth, carving turns, like you are surfing. The course really deteriorates throughout the day, so watch for riders who can adapt, maybe turn earlier to get to the next gate, instead of the guy who goes straight through the ruts."

Fun to Know: Both parallel slalom and parallel giant slalom feature head-to-head racing. A bracket system of two races per round means the winner will have to run the course 10 times in a single day.



Lindsey Van



SKI JUMPING

Medalist Hopeful:

Lindsey Van

Watch: The jumper as she speeds down the ramp. "When she feels the G-forces let up a bit, she launches herself into the air," says Van. "Then check her form. Is she stretched far out over her skis, arms relaxed at her sides? The skis should be tips-up in a V pattern. All this is to create maximum surface area, like an airplane wing, to fly as long as possible. And watch the landing. Is it a stable lunge position? No flapping arms. We get judged on both distance and style."

Fun to Know: There's no lip at the end of a ski jump. Instead, it hangs down 10.5 degrees. Get to the end without jumping, and you just drop off.



BOBSLED

Medalist Hopeful: Steve Langton

Watch: The start. "A good start time — push-off and load — at Sochi will be 4.7 seconds or faster," says Langton, a member of both the two-man and four-man USA I teams. "Then check the athletes' positions in the sled. The driver's helmet should be the highest with the rest in a descending straight line. Sleds need to go straight at all times and enter and exit in the middle of each turn. Too high or too low causes a skid and lost time."

Fun to Know: Langton is a big Boston Red Sox fan, so he'll pack a baseball cap, as well as a stash of Peanut Butter M&Ms.



Steve Langton



John Daly



FREESKIING

(Slopestyle)



Medalist Hopeful: Tom Wallisch

Watch: The tough tricks. In 45 seconds you do six different tricks, three on a rail and three off jumps. "How high are you going? How much air do you get? How much hang time? Do you stick the landing and not put your hands down? Do you maintain speed throughout your run?" says X-Games champ Wallisch. "If you see someone pull off a triple cork, a combination of three flips and spins while grabbing a ski, they are going to score well."

Fun to Know: Freeskiers use unique "twin-tip" skis that allow them to ski backwards.

SKELETON

Medalist Hopeful: John Daly

Watch: Body position. "Head down, shoulders down, feet together. Even though you are flying down one mile of ice headfirst at 90 miles per hour, you have to keep your head as still as possible, almost melt into the sled," says Daly. "Pay attention to curves 10 and 14. They are where you will likely see some wild action."

Fun to Know: Daly's helmet is covered with two-tone luminescent paint so it looks red in shadow and gold in the sun.



Tom Wallisch



FAST FACTS

WHAT: The Olympic Winter Games, a worldwide sports competition held every four years

WHERE: Sochi, Russia

WHEN: Feb. 7-23, 2014

WHO: About 2,500 athletes from more than 80 countries competing in 98 events in 15 winter sports

WATCH: On NBC and its family of television channels and online at NBCOlympics.com

MASCOTS:

The Leopard,
The Polar Bear,
The Hare



OLYMPIC TORCH:

The torch passes through 2,900 towns (traveling 35,000 miles and through 83 regions of the Russian Federation) and is carried by more than 14,000 people.

NEW FOR 2014: There are 12 events new to the Olympic program, including women's ski jumping, snowboarding slopestyle and halfpipe freestyle skiing. Three new team events will mix men and women: biathlon relay, luge team relay and team figure skating. boyslife.org/links/sochi2014

