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## 30 AUSTRALIANS SELECTED FOR SAPPORO 2017 ASIAN WINTER GAMES

A team of thirty athletes have been selected to become Australia's first event competitors at an Asian Winter Games when they hit the ice and snow in Sapporo in February.

The team, which features some of the nation's brightest winter prospects, was selected to compete in snowboard, freestyle skiing, alpine skiing, cross country skiing, biathlon, short track speed skating and figure skating.

The event will give a host of young athletes the opportunity to compete against the continent's finest as many look to build towards the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games.

"Our team we have selected for Sapporo 2017 features plenty of athletes on the rise that highlight the continued strengthening of winter sports in Australia," Chef de Mission Geoff Lipshut said.

"Australia's first foray into the Asian Winter Games will be a great test for our athletes against some strong competition and will potentially be a stepping stone towards Olympic competition."

Among the athletes competing are three-time Olympian Holly Crawford (snowboard – halfpipe), Vancouver 2010 Olympian Ben Sim (cross country skiing), and Brendan Kerry (figure skating), Pierre Boda (short track speed skating) and Deanna Lockett (short track speed skating) who all competed in their first Games at Sochi.

"It's an honour to represent my country at an event like this," Kerry said.

"It's a little unnerving when thinking about how big this event is and the added pressure, however it's also exciting and an incredible feeling knowing that you are the one chosen from your country to represent it as the best.

"There is always something new to learn and accomplish at every competition and Sapporo will be no different."

Fresh off testing out the PyeongChang 2018 venue in last week's World Cup Pierre Boda and Deanna Lockett will have arguably the most difficult test at the Games.

"Asia is very dominant in short track," Lockett said.

"I think I will be able to grab a lot of experience being able to race with all Asian countries from the first round and I expect it to be very competitive right from the heats."

Added Boda: "These Asian Games will definitely be a stepping stone to the Winter Olympics as it will most likely share the same format of racing so it will be a great eye opener as to what we can expect at the 2018 Winter Games."

While the team features a number of athletes who regularly compete on the world circuit, the Games will also give the likes of young moguls stars Cooper Woods-Topalovic, Ben Matsumoto, Sophie Ash and Jakarra Anthony some major international event experience.

“I think this will be a great opportunity for me to experience a bigger event atmosphere,” Anthony said.

“The experience will help me manage myself when I achieve qualification to bigger events like World Championships and Olympic Games. I hope to be able to it to enhance my performances at the next Olympics in PyeongChang, if I qualify, and at the 2022 Olympics in Beijing.”

As Australia’s biathlon ranks continue to deepen, Sapporo will see four young guns in brother and sister duo Darcie and Damon Morton, Jill Colebourn and Jeremy Flanagan compete.

“As an Olympic sanctioned event, I think it will be a good experience into what an Olympics would be like,” Damon Morton said.

“It’s also likely to be a really high level competition and so doing well there will be a good indication of how I’m doing at a world level.”

Darcie has had a massive 12 months having competed in the Lillehammer 2016 Youth Winter Olympic Games in February and is looking forward to competing alongside her brother in Japan.

“It will be awesome to travel to Japan and race with Damon,” Darcie Morton said.

“He’s really supportive during competitions, kind of like a second coach, giving me tips before the race and calming me down when I’m stressed. It will be really great to have him there with me.”

The 8th Asian Winter Games will be held from February 19-26 and involve five sports, 11 disciplines and 64 events.

The Olympic Council of Asia invited the Oceania National Olympic Committees to compete in Sapporo as guests, following an approach by the Australian Olympic Committee.

The athletes from Oceania can enter individual sports only and will not be eligible to win medals.

Athletes:

**Snowboard**

Millie Bongiorno	Snowboard – Giant Slalom, Slalom
Christian De Oliveira	Snowboard - Giant Slalom, Slalom
Nicholas Masjuk	Snowboard – Giant Slalom, Slalom
Holly Crawford	Snowboard Halfpipe

**Moguls**

Jakara Anthony	Freestyle Mogul Skiing, Dual Moguls
Sophie Ash	Freestyle Mogul Skiing, Dual Moguls
Ben Matsumoto	Freestyle Mogul Skiing, Dual Moguls
Cooper Woods-Topalovic	Freestyle Mogul Skiing, Dual Moguls

**Alpine**

Zanna Farrell	Alpine – Giant Slalom, Slalom
Liam Michael	Alpine – Giant Slalom, Slalom

### **Cross Country Skiing**

Jackson Bursill Cross Country - 1.4km Sprint\*, 10km Classic, 15km Free, 30km Free (Mass Start)  
Ben Sim Cross Country - 1.4km Sprint\*, 10km Classic, 15km Free, 30km Free (Mass Start)  
Casey Wright Cross Country – 1.4km Sprint\*, 5km Classic, 10km Free, 15km Free (Mass Start)

### **Biathlon**

Jillian Colebourn 7.5km Sprint, Mixed Relay  
Jeremy Flanagan 10km Sprint, Mixed Relay  
Damon Morton 12.5km Pursuit, Mixed Relay  
Darcie Morton 10km Pursuit

### **Short Track Speed Skating**

Pierre Boda Short Track (events TBC by mid-Jan)  
Denali Blunden  
Keanu Blunden  
Alex Bryant  
Joshua Capponi  
Andy Jung  
Deanna Lockett

### **Figure Skating**

Kailani Crane Figure Skating – Ladies  
Brendan Kerry Figure Skating – Men  
Matthew Dodds & Paris Stephens Figure Skating – Pair  
William Badaoui & Matilda Friend Figure Skating – Ice Dance

### **Further Information:**

Matt Bartolo, AOC  
[Matt.Bartolo@olympics.com.au](mailto:Matt.Bartolo@olympics.com.au)  
0416 531 411

Belinda Noonan, OWIA  
[Belinda.noonan@owia.org](mailto:Belinda.noonan@owia.org)  
0411 157 063