

Hills native heading for the Olympic slopes

By GREG KOWALSKI
STAFF WRITER

"Awesome."

In a word that's how Britta Ottoboni described the impact of being chosen again by the U.S. Olympic Committee to be a trainer with the American snowboarding and Alpine ski teams.

A trainer at West Bloomfield High School, Ottoboni left yesterday for a series of snowboarding meets on the West Coast before heading to the Olympic games in Nagano, Japan, in February.

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snowboarding will be an Olympic sport. The sport is akin to surfing on the snow with athletes riding five-foot boards down the slopes.

"I'm very excited about this because I know a lot of the athletes," Ottoboni said. And there is the thrill of being at the Olympic games.

"You live in the Olympic Village. You live and eat with the athletes," she said. "It's an experience you can't explain."

As a trainer, Ottoboni oversees the health of the athletes, monitoring their condition and treating injuries. That is essentially what she does at the high school where she works with students athletes.

"I'm a liaison between the coaches, athletes and physicians," Ottoboni said.

Although she is part of a team of trainers and physicians, she can have an extraordinary impact on an athlete. A decision to take an athlete out of play can bring a disappointing end to years of training and competition.

"The worst part is to tell an athlete, 'You can't participate,'" Ottoboni said. "It's a tremendous

responsibility."

But injuries aren't common. Athletes are finely tuned and well-experienced by the time they reach the Olympic games, she said.

Originally from Farmington Hills, Ottoboni said she enjoyed sports in high school and wanted to go into physical therapy. She studied at Central Michigan University and worked in California for three years before returning to this area.

She actually is employed by the Henry Ford Health Care Systems working at West Bloomfield High School.

Ottoboni got involved in the Olympic games 10 years ago by volunteering to be a trainer. She was at the 1992 Olympics in France and was at Atlanta in 1996 as head trainer for the basketball team.

"I've been in some amazing places," she said. "My commute in France was a 30-minute gondola ride up a mountain," he said.

Between the Olympics she works with teams at various events. Although the Olympics are the most visible and prestigious events, there really are no



Olympic-bound: West Bloomfield High School trainer Britta Ottoboni is heading to the Winter Olympic games in Nagano, Japan.

STAFF PHOTO BY DAN DEAN

more than part of a series of a season of events for many athletes.

"Since 1988 I've spent a year just traveling," she said. The current trip will take her out of town for six weeks. She credits her husband Vince, who is a

West Bloomfield firefighter, Henry Ford and the school district with great patience to allow her to jaunt around the world.

"They've been wonderful," she said.

The only concern she has, she said, is the uncertainty of the

Melissa's rehab continues at center

Melissa Garr was transferred last Thursday, Jan. 8, to Rainbow Rehabilitation, a transitional facility for adolescent victims of closed head injury. The 18-year-old had been hospitalized at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor for several months due to a bizarre poolside accident that left her in a coma.

Melissa's new address is 1220 Romney, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, 48304.

Meanwhile, her trach was removed Tuesday. She is now able to eat soft foods, said her father, Farmington Hills Fire Lt. Michael Garr.

He noted that 150 registered donors turned out for the recent American Red Cross blood drive, held at the new No. 5 station. Those donors gave 125 pints of blood, to help supply depleted blood bank reserves in southeastern Michigan.

Melissa, who would have been a junior at Farmington High School this year, was critically injured on July 23 when a heavy branch fell and struck her on the head. She went into a coma before beginning to emerge from her injuries in September.

MILITARY NEWS

If you have military news with a Farmington-area connection, send it to: Military News, Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington 48335.

EXCELLENT AWARD

Capt. Laura Kurzyrna, whose parents live in Farmington Hills, was awarded the Judge Advocate General's Award for claims excellence, presented by Major General Thomas, commander, U.S. Army Intelligence Center and Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

Kurzyrna was selected for this award for her outstanding contributions to the Fort Huachuca, Ariz., claims office. She was also selected as an instructor at the annual U.S. Army Claims Conference in Baltimore.

Kurzyrna is a graduate of Michigan State University, the University of Detroit School of Law School and Boston University. She is a member of the Illinois and American Bar Associations and the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Kurzyrna of Farmington Hills.



Laura Kurzyrna

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