



Burke died at the age of 29 in hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah, after tearing the artery that supplies blood to the brainstem during a training run in the superpipe at a personal sponsor event at the Park City Mountain resort. As the result of a fall after completing a jump, she suffered a ruptured vertebral artery, one of the four major arteries supplying blood to the brain. This caused her to go into cardiac arrest. Emergency personnel responded and CPR was administered on the scene during which time she remained without a pulse or spontaneous breathing. Burke was rushed to hospital, where she was put on life support and therapeutic hypothermia was initiated to protect her brain. On Jan. 11, she had surgery to repair the torn artery, and had been in a medically induced coma until she died on Thursday morning. Irreversible brain damage to Burke resulted from heart stopping. The artery that ruptured when freestyle skier Sarah Burke fell during a training run is one of the most critical blood vessels in the body, feeding oxygen-rich blood to the brain stem, neurosurgeons say.

It's the brain stem, located at the bottom of the brain and tucked inside the back of the skull, that controls breathing and heart function.

"Basically there are four major blood vessels that bring blood to the brain, and two are at the back of the head, come up from the back," explained Dr. Michael Cusimano, a neurosurgeon at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.

"They're called the vertebral arteries because they come through the bones of the neck and then get to the brain," he said. The two other major arteries, called the carotids, run up the front of the neck.

It was one of her vertebral arteries that Burke tore when she crashed at the training site, causing what's called a massive intracranial hemorrhage, in which blood poured into her brain.

Doctors say the severe brain injury caused Burke to go into cardiac arrest. In other words, her heart stopped beating and she was no longer breathing on her own, resulting in a lack of oxygen to the brain.

"So right on the scene of this mountain where she was on, where she was training, her heart stopped," said Cusimano. "And so it was probably that the artery was partly torn and that led to this bleeding that her heart stopped."

After the operation, tests showed that Burke had sustained severe irreversible damage to her brain due to lack of oxygen and blood after cardiac arrest. This brain damage from lack of oxygen was ultimately fatal.

She died surrounded by those she loved. In accordance with her wishes, Burke's organs and tissues were donated to save the lives of others.

Burke's publicist, Nicole Wool, released a statement on Thursday afternoon.

"The family expresses their heartfelt gratitude for the international outpouring of support they have received from all the people Sarah touched," the statement said.

"Our hearts go out to Sarah's husband [fellow skier] Rory [Bushfield] and her entire family. It's difficult for us to imagine their pain and what they're going through. Sarah was certainly someone who lived life to the fullest and in doing so was a significant example to our community and far beyond. She will be greatly missed by all of us at the CFSA and the entire ski community," Canadian Freestyle CEO Peter Judge said in a statement also released on Thursday afternoon.

Alpine Canada president Max Gartner also issued a statement on Thursday.

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"We are very saddened to learn of Sarah's passing. On behalf of Alpine Canada, I'd like to extend our sincere sympathies to the family and friends of Sarah and to the freestyle community. The loss of such a great athlete is a tragedy for the entire ski and sport community."

A moment of silence for Burke was observed before Canada's women's soccer team played Haiti in an Olympic qualifying match in Vancouver on Thursday night.

Legendary life

Burke's love of freestyle skiing started early. As a teenage moguls skier in Midland, Ont., she'd often sneak onto snowboard halfpipes for the last runs of the day.

"We did it on the last run so that if we got our tickets pulled we wouldn't be too bummed," she once told ESPN.

Burke went from an unwanted pest on the halfpipe to one of its biggest stars and advocates, winning Winter X Games gold medals and lobbying for the sport's inclusion in the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

Burke, who lived in Whistler, B.C., will go down as one of the legends of her sport.

P.O.V.

How should Sarah Burke be honoured? Have your say.

Born in Barrie, Ont., and raised in Midland, Burke got her start skiing with her family when she was five years old. She took up moguls skiing and competed for Team Ontario before switching to freestyle and winning the halfpipe competition at the 2001 U.S. Open of Freeskiing.

"Sarah was a person who I think in many ways was larger than life and lived life to the fullest. She was a phenomenal representative of her sport and of young people, and of sport in general, and her participation in what she chose to do transcended that sport and went into a larger realm ..." said Judge.

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Burke won four gold medals in superpipe at the Winter X Games and an additional gold in the event at the Winter X Games Europe, having swept both competitions in 2011. She was the early favourite for the event's Olympic debut.

She also won the 2005 world championships, was the first woman to land a 1080-degree spin (three full rotations) in competition and won the 2007 ESPY award as Best Female Action Sports Athlete.

Along with her accomplishments on the slopes, Burke will also be remembered for her fierce advocacy for halfpipe skiing's addition to the Olympics.

"She's been a pioneer," said Judge. "She was really one of the people that started out and led the sport in its very infancy and she rose to prominence very quickly and continued to ride that wave from the standpoint of trying to push the boundaries of the sport."

Longtime friend and Canadian Ski Cross champion Aleisha Cline told CBC News the tragic news of Burke's death caught her off guard.

"It's an absolute shock, I mean, you hear people that get injured and when I heard that she initially had got injured I just figured it was serious but she's a strong girl, she'll pull through ... it's quite a shock," she said.

Cline, who trained with Burke in Squamish, B.C., said Burke changed women's skiing.

"To lose somebody who has made such an impact and continuing to really, really make an impact in the skiing community for women and for girls ... it's definitely going to be a loss for Squamish and obviously the whole skiing community," she said. "Sarah was no stranger to winning and she was the first woman ever to jump a 1080 in a competition and land it, that's amazing."

Good memories

Cline said she has many good memories of her friend.

"She was always a really fun girl ... and she was very focused on what she wanted to do and very determined," Cline said. "She was always there with a smile and to lose someone like that it's just sad."

Though she was unsuccessful in getting halfpipe included at the Olympics in Vancouver, Burke continued to be a driving factor in the sport's inclusion in the 2014 Games.

"We've been fighting for years [and] it's not been an easy road," she told CBC reporter Teddy Katz on April 5, 2011, after the announcement was made.

"I woke up checking my phone a lot and keeping my fingers crossed. I knew it was looking good but you feel a little nervous. But finally when we heard that it was in, [I] was jumping for joy."

Judge spoke highly of Burke's fighting attitude towards bringing her sport into the foreground of winter sports.

"Sarah always approached sport from a 'Why not?' perspective. She carried that thought process all the way through her career," said Judge.

Judge said that counselling and other resources have been made available to Burke's fellow athletes, friends and family. The Canadian Freestyle Ski Association also said that other member athletes will be made available to the media once they have received the counselling they need and feel ready to comment.

Burke's accident has raised many questions concerning the safety of athletes competing in halfpipe and superpipe events. Judge stressed that athlete safety had always been a primary concern of Burke's, from the beginning of her journey to have her sport included in the

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Olympics.

"Sarah was involved significantly in terms of creating safe mechanisms, not only for her to train, but for younger kids to learn," said Judge." He added that athletes are aware of the risks they are taking when they train and compete.

"There's an element of risk in any sport ... there's an element of risk in walking down the street," Judge added.

The family has received several inquires about donations to be made in Burke's name. There have also been inquiries about helping with the outstanding medical costs and related expenses. For more information, check <http://www.giveforward.com/sarahburke> . The website has been set up to help raise \$550,000 US

<http://www.cbc.ca/sports/skiing/story/2012/01/19/sp-sarah-burke-obit.html>