Christie the redeemer

by Peter Rutzler

ELISE CHRISTIE is willing to risk going through her Sochi hell again in order to win gold in PyeongChang.

The short track speed skater is Britain’s brightest hope in South Korea. After the heartbreak of a Russia without love four years ago, Christie, 27, is now set to face her Olympic demons head on, but this time, as a triple world champion.

And she wants it to be known that she isn’t going to South Korea for the pleasantries. She is going there to win.

“I’m not sitting here saying I’m going to go and win a gold medal but that’s definitely going to be my intention,” Christie said.

“If I get a penalty on the last lap passing into first place then so be it. I’ve not trained this hard not to give myself that opportunity and we all know short track is a difficult sport to get things right in.”

Christie knows first hand of the difficulties that short track can throw at you.

For her, Sochi was a devastating experience. With the world watching, three disqualifications in the 500m, 1000m and 1500m left her without a medal, and in tears on the track.

In the 500m, she had a silver snatched from her grasp, a medal that would have ended Britain’s 20-year wait for a short track podium.

And then came the abuse. Speed skating is a national sport in South Korea, so when Christie inadvertently caught Korean athlete...Continued on Page 2
Elise unfazed by pressure as she prepares for golden treble

Continued from Page 1... Park Seung-hi in the 500m final, she enraged her counterpart’s fanatical fanbase back home.

Christie suffered a torrent of abuse on social media, including death threats.

But she is determined not to be remembered for the trolling she endured.

“The thing I always talk about is wanting to be known for who I am rather than the bullied girl,” she said.

“Obviously I went through some bad stuff but everyone does. Not many people get to see the fact that I’m a world champion or the type of person it takes to do that after everything that has gone wrong.

“Everyone just remembers what happened and my crying on screen, and I’ve got no regrets of crying because I put everything into it and it does make me emotional to lose.”

She will certainly be channeling her experience of four years ago to help power her through.

Short track is an exceptionally unpredictable sport. In an instant, years of hard work can be swept away by a misstep or an off-balance opponent.

Being resilient to failure is of paramount importance, and Christie is better placed than most to reconcile that reality.

“It’s something I definitely struggled with,” she said.

“When I first started winning medals, if something went wrong like a fall or a slip, it devastated me. “I would be able to get back on the ice and race okay but I’d just be so disappointed. “I don’t know how many world championships podiums I missed out on because someone took me out or I was team skated out.

“It’s just something you have to accept. One of my biggest things last season was accepting failure – that was one of the things I developed, partly through Sochi and a few other experiences.”

Once again, Nottingham based Christie is the bedrock upon which Team GB’s hopes in PyeongChang rest. As a world champion in three disciplines, the expectation is that she will get at least two of GB’s five medal gold target.

No British athlete has ever won multiple medals at the Winter Olympics. But Christie is not fazed by the expectations of her.

“In all honestly I haven’t looked at the medal target. I know there’s a lot of expectation on this Olympics and I think that’s a good thing because it means there’s a lot of us doing well,” she said.

“It would be amazing to be at a breakthrough Winter Olympics where we get more medals than ever before and we start really building Britain to be one of the top teams. That’s one of the dreams.”

Underdog set to shine from the shadows

by Yinsu Collins

ELISE CHRISTIE is not the only British speed skater who could make the podium in PyeongChang.

Looming in the shadows of the triple-world champion, Charlotte Gilmartin is hungry and ready for success.

“I definitely perform better as an underdog, so I like going under the radar and let the performances talk for themselves,” she said.

In a sport where she is often compared to her friend and skating rival Elise Christie, Gilmartin, from Nottingham, stresses that they’re in fact polar opposites when it comes to their racing styles.

“She’s very strong from the front and tries to take it on from there, whereas I’m trying to tactically outwit people,” she said.

“I feel like the way I race is more risky but it’s more fun.

“I can’t afford to put all my eggs in one basket necessarily but I love racing – I love the excitement of not knowing what’s going to happen.

“I race best that way.”

Gilmartin, 27, who made her Winter Olympic Games debut at Sochi 2014, finishing 16th in the 500m and 28th in the 1500m, believes the results will improve this time round at PyeongChang.

“Over the past two, three years I’ve been building up medals from world cups and European championships and making consistent finals,” she said.

“I’m more confident (than four years ago). I’m excited. I’m there to perform.”
Yarnold: IOC must protect us from Russian drug cheats

by James Roberts

LIZZY YARNOLD is using her status as Team GB’s only reigning Winter Olympic champion to speak out against doping.

