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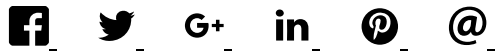
## Wintry end to Special Olympics: Athletes savor days of fun and successes

By Ronald Fisher  
rfisher@tribdem.com 1 hr ago



**Matt Dun**, of Allegheny County, competes in the slalom finals at Special Olympics Pennsylvania Winter Games at Seven Springs Mountain Resort in Champion on Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2018.

By Todd Berkey  
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Andy Sambol, representing Somerset County, waited patiently to take his spot on the podium prior to the 2018 Special Olympics Pennsylvania Winter Games awards ceremony on Tuesday.

Sambol was one of the more than 300 athletes who competed this week in the Winter Games.

On Tuesday, Special Olympic athletes and coaches gathered for the awards ceremony held in the Grand Ballroom at Seven Springs Mountain Resort.

Sambol, a former team USA member, competed this week in several snowshoeing events for the first time.

“It was a great debut,” said Sambol prior to the ceremony.

While the snowshoeing events were still new to him, Sambol performed like a veteran.

The Somerset County resident walked away from the awards ceremony on Tuesday with two gold medals and one silver.

“I had lots of fun,” said Sambol about participating in the Winter Games. He said that he enjoyed his experience this week, which included trying a new sport, making new friends, and his time with his coach.

Megan Critchfield, Somerset County’s head snowshoe coach, was more than pleased with the effort put forth by Sambol and her other athletes.

“They superseded expectations, even with the wintry conditions,” she said.

Critchfield said the athletes competing on Tuesday were challenged with performing in single digit temperatures and constant snow flurries.

“We started with no snow (Monday),” she said. “Today competition was pretty rough with

the winds, the snow in the faces, and the snow clear up to your knees.”

Critchfield said that her athletes remained positive on Tuesday and continued to perform.

“They do the best they can and they always overcome any of the challenges they’re put up against, and that’s what it’s all about,” she said.

Also making a first attempt at something new was Cheyenne Burton, of Lehigh County. Burton took to the slopes for the first time and earned two gold medals. Her attempt at securing a third gold medal fell short only because of the alpine slalom event being canceled.

“It was really fun,” she said. “I wasn’t expecting any of this. It was just a great surprise to me.”

Outside of being involved in the Winter Games, Burton spends time performing as a gymnast.

Because of her athleticism, Burton said she was encouraged to participate in the Winter Games – a decision that she is happy she made.

Burton, who was excited to show her medals to her family, said she has plans to continue skiing.

Mike Ermer, competition director for the western region, said the 2018 Winter Games were a success despite having to cancel the alpine slalom events on Tuesday due to the “dangerously cold” weather.

“There’s never been two perfect days in the Winter Games,” Ermer said. “Every year there’s so many hoops that we have to jump through.

“We make adjustments as we have to, and I take pride in that.”

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Ronald Fisher is a reporter for The Tribune-Democrat. Follow him on Twitter @FisherSince\_82.

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## Ronald Fisher

