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Cross-country skier Devon Kershaw hasn't lost any time lamenting what might have been. He's focused on this year's World Cup season and on the next Games in Sochi. Ted Rhodes, Calgary Herald

# Cross-country skier rebounds from heartbreaking Games

CANMORE'S DEVON KERSHAW MISSED MEDAL BY A SPLIT SECOND. HE'S BACK COMPETING BUT KNOWS HE MAY NOT GET THAT CLOSE AGAIN



VICKI HALL

CANMORE

Devon Kershaw would like to take this opportunity to provide an update to Canadians who last saw him on the verge of physical and emotional bankruptcy.

Sure, the cross-country skier's soul may never fully recover from the agony of coming so painfully close to gracing the Olympic podium on home snow. And sure, he still can't bring himself to watch the video evidence of his fifth-place finish in the men's 50-kilometre event — just over half a second back of bronze and 1.5 seconds back of gold — at the Vancouver Games.

But just as one dream dies, another is born. On Saturday, Kershaw finished on the podium in his first FIS event of the new season in Sweden, a third-place finish in the men's sprint final at Bruksvallarna, Sweden.

The tears have dried. The journey to the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia, has officially begun. "You can't beat yourself over what happened," Kershaw says. "You can only use it as motivation for the challenges that lie ahead." In reality, Kershaw has no idea if he'll ever better his performance on that final day of the Vancouver Olympics. In the race of his life (thus far), the Sochi. One, natives shocked the world with the best-ever performance for a Canadian man in the cross-country version of the Olympic marathon.

"Drive 50 kilometres and yawn," Kershaw says. "That's what I lost the Olympic gold medal by. Fifty kilometres of driving is long. Especially if you're in the city." "You're on the Deerfoot. You're booming along. You go out to the airport and maybe stop at Costco and drive all the way home. And

then you get out of your car and yawn.

"That's what I lost by." Completely consumed by the moment, Kershaw rounded the final corner and roared into the stadium. He couldn't hear anything. Couldn't see anything. On instinct, he lunged at the finish line and tried to will oxygen into his lungs.

He looked up. A man in red was screaming primally. A man in white pumped his arms in the air in wild celebration.

Norway's Petter Northug, in red, won gold in a time of two hours, five minutes, 35.5 seconds. German Alex Teichmann settled for silver, crossing the finish line just 3 seconds back of the winner.

The man in white, Sweden's Johan Olsson, captured bronze — one second behind Northug and just a half second ahead of Germany's Tobias Angerer and Kershaw. Angerer beat out the Canadian for fourth by a ski tip — not that it really mattered.

After 50 kilometres, Kershaw missed out on his chance to become the first Canadian man to ever win an Olympic medal in cross-country skiing.

At home, no less. "Reality hit so fast," Kershaw says. "You never know what life can throw at you, so you never know if you'll get the chance again."

"I could train for the next four years and get worse. Or I could be injured."

With every muscle in his body groaning, the long-time Canmore resident dissolved into tears before an international television audience.

"That's the beauty and the curse of sport," Kershaw says, philosophically. "There's only one best in the world on a day. There's not many other things in life that are like that. If you're in the field of medicine, and say you're a heart surgeon. There's maybe a dozen fantastic heart surgeons in Canada. In the world, there are hundreds of the top surgeons."

"But best of the best surgeons? It's impossible. You can't quantify it. Same with



Germany's Tobias Angerer, front, and Canada's Devon Kershaw cross the finish line at the men's 50-kilometre mass start classic cross-country final at the Vancouver Winter Olympics. Kershaw finished an agonizing fifth. Herald Archive, Reuters

business. There's successful business people, but who is the most successful? Who is the No. 1? You can't quantify it."

In Vancouver, Kershaw will forever go down as No. 5 in the 50 k and No. 4 in the team sprint with partner Alex Harvey. Close just doesn't cut it at this level.

"I remember in Sydney, Simon Whitfield coming from behind and sprinting past the pack to win," Kershaw says. "Or at the last Olympic Games, when he's sprinting to the finish."

In a moment etched in Canadian sporting history, Whitfield indeed reared from fourth place to first and back to second in the race to the finish in Beijing.

"The group was four deep, so somebody came fourth in that race," he said. "But he was that close. Nobody talks about him. Somebody has to lose that sprint. You just hope it's never you."

**REALITY HIT SO FAST. YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT LIFE CAN THROW AT YOU, SO YOU NEVER KNOW IF YOU'LL GET THE CHANCE AGAIN**  
DEVON KERSHAW

stuck, at times, on one particular ski exchange that robbed him of a couple of valuable seconds.

Coulda, Woulda. Perhaps shoulda.

But the chatty Kershaw isn't one to feel sorry for himself.

"Devon doesn't give much time to the 'what-ifs,'" says girlfriend Chandra Crawford, a gold-medal winner in the sprint at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy.

"He didn't give in to it enough to even milk."

For police before she succumbed to her injuries in hospital.

"When you come upon your girlfriend's twisted bike and she dies when you're just 18, it's just not the end of the world to come up a hair short in a ski race," Crawford says. "Even if it's the biggest one in the world."

Kershaw credits a visit this summer to the Sick Kids' Hospital in Toronto for really putting his Olympic disappointment into perspective.

"Fifth at the Olympics or 20th at the Olympics," he says. "Whatever. You see four-year-old kids, dealing with cancer and battling with chemotherapy."

"I've got goals. I'm lucky to be able to wake up with purpose and chase after a dream and be goal-oriented and all these great things. It's not that sport is trivial, but really all it is somebody with a watch. They say, 'Go,' and then time it."

The goal is to finish first or at least in the top three. "You can't get too bummed out," Kershaw

says. "You can't be paralyzed and become depressed about coming so close, because you're still so lucky when it comes to the other aspects of life."

With that outlook in mind, Kershaw is determined to press forward. His short-term goal? To win his first World Cup and capture some hardware at the world championships.

"I think the Olympics were a real motivator for Devon," says coach Justin Wadsworth.

"But now he knows he can do it. He can be on the podium. He's that close."

Sochi is four years away, but Kershaw believes he can rewrite the ending to his five-ring story.

"I'll never get an opportunity to win a medal in my own country again," he says. "That's gone forever. But I still have the opportunity to make history for our team — to become the first Canadian man to ever win a cross-country medal at the Olympic Games in history. So that's pretty cool."