

Dutch Rider Takes First Snowboard Paralympic Gold

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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ROSA KHUTOR — Bibian Mentel-Spee of the Netherlands became the first athlete to win a snowboard gold medal at the Paralympics on Friday, almost 14 years after cancer wrecked her dream of competing at the Olympics.

Mentel-Spee, 41, won in a time of 1 minute 57.43 seconds, beating France's Cecile Hernandez Ep Cervellon to the gold medal by almost 10 seconds at Rosa Khutor, in the mountains above Sochi.

Mentel-Spee was tipped to compete at the 2002 Winter Olympics, but never qualified after being diagnosed with cancer that necessitated the amputation of her lower right leg. She then became a pioneer of para-snowboarding and a campaigner to give the sport Paralympic status.

"It took us about eight years to get [snowboard] into the Paralympics," Mentel-Spee said. "I

was back on my board four months after my amputation ... and I always thought it didn't really change that much."

"It didn't really take me that long to adjust," she said. "When I realized that I thought, 'why isn't this for kids with disabilities? Why don't they know this?' And that's why I wanted to do this."

The bronze medal went to Amy Purdy of the United States, who competed in able-bodied events in the 1990s before losing her legs to meningitis. She subsequently turned to a show business career and will compete on the U.S. television show "Dancing With the Stars" later this month.

"I'm just excited. It's been a lot of work leading up to this place so it's kind of a breath of fresh air to have done it," said Purdy, whose partner Daniel Gale wrapped an American flag around her shoulders and kissed her while she spoke to journalists. "The whole journey has been amazing."

Purdy was 16 seconds behind Mentel-Spee for the bronze.

Unlike the Olympic snowboardcross format of six riders racing each other in a knockout system, only one rider competes at a time at the Paralympics. The competition is a time trial where the total of the best two runs of three count for each athlete.

The men's third run follows later Friday at Rosa Khutor.

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