Since the 29-year-old won skeleton gold at Sochi 2014, Yarnold has repeatedly voiced her outrage at the continued inclusion of Russian athletes despite the country’s state-sponsored doping programme.

The racer, who calls Shedfield, Hampshire home, backed a ban on Russians implicated in doping four years ago competing at the Winter Olympics and stands by her views ahead of PyeongChang.

She said: “I don’t ever step away from issues that are close to my heart and my sentiments will continue to be the same that it’s important to protect clean athletes.

“It’s a joy to compete in a sport knowing that I’m up against a fair competition. That will never change.

“We’ve yet to see what the criteria is for the clean athletes who will be going to Pyeongchang and hopefully we will hear that soon, but I hope the IOC will continue to protect clean athletes.”

The skeleton athlete has endured an eventful four years after bursting into the public consciousness by winning Team GB’s only gold medal in Sochi.

Yarnold completed a career grand slam in March 2015, adding a World Championship to European and Olympic golds.

But once she reached the top of the mountain, motivation was hard to come by.

Six months later, the Olympic champion announced she was taking a year out from the sport due to burnout.

This was a blessing in disguise.

The Sevenoaks-born racer used the time away to refocus and claimed bronze at last year’s World Championships in Konigssee, Germany.

And this year she finished ninth in the World Cup series earning a bronze in Lake Placid and multiple top ten finishes.

Despite being diagnosed with a vestibular disorder causing dizziness last September, she is aiming to become the first Winter Olympic champion to defend a skeleton title.

She said: “If I hadn’t taken that year off I wouldn’t be sitting here now. I won everything there was to win so I had to find that re-motivation – and that was to go to Pyeongchang.

She added: “Having that knowledge myself and the trust from the team makes me really confident.”

History is on Yarnold’s side.

Since skeleton returned to the Games at Salt Lake City 2002, Team GB have won a medal on every occasion, including women’s gold at the last two Olympics.

No slider has ever defended an Olympic title – if Yarnold prevails in PyeongChang, she will return to the top of the mountain.

Deas ready to join skeleton hall of fame

by Sophie Watkiss

THE FORGOTTEN competitor.

The woman who has flown under the radar. The skeleton athlete who is our best chance of winning a medal.

Laura Deas, 29, finished fifth in this year’s World Cup series, four places above reigning champion Lizzy Yarnold.

At PyeongChang, the resident of Bath, Somerset, is ready to become part of Team GB’s skeleton dynasty, joining Yarnold and Amy Williams, who struck gold at the past two Games.

“We have a rich history of skeleton athletes doing well in their first Olympics.

“I feel like if I go and execute the plan that I want to execute and perform as I have all season, I know I can get on the podium and that’s definitely my intention, that’s where I want to be,” she explained.

Deas, however, welcomes the rivalry between her high-profile team mate, and appreciates a gold medal winner in her midst.

She said: “Lizzy is a good friend of mine so I’m able to ask her questions about what it was like and what I should expect.

“It’s really nice to have her about – she brings a real experience to the team.

“Although we’re individual athletes we are a part of a bigger team as well.

“We are two pieces of a bigger puzzle.”
The Muir the merrier for curling superstars

by Sophie Watkiss

PYEONGCHANG 2018 will mark Eve Muirhead’s third Olympic Games.

A bronze in Sochi four years ago and European Champions in 2017, Team Muirhead are in search of their second Olympic medal.

These games, however, will stamp a different place in history for the 27-year-old skipper.

Her two brothers, Glen, 28, and Thomas, 22, will join their older sister as part of Kyle Smith’s youthful rink.

Eve said of her brothers’ selection: “They’ve earned their place here, they need to focus on the men’s competition.

“I’ll be supporting them every single game and watching them on TV as much as I can, but my number one priority is my own game.”

Coming from a curling dynasty, it is no surprise the siblings have experienced such success.

Their father Gordon Muirhead was a Scottish curler and World Champion during his time.

“My dad always says he wishes he was still playing, that he’s got the right age to play and he’s doing the farming.”

During the Olympics, their father and Thomas’ girlfriend will take care of the farming duties, but Glen is keen for people to understand the status of ‘part-time’ should not be negative.

He said: “It’s not like full-time you’re doing everything you can and part-time you’re not, it’s misunderstood.”

Looking back on their sister’s success four years ago, all three siblings have learnt from the experience.

