

## **Team Toyota athlete Mark Morris: From the prairies to the mountains, it's been an uphill battle for this snowboarder**

*Every athlete competing at the Paralympic Games or Olympic Games takes a unique journey on their way to the top. While talent, great coaching and years of hard work are elements almost all have in common, the elite athletes who represent our nation at the highest level often had to overcome seemingly impossible barriers to create opportunities for themselves. This is Mark Morris's story.*

Growing up in Saskatchewan, it was on a family trip to Lake Louise that Mark Morris first laid eyes on the "skateboard for the snow" that would ultimately become his greatest passion in life: snowboarding. He knew he had found his calling and immediately began snowboarding wherever he could – not an easy task in the Canadian prairies.

By the age of eight, he was travelling to participate in camps and competitions that would challenge him as a snowboarder. But the financial hurdles of the sport were difficult for an emerging young athlete, and he remembers little things like eating Lunchables in the chalet instead of purchasing lunch like the other kids.

By 12, footage of Mark began circulating. Sponsors started paying attention and, as a teenager competing in Canada Winter Games and the X Games, earned the support of well-known sponsors like Burton, Red Bull, and Oakley.

"For me, winning was a bonus. My dream was just *getting* to these competitions and proving to myself and other young kids that it doesn't matter where you come from – you can achieve any goal you set your mind to."

It was smooth sailing for a while. Mark was a professional snowboarder by the age of 15 and pursued his passion without incident for seven years. Then, a broken femur stopped him in his tracks. After taking six months to recover, he had *another* horrific accident on a backcountry snowboarding trip, leaving him with 17 broken bones.

"Recovery from my second injury seemed impossible at times but, once I started healing physically, I started healing mentally as well, and I realized how important mindset can be. I celebrated mini victories – even if it was something small like being able to lift my right leg. With the right mindset and support, I came out stronger than ever."

Now a Team Toyota athlete and professional snowboarder, Mark also takes being a role model seriously.

“As a kid, when I met a snowboarder that I admired, that interaction made such a big difference to me. So, today, when I meet kids who admire me, I really try to give it my all.”

This commitment lead Mark to start the McMorris Foundation to help financially disadvantaged youth find their passion through sport. The Foundation covers everything - from travel expenses to equipment costs.

“Even though times were sometimes tough financially, my brother and I had every opportunity to play sports, and the life lessons we learned were so valuable. So, I’m proud to be able to help remove some of those barriers for other young athletes. If a kid like me, from the most vertically challenged place in Canada, can build a career like this, anyone can.”

Today, Mark is looking ahead to Beijing 2022, knowing that he’s in the right place, because he still truly loves what he’s doing.

“It will never feel like work if you’re doing what you love.”