

## RAVI DRUGAN

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## STAY SEATED

After a tragic accident in 2004, adaptive monoskiing was just a way for Ravi Drugan to get his life back. Then, it became his life. *By Scott Yorko*

**DISCIPLINE** Slalom, Super G, GS  
**HOMETOWN** Eugene, Oregon  
**AGE** 32  
**CAREER HIGHLIGHT** Bronze in Mono Skier X 2015 at X Games, Gold in Para-Snowboarding World Cup in Lake Louise, Alberta in 2012



After losing his legs, Ravi Drugan could have chosen to sit out on life. But the adaptive monoskier made other plans. Photos: Courtesy of Ravi Drugan

At age 14, Ravi Drugan was well over six feet tall and a gifted athlete in skateboarding, water polo, baseball, and soccer. But three days before his 15th birthday, he was found on the train tracks in Eugene, Oregon, both legs severed above his kneecaps. Two thirds of his body's blood was missing along with his new Carhartt jacket and the money from his chain wallet. After initially pegging him as dead, first responders found a faint pulse in his neck. One thing they never found was an answer to the question of what exactly happened that night, but clues point toward an attacker beating Drugan unconscious and leaving him on the tracks where he was run over by a train.

Limb loss is tragic for anyone, but especially for someone as active as Drugan. It was a rough four years before his dad, Dan, first helped him into the chair of a seated monoski in 2009 at Hoodoo Ski Area in Central Oregon with the support of local nonprofit Oregon Adaptive Sports. Drugan's balance, strength, and body control made him a natural, and he was ripping down black diamonds by the end of day one. He skied 120 days that season and has never looked back.

Though he's also raced autocross and is no stranger to speed, Drugan's ski career took off faster than he could have imagined. When an invitation to compete in the Mono Skier X event at the 2011 Winter X Games showed up in the mail, he first thought it was a scam. Four years later, in 2015, he took home the bronze medal.

By that point, freeriding was fused with Drugan's identity as he hit jumps and rails, arcing smooth S-turns wherever he wanted to on the slope. "Ravi has so much style and the ski is a true extension of his body," says Josh Dirksen, pro snowboarder from Eugene and founder of the Dirksen Derby banked slalom event in which Drugan has won gold six times and silver twice. "He still has all of his nerve connections so he has all this fluid control. Watching him makes you want to be in a sit-ski even if you have legs."

Then the X Games suddenly dropped the Mono Skier X event before Drugan got a chance to go back. "He loved freeriding and skiing the powder," says Drugan's mom, Keli Schunk. "But when they dropped monocross, that really took the wind out of his sails. There wasn't anything else with that level of exposure as the X Games, so he started training for alpine racing."

"It's the funniest thing," Drugan says. "Back when I was younger and first started, you'd never catch me dead in a tight skinsuit, carving an icy groomer on a good snow day. I told myself 'I'm never doing that.'" But now, at age 32, he's doing that quite a lot—nearly 250 days a year.

Drugan is headed to Beijing in March with the U.S. National Paralympic Ski Team to compete in slalom, super-G, and GS. He's ranked eighth in the world in slalom and took bronze at the Leogang World Cup slalom race in February of 2021. And just like anything

Drugan does, he's all-in, training hard in the gym to try to put eight pounds of new muscle onto his 112-pound frame. He's working with a nutritionist to consume 80 to 100 grams of protein a day with 80 to 100 ounces of water. "It's been hard eating that much food, but not as hard as leaving the mountain early, when it's still snowing, to go work out in the gym," he says. "My X Games training was mostly hot laps through the terrain parks. It's been a big change these last few years to spend more time on groomers and tree runs and gates than skiing powder."

A true soul shredder, Drugan's dichotomous ski identity is perhaps the greatest challenge on his Olympic racing journey: dialing in his line choice, cutting radius off his turns in tight courses while still building enough energy to accelerate through the turns, goes against his natural instincts. Nailing it just right, though, getting the same power that he puts into it, makes him smile. "Slalom reminds me so much of freeskiing through tight tree lines. With my background compared to a racer's, the more technical and challenging the snow conditions of a rutty, variable race course get, the more it almost adds to my favor," says Drugan, whose dad taught him to ski in any conditions. They'd often pick the worst run on the hill and try to make it fun.

As stoked as he is just to wake up and ski every day, Drugan is competitive and he knows from his last two years racing the World

Cup in Europe that the field is, too. "It was a gut-check going over there," he says. "Those guys are out for blood and skiing right on the edge of control." Some of them still have their legs, too, which can be either beneficial or dead weight. Drugan will race against guys with 100 pounds on him, a significant load that helps tremendously in the downhill (which Drugan will skip at the Olympics to focus on the other three events). But in the slalom, the weight savings and streamline of his double amputation helps Drugan maneuver from edge to edge much more nimbly and hit the gates more cleanly.

It's no surprise that Schunk, Drugan's mom, thinks he's going to do well and that he has a shot at the podium. But all of his coaches, mentors, and teammates seem to agree that when it's game time, Drugan is always ready to surprise people.

Regardless of how he does at the Games, you can hear in his voice how electrified Drugan is to be a globetrotting Olympic athlete. Beijing is just another fun hit through life's terrain park of obstacles.

"When I first had my accident and lost my legs, I would have done anything to change it back," he says. "But now, having had all of these rad experiences and memories that it's given me, I wouldn't change a thing. If it didn't happen, I might not be traveling the world skiing in all of these epic places." When put that way, it seems more like destiny than tragedy.



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