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U.S. Boarder Shaun White Looks to Defend Olympic Half-Pipe Crown

By Jennifer Monaghan

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The U.S. rider — a two-time Olympic medalist and 13-times X-Games winner - Shaun White.

All eyes will be on U.S. snowboarder Shaun White when he takes to the slopes at the Rosa Khutor Extreme Park to defend his Olympic half-pipe crown on Tuesday.

The U.S. rider — a two-time Olympic medalist and 13-times X-Games winner — pulled out of the slopestyle event last week, citing safety concerns after Norway's Torstein Horgmo broke his collarbone in practice.

The move drew scorn in some quarters, with Canadian rival Maxence Parrot saying on Twitter "Shaun knows he won't be able to win the slopes, that's why he pulled out. He's scared!" The comment was swiftly removed, but White is under pressure to come up with the goods on Tuesday nonetheless.

Yet it seems that White also has gripes about the half-pipe course in Sochi.

"Today was not the best," White said after a practice session, USA Today reported Sunday.

"The first day, the walls were a little over-[vertical]. ... Today, they made the walls better so everybody lands [correctly], but in the flat bottom, where they cut it, it's a bump, so everyone is riding along and then hits the bump. And that's really not very good," White said.

White's concerns have been echoed by a number of other athletes, with women's defending half-pipe champion Torah Bright telling Australia's Network 10 channel: "It's brutal and all you can do is kinda laugh. ... The people who are constructing the pipe aren't the greatest at their craft, and it makes it challenging for us."

The half-pipe event will see competitors board down a 180-meter course, using the height gained from riding up the pipe's walls to perform aerial maneuvers. Points are awarded for the complexity of tricks and the accuracy of their execution.

Other medal contenders in the men's competition include White's compatriot Danny Davis, who took gold at the 2014 X-Games tournament, and Japan's 15-year-old star Ayumu Hirano, who finished second to White in the X-Games 2013.

Age has proved to be no barrier to success at the Olympics so far, and Hirano could do worse than look to fellow youngster Yulia Lipnitskaya, whose dominant display in the team figure skating event helped to secure a gold medal for Russia over the weekend.

Russia has three boarders hoping to advance from the qualifiers: Nikita Avtaneyev, Pavel Kharitonov and Sergei Tarasov.

Qualifiers will take place at 2 p.m Tuesday, with successful competitors advancing to the semi-final at 7 p.m. The final will be held the same day at 9:30 p.m.

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