

STEPH PREM

From injury to victory

Five-time Australian snowboard champion and former winter Olympian Steph Prem talks to *Toni Krasicki* about life after injury and how it spurred a new career.

Former pro snowboarder Steph Prem is on top of the world. Not literally, although when she's running luxury five-star skiing and snowboarding holidays in the Canadian Rockies through her business Premium Snow Tours, she may as well be.

Excelling at giant slalom and snowboard cross, she often says that winning the overall interschool championships at 17 was a major highlight of her career. But that was before turning pro and heading to Vancouver for the 2010 Winter Olympics. 'Obviously the Olympics was a major highlight of my professional career but it was THE most exciting and overwhelming week of my life,' she says of her experience.

While most elite athletes start priming for their sports at an early age, Steph didn't realise she had the potential to turn her favourite hobby (snowboarding) into a professional sporting career until she was 18 years old. 'After I finished my first year of uni I went overseas to compete for the season and it wasn't until then that I realised I maybe had what it took,' says Steph about her life changing decision to pursue the Olympic dream.

Sponsored by Billabong, her road to the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics was not your typical fairy-tale where she was escorted by a crew of elite trainers and massage therapists. Eight years ago when Steph embarked on her four-year training and competition schedule leading up to the games she said that it was a tough journey with very little support from governing bodies in Australia. 'My dad was my dry land coach, my boyfriend my snowboard coach and my support team consisted of family and anyone who could contribute/was enthusiastic and optimistic in helping me on my journey.' Calling her family and husband, 'The





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Dream Team', Steph says that it was and is their support that inspires her achievements.

In addition to the challenges Steph came up against, was a combination of the heavily male dominated nature of the sport and Australia's obvious lack of lengthy snow seasons. 'We only get two months of snow a year to train on then the rest of the year is spent training and travelling for the northern seasons and there was (and still is) very limited funding available for female snow sports athletes in Australia,' she explains. Particularly in adventure sports, the risk of injury comes with the territory and Steph admits that injury is the hardest thing about being an athlete. 'You only get one body to perform in as an athlete and if something goes wrong with that body it will effect your



'Never, never, never give up. You have good days and bad – focus on the good. Stay passionate and work hard.'

entire season, performance, race day, mindset - everything.'

A back injury in 2010 not only cut short her career as a professional athlete but also kept her off the snowboard for 18 months. Often and with the right mindset, opportunities arise from adversity, and Steph used this injury as a fork in her career path. Swapping high impact and extreme sports for Pilates and functional exercise, little did Steph know that this was the beginning of a new career. 'My injury and the need and want to be able to rehabilitate my own body and help others with theirs encouraged me to start my business. I loved how the functional movement helped and sped up my recovery and how much better it made me feel!'

Her passion for fitness and strong belief in the importance of women's health and wellbeing is palpable. She says 'You can make such a difference to a woman's overall health, body and mind with simple and enjoyable exercise and functional movement. I work with/ surround myself with some very inspiring and empowering women of all ages and

believe it's a very powerful and encouraging environment to create change and improvements in female health and fitness.'

The former dance teacher/choreographer says that her background in musical theatre, dance and drama armed her with a multitude of transferable skills. She swears that dance enhanced her balance – perfect for snowboarding. Although a regular television presenter, Steph's role as an expert commentator for Channel 10s coverage of the 2014 Sochi Olympic games was a nice boost to her growing media portfolio. She says that the commentating was tough because she wanted to cheer on many of her friends who were competing, as well as scream when Aussies were knocked out. 'We were live the whole time – so there was no room for error and I often would have to turn off my mic so I could jump up and down and comment off air. Some of us made a few little mistakes along the way but we all had a good laugh about it,' she muses.

Despite the injuries, Steph's life sounds

pretty sweet: snowboarding in Canada and empowering people through health and exercise, with a splash of TV presenting to break it all up! 'Natural ability will only get you so far, and ability does not necessarily mean you know how to work hard.' It's a mantra that has obviously worked well thus far!

You can follow Steph Prem on Twitter @premiumperformance or on Instagram @premiumsnowtours

Photographs (including cover image) by Kit Haselden OH!

'To me, optimum health means ridding your body of inflammation and stress, making healthy choices about what you put into your body, and feeling full of energy.'