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Let the Games begin



Junior defenseman Julia Marty will lace up her skates for the Swiss National Team. Photo by Jim Pierce.

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When the puck drops on the women's ice hockey tournament at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver on February 13, Huskies fans everywhere will have at least three reasons to pay attention.

Women's ice hockey coach Dave Flint will be behind the bench as an assistant coach for the USA Women's National Team. Swiss-born sophomore goaltender Florence Schelling and junior defenseman Julia Marty will lace up their skates for the Swiss National Team.

But the Vancouver Games will be a showcase for more than Northeastern prowess in women's ice hockey.

Steve Langton, '06, a former sprinter and jumper for the Northeastern men's track and field team, will compete for the U.S. team in the two-man and four-man bobsled events. Langton has won gold medals in national competition in both specialties.

Schelling, who posted a 1.38 goals against average and a .949 save percentage through Northeastern's first 20 contests, rattled off her expectations for the Games—both as the starting goaltender for her club and as a spectator.

"We have a really good team this year and I feel that people will be in for a surprise," she said. "Most of the games are already sold out, so it's going to be really special."

When she's not stopping pucks, she wants to muck it up with her teammates and competitors. "I'm most looking forward to the opening ceremony and living in the Olympic Village," Schelling said.

Marty, an assistant captain for the Swiss club, wants to put aside distractions—the Olympic Village, the media—and focus on hockey. As a defenseman, making sure the puck stays out of her team's zone isn't her only responsibility. She's mentoring the Swiss team's first-time Olympians.

"We have a lot of young players," she said. "I'm a role model on the ice."

Both Schelling and Marty competed at the 2004 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy. But playing in Canada, for an audience as wild for hockey as Bostonians are for the Red Sox, tends to put things in perspective. "Women's hockey in Switzerland doesn't have a lot of spectators," Marty said. "To play in Canada is a huge thing."

When Flint's USA squad hits the ice on February 14 against China, it will be a gold medal favorite. But the Yanks will have to get through Canada—which beat the U.S. team seven out of ten times in exhibition matches leading up to the Games—if they hope to wear gold at the medal ceremony.

"Gold is realistic," Flint said two weeks prior to facing-off against China. "We've won the last two World Championships and we're ranked number one in the world right now."

But he acknowledged that improved teams such as Finland and Sweden would make a run at gold all the more difficult.

When he's not coaching his players through drills or prepping for an upcoming game, Flint hopes to catch some of the world's premier snowboarders, bobsledders, skiers and figure skaters perform on the biggest stage of their lives.

"I've watched it on TV in past years and I've seen these memorable moments, but to be there would be

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unbelievable," Flint said.

From his bobsled, Langton might have the best view of all.

Though he made his first sled run fewer than three years ago, Langton was the USA Bobsled & Skeleton Federation Rookie of the Year in 2008 and won two gold medals in the four-man and two-man bobsled in Park City, Utah, at the 2009–2010 America's Cup.

The transition of the Melrose, Massachusetts, native from runner to bobsledder doesn't surprise Northeastern track and field coach Sherman Hart, who coached the Olympian for five seasons. Hart said Langton was one the strongest and fastest athletes on his team.

"Steve is extraordinarily versatile and can do anything he puts his mind to," Hart said. "He is extremely competitive and it's within his physical power to do very well in bobsledding."

Langton wasn't ready to give up competitive athletics after capping a collegiate career that included finishing third in the 100-meter dash at the outdoor 2004 America East Championship, so in 2007, he submitted an athlete résumé online and attended a summer recruitment camp in Lake Placid, N.Y.

Three years later, and he's on one of the world's biggest athletic stages. He has high hopes. "We have as good a shot as anyone else" at winning gold, he said over the phone from Vancouver just a week and a half before the games. "Maybe a better shot. I truly love what I'm doing right now. The experience has been so amazing."

To follow the Huskies in the 2010 Winter Olympics, please visit <http://www.gonu.com/whockey/2010/winterolympics.htm>

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