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Beijing 2022



She's still only 17, but after cutting her teeth at Glenshee, the Lecht and her local dry slope, freestyle skier Kirsty Muir is being tipped as a medal contender at the Winter Olympics in Beijing. Interview by Malcolm Jack

“I was almost four,” replies Kirsty Muir, uncertainly, when asked if she can remember the first time she ever put on a pair of skis – or, at least, the first time she had a pair of skis put on for her by her ski crazy parents. “I don’t actually remember it that much,” she concedes, over a Zoom call from a room in Stubai, Austria, after a long day on the slopes preparing for a World Cup competition. “I know I learned on the dry slope in Aberdeen, and I also learned at Glenshee and The Lecht, because they’re the ones closest to us. So yeah, I grew up skiing on the Scottish mountains from from the age of four.”

Something Muir can remember, though, is the first time she chose skiing for herself. “I’m not sure what age I was, maybe five or six,” she recalls, “and my parents gave me the option of either skiing on a Wednesday night or going to ballet class. I chose skiing.”

There have been many drop-offs and pick-ups, early mornings and late nights since that fateful decision – not to mention a lot of mentoring and training and more than a few bumps and bruises – but ballet’s loss has undoubtedly proven skiing’s gain. Now 17, Muir is one of the most highly rated young prospects in British freestyle – a “one in a generation athlete” according to fellow Scot and former Olympic snowboarder Lesley McKenna. Watch footage of Muir pulling off her first ever “dub twelve” on snow in Stubai in November last year – a monster triple-rotation spin with switch landing which she had worked for over a year to perfect – and you should get a sense of what McKenna means.

It was at the 2018 BRITS in LAAX, Switzerland, that a then 13-year-old Muir first made the ski establishment sit up and take notice by winning all three Freeski titles – big air, slopestyle and halfpipe – against competitors many years her senior. She was a two-time world junior medallist and Winter Youth Olympic silver medallist by the age of 15 (she narrowly missed out on gold at the latter competition by a mere 1.25 points to China’s Ailing Eileen Gu). In March this year, Muir competed in her first senior World Championships in Aspen, Colorado, promptly taking home her first World Cup medal by winning silver in the ski slopestyle. “I managed to up my run and do my dub twelve,” she remarks. “Coming second was an incredible experience, I was really happy.”

The British team for the 2022 Winter Olympics in February hasn’t been announced yet, but Muir is already being strongly tipped as a medal contender in Beijing – in fact, she could become the youngest ever freestyle Olympic medal winner. Still, she speaks sensibly of keeping her feet on the ground (when they’re not twisting through the air), and the delicate balance she must strike at this still nascent stage in a hugely promising career, not just between managing the rising pressures of hope and expectation but between training,



Muir off to a flying start

travel and competitions, and less glamorous things like getting her schoolwork done.

"When I'm in a proper competition period like right now," says the sixth-year student at Aberdeen's Bucksburn Academy, "I just say to my teachers 'I can't make the deadlines,' and they're really supportive. And then other times, I get back on top of it."

The lockdowns of last year proved a not unwelcome opportunity to concentrate more firmly on studying ahead of her exams (Muir was in Switzerland when the pandemic first took hold and had to make a dash back to Scotland before air corridors closed). "I kind of just did my schoolwork along with trying to keep training in the garden and stuff," she says. "I had very, very minimal equipment, just a bar, no weights or anything. Just enough to keep my strength up. It was actually really nice to have a break in a sense, that I got to see my family."

Muir had only ever been on three foreign ski holidays in her life before her competitive career started taking flight – since then, global pandemic notwithstanding, she has

Above and right: Kirsty Muir winning the silver medal during the women's Freeski Big Air event at the Lausanne 2020 Winter Youth Olympic Games in Leysin, Switzerland.

Photographs: Valentin Flauraud / Shutterstock

 **To watch Kirsty Muir landing her first ever dub 12, click [HERE](#)**



"There's no better feeling than when you've just gone off a jump and you're in the air"

been lucky enough to begin seeing the world in a way that few people her age do. "I've enjoyed it so much," she says. "I mean, you know, what school pupil can say that they have travelled around the world? I've been to New Zealand and it's such a beautiful place, I've been to Canada and then to the US for the first time earlier this year. I just really feel grateful for it."

Muir can't deny that China is next on her travel bucket list, and that she's dreaming of competing against the Beijing skyline at Big Air

Shougang – the only snow event venue inside Beijing city at the 2022 games. Last Winter Olympics in 2018, 13-year-old Muir had to stay up way past her bedtime ("I wasn't really supposed to stay up," she admits) to catch a glimpse of events in PyeongChang, South Korea, including Britain's first ever Olympic ski medal, a bronze won by then 19-year-old Izzy Atkin in women's slopestyle (Muir's strongest discipline, as it happens).

Could she have imagined back then that she might be part of the British setup four years later? "After watching the 2018 Olympics, I was definitely thinking, you know, I was hoping that maybe one day I might get there," she says. "There was always a part of me that really wanted to go. And I'm just really happy with how my skiing has progressed since then and that I maybe have the opportunity this time."

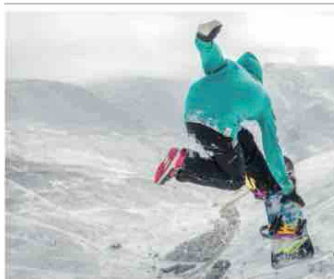
She won't be drawn on her medal prospects if she does compete in Beijing, other than to modestly concede that, should she perform to her highest possible standard, and should others perhaps not, "I could do well."

Muir acknowledges that her experience of growing up on the slopes, thanks to her parents' enthusiasm for the sport (especially her father, himself a skier since before he could remember), is rare in Scotland, and has helped put her on a level playing field with competitors from snowy countries such as Canada, France and Switzerland, where many kids are practically born on skis. Only a tiny handful of Muir's friends at school were also serious skiers, and she has always been aware that hers was, as she puts it, "the odd sport".

And yet, Muir is convinced that what Scots may lack in terms of reliable snow cover, they make up for in grit, passion, and determination. "I think skiing in Scotland really does make you a good skier," she says. "With the weather conditions and, you know, jumping over patches of heather and things."

She's seen the sport advance considerably in this country even in her short lifetime, and is doing her bit to help it advance some more by volunteer coaching at Aberdeen's dry ski slope whenever she can. "I really want to inspire other people and help other people into it," she says. Surely nothing could boost interest in skiing among people young and old in Scotland, and across the world, quite like watching a teenage superstar become a historic medal-winner at a Winter Olympics? Muir doesn't disagree.

"There's no better feeling," she says, when asked to try and sum up her love of freestyle skiing, "than when you've just gone off a jump and you're in the air. I don't know how to explain it, just the adrenaline and the excitement. I don't think I get that feeling from anything else." ★

Ski Scotland

Nevis Range • Cairngorm
Glenshee • Glencoe • Lecht

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