

ABOUT VI SKIING

WHAT IS VI SKIING?

Visually Impaired, or “VI”, skiing means that the athlete is either totally blind, or has reduced visual acuity or visual field. VI skiers use the same equipment (skis, poles) as skiers without disabilities, but ski with a guide who provides verbal cues for following the course.

WHAT IS RETINITIS PIGMENTOSA AND HOW DOES THAT AFFECT DANELLE’S VISION WHILE SKIING?

Retinitis Pigmentosa is a genetic eye condition where the retina progressively degenerates and eventually causes blindness. Danelle has “spotted vision” and can only see up to five feet in front of her. Even then, she can only see contrasting colors without any level of detail.

Most people with disabilities have the same disability all the time – for Danelle, her vision is never the same, always changing and often getting worse due to the light conditions. Danelle “appreciates every bit of light that comes in through my eyes. There will be darkness. I just don’t know if it’s tomorrow or another five years from now.”

HOW IS THE SKIER ABLE TO ‘SEE’ AND COMMUNICATE WITH THE GUIDE?

Danelle’s husband and guide, Rob, helps her navigate the course with a combination of physical and communication aids:

CONTRASTING BIB

Rob wears a dark racing suit and bright orange tee shirt and bib, creating a high-contrast target that Danelle can spot as she skis behind.

HEADSETS FOR CONSTANT COMMUNICATION

Both Danelle and Rob wear motorcycle headsets (from Cardo Systems), which are attached to their ski helmets. Danelle cannot ski without these and luckily, they are bomber – reliable in snow, wet conditions, even crashes! Rob is constantly communicating about where to turn and what she’ll feel with the terrain, keeping Danelle on course even if she loses sight of him. This open line of communication – translating every “step” down the mountain – is essential for any VI team.

TRUST

When sight is limited – or totally gone – you have nothing if you don’t have trust. Danelle trusts Rob 100%, a cornerstone of Team Vision4Gold.

WHAT MAKES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SKIER-GUIDE PAIRING?

Back to trust. With as low vision as Danelle has, trust between her and her guide is the foundation of their ski racing... (just so happens, of their marriage too!). Understanding each other’s language, open communication and consistency are also critical ingredients for success.