

SPEED SKATER TRIES TO REACH OLYMPIC VELOCITY

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Cory Goelz has spent most of her life going in circles. But this time around the Town of Tonawanda speed skater is determined to grab at the Olympic rings.

Starting the day after Christmas, at the three-day national Olympic Trials in Milwaukee, the 25-year-old Goelz gets the third, and best, shot of her life at making the U.S. Olympic team.

Winning an Olympic berth is a dream Goelz (pronounced "Gelz") has nurtured since childhood, shortly after her dad and mom, Jerry and Marion Goelz, first put her on skates at the old outdoor rink at Riverside Park.

"I'm not going to say I'm on the team," Goelz said recently by phone from her home in Milwaukee, where she trains with the national team at the Pettit National Ice Center, site of the trials.

"It's going to be a very hard trials," she said. "There are lots of girls after the same thing. There are a lot around the same level of ability fighting for positions. It's going to be very hard, but I feel I'm ready for it. But I'm going to have to be at my best."

Her coach, Gerard Kelkers from the Netherlands, agrees. Asked if Goelz had a "good chance" to make the team, he replied, "Yes, she has a chance. But 'good' we have to take away at this point. Her training has been better than last year . . . but we have a very good team in here," added Kelkers, bronze medalist at 5,000 meters in the 1988 Calgary Games.

Goelz, who stands 5-foot-5 and weighs about 130 pounds, specializes in the three longest of the five women's distances -- 1,500 meters, 3,000 meters (which she considers her best) and 5,000 meters. The Olympic team will be chosen from the top four finishers at each distance, but there will be a maximum of 10 skaters altogether.

"I've always had very slow reactions, so I never could get off to a quick start. Somewhere along the line I discovered that I was better in the longer distances," she said.

"It's a very technical sport. . . . It's how you push and how you push more efficiently. And there are a lot of mind games. You can play mind games on yourself and each other. . . . Mostly it's a matter of keeping your head together.

"At the longer distances you've got to concentrate more. You can't let it escape you. You have to pace yourself. . . . The first couple laps come real easy, then you really have to concentrate and you have to think about what you have to do each lap. . . . You get most of your speed on the turns, so you have to build on that," she said.

Training for long-distance skating involves "more off-ice work than on," Goelz said.

"It's very hard to get into shape by just skating. Training is a mixture of off-ice training -- weights, riding the bike -- and getting on the ice."

Kelkers praised Goelz as being "dedicated in a way that she's always on top of her game. She's easy to coach and I only have to tell her things once. . . . It's obvious that skating is her priority and she lives for skating. Her day revolves around skating. At this point, training has to be the mainpart of her life and everything revolves around that."

Goelz, a member of the national team since 1994, finished fifth at 3,000 meters in the 1992 Olympic Trials, but only the top three made the team. Two years later, she finished seventh in the 3,000 and fourth at 5,000 but missed the cut for the Games at Lillehammer, Norway.

Her national stature has improved since then.

Last December she placed fifth overall in the women's U.S. Speedskating Allround Championship and was the top American finisher (seventh overall) at the 1997 World University Games in South Korea.

"Cory has been working her way up over the last few seasons. She's improved year after year, she is getting better and better," Kelkers said.

As a tune-up for the Olympic Trials, Goelz will skate Sunday in the Fall World Cup Trials at Milwaukee and then World Cup competitions at Berlin and Heerenveen, Holland.

Goelz, a 1990 Kenmore West graduate, grew up in the speed-skating shadow of her older (by three years) sister, Wendy Goelz-Kopasz, who also learned the sport at their father's classes at Riverside (on Wednesdays) and Cazenovia (on Sundays) rinks.