Eve said: “I think it showed our courage and professionalism to get back into the next match.

“I believe the bronze is the hardest match as you’re always coming off a loss.”

Muirhead’s rink narrowly lost to Canada in the semi-finals but under the guidance of coach Rhona Howie, won the bronze medal against Switzerland with the final stone.

Eve’s success proved to be the catalyst for young Thomas as he watched from the back of his lecture theatre.

He said: “That was the moment it sunk in for me, that’s what I’m gunning for in the next four years.”

Team GB’s curling medal success four years ago means the public will be watching closely as the Perthshire trio look to build on their already rich history.

Sister act

by Sean O’Brien

FROM flipping burgers in McDonald’s to front flips on the slopes of PyeongChang, Molly Summerhayes is an unlikely Olympian.

“My friends used to come in to the restaurant and laugh at me when I first started,” Molly said.

“And now she’s the sister and teammate Katie chuckled.

But in a glamorous double life, Molly is embarking on her first Winter Games. Her funding methods are unconventional: a combination of fast-food service, crowd-funding and the support of her parents.

“For me, I couldn’t ask for a better job,” the 20-year-old said.

“I set up a GoFundMe page and raised some funds through that as well, but a lot of my funding comes from mum and dad.

Her 22-year-old sibling Katie, though, is no stranger to the event after competing in Sochi 2014.

Molly’s attempts to gather advice from her sister, however, often go begging.

“I tried to ask questions but she gets a bit annoyed sometimes because she tells me they’re stupid,” Molly joked.

“I asked her what clothes to take and she was like, ‘Just take a pair of jeans, you’ll be fine’.”

The two freestyle skiers from Sheffield, South Yorkshire are as close as they come and will be leaning on each other for support in South Korea: “It’s great that we’ve got each other,” Katie said.

“I told Molly about all the experiences I had last time and it’s great she gets to live it with me.”

But that’s not to say they don’t enjoy a bit of sisterly competition.

“It’s good we don’t do the same event,” Katie said.

“In every day, little things we’ll try and compete, even if it’s just racing up the stairs.”

“Even with the Playstation next door,” Katie added.

“Yeah, that got a bit heated!” Molly laughed.
British bobsleigh fighting on after Tasker’s dream denied

by Alex Bowmer

FOR MANY athletes, the Winter Olympics is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The thousands of hours of gruelling practice, the expectation of a nation and the faith placed in them by parents and coaches alike is enough motivation to grab the opportunity with both hands.

For the GB bobsleigh team, PyeongChang 2018 will be especially precious.

Heading into the New Year, Bruce Tasker was set for a place on one of the four-man teams at this month’s Games.

The 30-year-old was an integral part of the quartet that finished fifth in the same event in Sochi 2014. He may still receive a bronze after the two Russian sides ahead of them were disqualified.

However, his hopes of appearing in another Winter Games were cruelly ended after suffering a minor stroke on January 4.

Joel Fearon, 29, is a long-time team-mate of the Welshman, with the two winning a bronze medal together at the World Cup in Utah last November.

“Bruce is a very, very close friend of mine,” the Loughborough, Leicestershire, athlete said.

“There’s not been one medal or really exciting time without him being somewhere close to me. “He is probably the most respected guy in the team – a rock of the sport. It is hard, but hopefully we’ll make him proud.”

Lamin Deen, 36, helped the team qualify for Sochi alongside Tasker and echoed Fearon’s sentiments.

“It certainly hit the squad pretty hard,” he admitted. “Every success I’ve had, Bruce has been in and around it.

“He’s a good friend. I say to people ‘Bruce is British Bobsleigh.’ “If there is anyone you want in and around your team, it’s him.”

Deen, from Manchester, was deprived of an historic World Cup gold last November in Whistler after being pipped by a Russian team subsequently found guilty of doping.

However, Deen, also a Grenadier Guardsman in the army, insists he is not focused on the scandal.

He said: “When you’re on top of the mountain, you can’t afford to be thinking about anything else. “It’s a pleasure to work with the guys and the staff we’ve got, morale is very, very high. “It shows with the results we had at the start of the season and the picture we are building going into PyeongChang.”

Lightfoot sets sights on biathlon history

by George Bond

“YOU want me to go uphill with a rifle on my back? Are you insane?”

For Amanda Lightfoot, Team GB’s biathlon entrant for PyeongChang, learning to ski did not take the usual form.

Instead of a week of chalets, après and assaults on the liver, a 19-year-old Lightfoot took her lessons as part of army training.

