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Paralympic ski newcomer Tori Pendergast setting her sights on winning a medal at Sochi

AMANDA LULHAM • THE DAILY TELEGRAPH • NOVEMBER 15, 2013 1:12PM

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Paralympic sit-skier Tori Pendergast in action at the IPC Alpine Skiing World Cup in Thredbo in September. Picture: Jeff Crow Source: Supplied

SHE hurtles down mountains at 80km/h but it's not a career-threatening high-speed stack Winter Paralympian Tori Pendergast has nightmares about - it's her alarm clock.

The Paralympic ski newcomer is still more at home on the beach near her NSW Central Coast home than the slopes of Europe but the change in climate doesn't bother her much.

"It's the early mornings," said the 22-year-old who will make her Winter Paralympic debut at the Sochi Games next year.

"I am so not an early morning person and I hate getting up. That's really the hardest thing for me."

Pendergast, born missing the lower part of her spine, has skied standing in the past but will race a hi-tech custom-built sit-ski at the Paralympics next year.

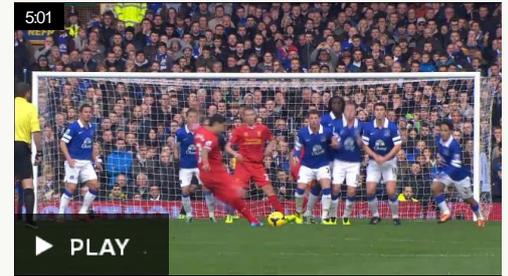
While now considered a dark horse for Australian medal success in Sochi, Russia, after a silver and bronze medal at recent World Cup meets in slalom and super G events, the youngest member of the Winter Paralympic team admits her introduction to top level competition three years ago was less than memorable.

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"I was super new to it and super nervous," said Pendergast whose ankles and thighs are strapped into the enclosed seat which carries her down mountain and who is Australia's first ever female sit-skier..

"I got really hyped up and nervous about it and crashed so I DNF'd my first two races.

"But I still loved it."

This weekend Pendergast heads overseas for a series of training camps and pre-Winter Paralympic events with other Australian squad members including vision-impaired Jessica Gallagher, who became Australia's first female Winter Paralympic medallist at the last Games in Vancouver.

Australia failed to win a gold at those Paralympics with the goal to rectify this omission in Sochi next year.

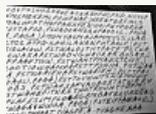
Mitch Gourlay, in the standing men's class, is considered one of Australia's top chances of achieving the feat along with Toby Kane and Cameron Rahles-Rehula, who has come out of retirement for another shot at glory.

Australia is still hopeful of qualifying two snowboarders for the games at upcoming American and European meets.

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