

Just another bump for Brassard

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The headline a month ago read: "Brassard's career in question." But the only question Jean-Luc Brassard's mind yesterday was: "How soon can I be back on skis?"

Brassard, the 1994 Olympic freestyle moguls champion, was honored in Montreal yesterday as winner of the Gillette World Champions Award, an annual prize to the Canadian athlete, professional or amateur, who best demonstrates superior sporting achievement combined with a commitment to helping his or her community. Though he was moving delicately on crutches, only eight days removed from arthroscopic surgery to repair a knee he recently blew out in Italy, there was nothing all tentative about Brassard's comeback plans.

"This afternoon, I go see the doctor to get the stitches out and hear a progress report," he said. "I think I'll be walking (without crutches) and riding a bicycle next week, and ready to ski by mid-September." No sooner had the three-time World Cup champion torn the anterior cruciate and medial collateral ligaments in his left knee during training in Italy than he was on the phone to Sacré Coeur Hospital surgeon Pierre Ranger.

A revolutionary arthroscopic procedure sewed the torn ACL together using an artificial polyester ligament, which Brassard says will make the knee not only as good as new, but better. "Usually they'd use a piece of patellar tendon, but the rehab would have been too long," he said. "The Salt Lake Olympic qualifying period begins next January, and I want to be strong for the first World Cup in November." (...)

In fact, the only discomfort the skier was feeling yesterday was considering what lay ahead in Ranger's examining room. "He told me to stay off my feet, and I've been standing all day," he said. "There'll be some inflammation, and he won't be happy with that, but I'm bringing him a little gift - a nice pair of Oakley sunglasses. Maybe he'll go easy on me."