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U.S. Paralympians Complete Podium Sweep in Snowboard Cross Event

By The Moscow Times

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KRASNAYA POLYANA —The U.S. claimed a rare podium sweep at the Sochi Paralympics on Friday as Evan Strong won the gold medal in the first-ever men's standing snowboard cross.

Strong, 27, was in second position after the first run but claimed the gold with a blistering second run of 51.62 seconds down the Rosa Khutor Extreme Park course. Strong's cumulative winning time was 1:43.61.

"Today is a dream, I'm ecstatic, I'm over the moon, I don't even feel like my feet are on the ground right now," Strong said. "To be able to pull this off, it's just a testimony to the U.S training, our coaches, to what we've been working on all year long."

His teammate Mike Shea saw his 0.26 lead wiped out after the second run and had to settle for silver in 1:44.18, while Keith Gabel claimed a distant bronze, 3.49 seconds off the pace with

1:47.10.

Shea was just 0.01 seconds behind Strong after the second run and could have improved his result in the final third attempt, but fell closer to the finish line.

"I was confident in my abilities, I'm not unhappy with how I did it all and my fall at the end, it was just part of me going 110 per cent," said Shea, who lost his left leg in a wakeboarding accident.

It was the first men's event in a competition making its Paralympic debut in Sochi.

Earlier Friday, Bibian Mentel-Spee of the Netherlands became the sport's first gold medalist, winning the women's event over France's Cecile Hernandez Ep Cervellon and Amy Purdy of the U.S.

Unlike the Olympic snowboard-cross 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.

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