“I was under the impression I was going to be downhill skiing,” she said. “I’d never seen snow.

By this point, she already had three years’ military experience under her belt, including a six-month tour of Iraq.

A year later, she decided to combine skiing and shooting as her profession, and has been Britain’s number one biathlete since 2010.

Now 31, Lightfoot, from South Shields, Tyne and Wear, heads into her second Winter Olympics as GB’s second representative in the sport, after Emma Fowler – also from an army background – competed at Turin 2006.

It seems implementing military-style training worked its magic.

She said: “My coach the last four years has absolutely beasted me day in day out, and I’ve got a trainer on the shooting side so the build-up to this feels better and more prepared. “I want to have the best result ever for a British female athlete in biathlon.”
Cheshire and Wallace ready to banish their injury trauma

NEITHER Rowan Cheshire nor Lloyd Wallace remember much about the incidents which threatened their careers.

And yet, both freestyle skiers find themselves competing on the greatest stage of all, just months after serious head injuries. This is not Cheshire’s first Olympics, but it is the first she hopes to compete in. She smashed her face against a halfpipe in Sochi, rendering her unconscious and out of contention for the 2014 Games.

Months later, the then-18-year-old suffered another concussion, which was the real setback.

“The second one really knocked me mentally,” she said. “A lot of people with concussions feel like they can’t go anywhere by themselves because they feel slow and foggy and weird. After my head injuries I didn’t want to go anywhere by myself, so when I went to see the doctors with my mum I’d have to get her to come with me. “Even when you’re healed, that feeling of ‘Oh God I’m going to feel weird if I go outside’ would manifest itself.”

But the 22-year-old never considered giving up what she loves. Despite the battle scars, the youngster from Stoke is going to South Korea on her own terms.

“My family never said I should quit or stop doing my sport. “They know I love it to pieces and they know if I wanted to quit – it’s my decision.”

Wallace, also 22, will be flying through the Korean skies doing tricks he’s practised to the point of exhaustion. In August last year, however, one went horribly wrong.

The Bath skier said: “That is the trick I’ve got my best results from - probably one of my most comfortable tricks. “I was just very unlucky. I was coming down the ramp and I just caught an edge, apparently quite a bad edge, and it put me off balance. “For this type of jump, skiers travel at speeds of up to 70 km/h. He buckled into it and was immediately knocked out.

The youngster was helicoptered to hospital and put in an induced coma for 24 hours. Quite remarkably, he suffered no major injuries.

Heading into PyeongChang just six months later, Wallace remains unfazed, largely because he cannot recall the trauma of the incident.

“Luckily I didn’t remember it, so I think that psychologically it’s not going to be as big a hurdle,” continued Wallace. “I’ve had big crashes in the past and psychologically I’ve had to get over those hurdles because crashing is a part of aerials. “I think any sport you put a crash helmet on for you know the risks. “You’re willing to take the risks.”

McNeill hopes public faith is vindicated

MICA MCNEILL has endured an unconventional route to the slopes of PyeongChang.

She will be competing for the two-woman GB Bobsleigh team alongside Mica Moore, but their prospects of competing were thrown into doubt last year.

The pair won gold at the junior Bobsleigh World Championship last January, but were told by the sport’s governing body in September that only the men’s team would receive Winter Olympic funding.

McNeill said: “When I first got the news, it was really emotional. I was absolutely devastated. “That emotion takes over and your brain automatically pulls you to, ‘my career is over.’”

McNeill regrouped and set up a GoFundMe page in a bid to realise her dream. She was soon inundated with contributions and messages of support, with the total raised exceeding their £30,000 target.

The 24-year-old has been blown away by the public faith. “These people are getting nothing from this, that’s the most incredible part,” said the athlete, from Consett, County Durham.

“The people of Great Britain have really shown that they’ve got behind British athletes. They have got us to where we are.”

After displaying such tenacity, McNeill will look to end her winter of discontent on a high note.

FIGHT: Mica McNeill had to battle to reach the Games. Credit: Getty Images
Billy’s leap of faith

by Jonathan Harding

BILLY MORGAN loves to push boundaries and in 2015 he became the first person to land the biggest trick in snowboarding to date – the quad cork 1800.
Owing to his enviable athletic ability, the 28-year-old, pictured above, has a penchant for pulling off extreme flips, heading to PyeongChang’s Slopestyle event with an eye-watering repertoire of tricks, which he has honed in his home city of Southampton, Hampshire.

