

The Armed Forces Para Snowsports Team

The Armed Forces Para Snowsport Team (AFPST) has gone from strength to strength this year, with growth in the foundation teams and truly impressive performances on the world stage. The charity is run by volunteers, and exists to aid the recovery of wounded, injured and sick Service personnel and veterans. It does this through the medium of adaptive Alpine skiing, snowboarding and Nordic skiing, providing a winter sports focus for adaptive athletes to regain their spirit of challenge, competition and achievement. Importantly, the charity also offers veterans the chance to form strong friendships with others who have shared similar experiences, fostering a familiar sense of military camaraderie. AFPST runs a year-round program of snow events for all levels, and has strong links with many Service charities.

Paralympic qualification for Pyeongchang 2018 has become a reality for several of our athletes. As we approach the end of the summer season, it marks the beginning of an exciting year ahead! There is flexibility in the structure of each team and athletes who show ability and determination often find themselves competing after little time on snow. Receiving no public funding, the team relies on donations, sponsors and fundraising from the military and general public.

ALPINE

Alpine training began in July at the Folgefonn Glacier, a short drive away from the idyllic Hardanger Fjord in Norway. Andy Barlow and Nerys Pearce both knuckled down and trained hard, with some fantastic results. Andy put in considerable time and effort on his strength and conditioning at Tedworth House, and used the H4H Skiplax to perfect his technique. This was visible as he gained new levels of balance and movement. GB visually impaired athlete Menna Fitzpatrick and her guide Capt Jen Kehoe were also training hard and looked inseparable as they flew down the slopes. Off snow, the athletes had a packed schedule of physiotherapy and mobility sessions, ski preparation and coach debriefs to prepare them for the season ahead. The camp was a resounding success and set all athletes up well for competition.

The Foundation team began their training in the UK, with a three-day indoor training package split between the Snow Centre in Hemel Hempstead and the Skiplax at Tedworth House. This set the newcomers up for their first venture across Europe to the fantastic facility of Snow World, in Landgraaf, Holland, where they made the most of training on their prepared piste. Winter training on snow began in October, when all Alpine teams headed to Austria to make the most of the world-class facilities. Although the teams had trained hard in summer, nothing can replicate the mountain environment, with its ever-changing weather and snow conditions. The camp focused on consolidating the fundamentals learnt in indoor training, as well as challenging the athletes with race training.

Competitive racing began in December for the GB and performance teams, who went from Pitztal, Italy to the Army Alpine and Inter Service Ski Championships in Serre Chevalier and Meribel. Menna and Jen have proudly represented GB on several podiums, their latest wins include a Bronze in the Super G and Silver at the Para Alpine World Cup Finals in Jeongseon, South Korea. Our athletes are going from strength to strength with the Paralympics firmly in their sights!

NORDIC

During the summer season the performance team trained for the first GB representation in the IPC Para Nordic World Cup for 20 years! Training was packed full of rollerskiing and strength and conditioning training and the team completed three camps in Oberhof, Germany. Here the athletes made the most of the top facilities; over 2km of indoor tracks with varied terrain that allowed them to perfect their technique. This training really benefitted the athletes when it came to the first camp on snow, at Ski Spectacular in Breckenridge, Colorado, a fantastic event that is one of the largest winter sports festivals for adaptive athletes. The winter training paid off; we had three athletes compete at the first World Cup competition in Finland, where they pushed the boundaries for this new adaptive sport for GB. The second World Cup event in Ukraine was fraught with difficulties, including delays, lost kit and equipment, and temperatures of minus 29! The team braved the conditions and worked hard, setting them up for their next event in Finsterau, Germany, where both Scott Meenagh and Terry Ahrens achieved the IPC minimum qualification standard in both cross-country and biathlon. Terry competed in the 1998 Paralympics and we can't wait to see what he can do 20 years later in South Korea! At the final World Cup of the season in Japan we saw a top ten finish for Scott with a strong performance from Terry too. Their qualification is a huge milestone for GB Nordic adaptive skiing and an amazing achievement for both athletes!

The Foundation Team has grown in size this year and has a really positive, welcoming ethos for new members. The Royal Signals kindly raised money for two of our athletes to train with them at their camp in Norway, which they hugely enjoyed and benefitted from. The charity is consistently in awe of the kindness of fellow service members, and could not operate without the ongoing support of the military. This was also evident at our largest ever foundation camp in Ruhpolding, Germany, where four veterans tried Nordic for the first time. Here they had the opportunity to watch some of the National races and were inspired by the performance teams dedicated training schedule. The Army were out in force to support the charity, with KRH kindly allowing the team to use their weapons on the range, and the REME and RE teams attending a show and tell session the charity ran, where they got to use the visually impaired weapon and the sit ski, some with more success than others! A

AWSA President, and Colonel Commandant of the Parachute Regiment, Lt Gen Sir John Lorimer KCB DSO MBE awarded three of our Parachute Regiment athletes with his Commandant's coin. This prestigious award is given to those who represent the Pegasus ethos and our athletes could not be more deserving. This rounded off a truly inspiring training camp for both athletes and volunteers, where all could see the importance of winter sports to recovering veterans.

There have been changes to the coaching staff this season, with Sgt Simon Allanson joining the team as a full time coach. Simon was a GB biathlete for five years and then went on to be the team manager and coach for the GB biathlon team, taking them through a full Olympic cycle. His experience and knowledge is invaluable, and the team is thrilled to have his guidance during this exciting journey.

SNOWBOARD

Summer training began on the Stubai Glacier in Austria, before further training for Owen Pick in Kunatal with the Army snowboarding team, where he gave them a few tips! November was a busy training month, with training in Austria followed

by a trip to Holland for the first IPC World Cup Banked Slalom of the year. All the hard work pre-season set the team up for the first event, where Owen Pick and Darren Swift headed to South Lake Tahoe for the North American Cup and two World Cup Events. The first week was training and the conditions were incredible with fresh snow every night. This allowed the team to make adjustments to their kit, and get acclimatised with

the runs before the second week, which was all competition. After some solid performances, Owen qualified for the next event and Swifty just missed out. After three years competing on the World Para Snowboard circuit, Owen started to cement his place on the podium, with his first major medal, a silver, in February at the World Championships in Big White, Canada and a further two podium finishes at the World Cup event in La Molina, Spain. Both team members enjoyed the atmosphere and camaraderie from the Para snowboard community across all nations

and both saw improvements with every race. Owen was also recognised by the Soldiering on Awards where he won the Sporting Excellence title in recognition for overcoming his injury and excelling in snowboarding. After some impressive performances from Owen that demonstrate his talent, grit and determination, we can't wait to see what he does at the Paralympics!

The AFPST relies on donations so please visit afpst.co.uk to find out more about supporting our fantastic athletes. All the training, competition and mental effort reminds us that whether it is making that leap and starting a new winter sport or beginning a journey to a Paralympic medal, the path is not an easy one, so please continue to support AFPST #1YeartoGo!