But every move is a mental battle, a delicate balance between the execution of intricate technique and the confidence to risk life and limb pulling it off.

There was even a stage in 2016 when Morgan considered quitting in the build-up to the Olympics, with the risk of injury temporarily outweighing his willingness to ignore them.

“I thought the fear had got to me and I can’t do this anymore. I had to work my way around that and decide the risks haven’t changed, it is just my perception of them,” he said.

“It happened over time but I do remember feeling that I can’t do this anymore. I had to go to a contest where I had to do triple corks and I didn’t want to do them because it’s scary, but I went, did them and had a really good time.”

“I just have to continue counting the risks like I have done before.”

Morgan is one of six snowboarders competing in South Korea and after picking up two bronzes in World Cup events last year, is expected to improve on his tenth place finish in Sochi four years ago.

However, he is not focused on winning medals, instead prioritising the element of fun, the pure, central tenet of snowboarding.

“If I focused on medals I would not be any better. I would have just chained my mind to an extent where I don’t enjoy it. It gets scary and that’s the kind of thing I have to beat away,” he said.

“If I make it scarier and more intense I wouldn’t have the fun stuff in between to make it doable.”

Once pictured on a Sochi rooftop surrounded by Russian women, Morgan possesses an undeniable passion for après-ski, often with his travelling family.

He joked: “I do remember once having a toilet seat around my neck at one point in the middle of the dancefloor, but that was towards the end when we were fully celebrating.”

Yet despite competing in a sport that necessitates flamboyancy, Morgan admits that he, much like the rest of Team GB’s snowboarding contingent, are actually fairly reserved.

He said: “There is not much arrogance in snowboarding because it is not cool to be an unliked person. We are surrounded by nice people which makes it so enjoyable to do.”

The girl told she would never skate again

by George Bond

ALMOST two years have passed since GB figure skater Penny Coomes was told she would never compete again after shattering her kneecap in eight places in a training accident.

Defying the odds, she now stands ready to compete in her third consecutive Olympics in PyeongChang with long-term partner Nick Buckland, both of whom train in Novi, Michigan.

Coomes, 28, believes the tortuous nature of her recovery brought her back stronger.

She says: “We’ve spent all day every day together since we were about 14.

“So to have your other half in America while I was in England, stuck in bed – there were days I felt down and to be honest a little jealous of what he could do and what I couldn’t do.

“But I wouldn’t have it any other way, I want to be an inspiration, that’s really driven me.”

Partner Buckland, also 28, hopes Coomes’ accident will drive them on.

He says: “We’ve just both become even more connected, even more goal-driven and just closer than we ever thought possible. I think without this obstacle we wouldn’t be able to achieve what we have.

“I see ourselves as dark horses coming into this – from the bronze up to 12th place, it’s wide open.”

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“I see ourselves as dark horses coming into this – from the bronze up to 12th place, it’s wide open.”
Record-breaker Ormerod aims for gold

by Joe Walker

AT 16 years old, Katie Ormerod became the first woman to complete a back side, double cork 1080.

Now, at 20, she has her eyes set on Olympic gold.

With an X Games bronze under her belt and a World Cup victory in Moscow at the start of 2017, there is a feeling this could be her year.

Sochi 2014 was too soon for the then GCSE student, but the disappointment of missing the

Third time lucky for ski-cross Sarsfield

by George Hallam

THE only time Emily Sarsfield got near an Olympics, she snapped knee ligaments and broke her femur and tibia.

At the ski-cross practice event for Vancouver 2010, Sarsfield’s accident changed the course of her career.

Then at Sochi 2014, she controv-

erially missed out despite being

British number one.

The 34-year-old from Durham is finally set to make her debut and admits her set-backs have only made her hungrier.

She explains: “I feel like I’ve left no stone unturned, there’s nothing else that could possibly come my way. I’ve definitely earned it, I’ve

grafted for it. Blood, sweat and tears, a lot of tears.

“Physically I’m stronger, men-
tally I’m stronger, that can only help you as an athlete. I’m ready.”

Ski-cross combines naturally occurring downhill terrain with artificial banks and jumps with four competitors on the track at a
time, and the eight-time national champion describes its rigours.

She said: “We’re jumping 30-40 metres which is the length of two double decker buses, so if I don’t make that jump and that landing I’m essentially jumping from a two-storey building direct into concrete.

“It’s the ultimate spectator sport, it’s kind of like the 100 me-
tre sprint in the Winter Games.”