

2017/18 Oversea Report

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This year, on December sixteenth, I boarded a flight to part take in my first Australian Junior National team European season tour. I had never skied in Switzerland before nor in Austria, but I had heard lots of good things. I went over with hopes and expectations of what I would be skiing in, the reality however was far more stunning than I had imagined. I landed in Zurich on the seventeenth and stayed a night there to recuperate. The team got together on the eighteenth and by the evening we were all in Davos Platz in a two storey house with four people to a unit. The house was quaint, well-loved and lived in, but I wasn't there for the accommodation, I was there to ski. The ski trails in Davos were amazing, although we did have to take our skis off to cross roads through town. The best skiing was to be had on the edges of town where the trails were uninterrupted and really enjoyable to ski on. Most of our intense training took place in the Fuella Pass on the World cup distance track. The trail was full of challenging climbs, steep descents, fast flowing flats and tight corners. This made for a great all-round trail where you had to be constantly focused no matter where you were. For the longer lower levels skis my favourite track was the Wolfgang Trail. We didn't ski it often, usually choosing Sertig Valley, which was closer, skiing up it was a blast.



The city of Davos was quite small, but well supplied so we could get anything we needed just by walking to the shops. We didn't have to drive kilometres for groceries and there was an abundance of ski and snow sport shops.

A couple weeks into the trip the team was given the opportunity to spectate at the Lenzeheide stage of the Tour de Ski. The experience was unforgettable and whilst I enjoyed myself thoroughly I also learnt a lot about competition at the elite level. To see your idols ski right in front of you, to watch their each and every movement as they climb these ridiculously steep gradients with ease was just mind blowing, but it showed me what you need to aim for in the future. A highlight of that day for me was watching how Dario Colonga skied so evenly the entire race. He glided up the hills with strong technique and a higher tempo than many of his opponents. They often fatigued and began to grind up the ascents.

A couple of weeks after the Tour de Ski was our first race in Campra. The course was interesting and very fun for both the sprint and distance events but the snow and weather were not so pleasant, with the weather warming up and a lot of rain falling. This race for me was quite a reality check with none of the Australian men finishing in the top half of the field in either race. I had been told not to expect podiums of anything of the sort, but to finish in the bottom 20 racers showed that there was a lot of room for improvement before the World Juniors. For the Campra weekend we stayed in an enormous house in Olivone with some members of the senior national team and it was awesome, spacious, well-furnished and had a nice overall feel.

Prior to the next race weekend in Steg, Liechtenstein we returned to Davos for training. The weather there, the accommodation and surrounding mountains are phenomenal, the same can't be said for the XC race track though. It's just 10 minutes down the road from our hotel yet there they were struggling for snow, gathering what they could to maintain the track from the surrounding fields. The track itself was quite interesting with many steep climbs and descents and some non-cambered corners. I felt strong in both the races, classic interval and skate pursuit. I did however sadly fall in the classic race and break a pole, losing minutes in time getting up and then receiving a new pole. I felt that it was going to be my best performance but that's the nature of racing. Some things pop up that you don't expect. I still thoroughly enjoyed my time in Steg but now it was time to head across the border into Seefeld, Austria. We were truly in prime position in Seefeld, we could literally walk out the door, ski down a ski run, cross a car park and be on the XC ski trails in no time. We stayed in self-contained units with everything we could've needed. Early in the week the weather was quite foul in Seefeld with blizzard like conditions for our first day and prerace. By the time skiathlon, our only Austrian race, came around the weather cleared and made for a good race. This was the first ever skiathlon I had competed in and I felt really strong in the classic but however my skate leg wasn't as good, I need to improve my skating, still am proud of my performance.

From this point on we trained for about a week in Seefeld but left just as the World Cup began. We were headed now to the Goms Valley in preparation for the Junior world Champs in the coming weeks. I was only competing in the relay this year, I would've liked to compete in the distance events, however very honoured to be representing my country in the relay. The whole week was a blur to me with so many new face's, new friends and such a professional environment. I was in awe of this place and the people I was surrounded by. I focused fully on my performance in the coming days as I competed on the last day of the week's racing. I learnt a lot in terms of preparation, planning and self-discipline over that week fully managing myself and trusting the coaches and wax techs that everything will run smoothly around me and not letting anything grow doubt or worry in me and distract me from what I needed to do. I also learnt more about my equipment, what to look for in a ski to favour a certain condition and what binding setup.

Despite the team finishing last in the relay I had an absolutely awesome ski and enjoyed every second of it. The course was phenomenal and so too the atmosphere. We were all cheering for everyone no matter their nationality as everyone cheered for us. I have never experienced anything like this and I'm ready to go through this all over again just for that one exhilarating week. It makes all your training worth it and you determined to work harder.

Post Junior World Champs and the Australian Junior National tour we are all going our separate ways. I was staying in the Goms valley for another 3 weeks in Feisch, a moderate sized town about 30mins from Ulrichen where the Junior World champs were held. There I stayed in an apartment on my own and lived as minimally as possible whilst still maintaining a healthy lifestyle. I trained three times a week with a local ski team called Ski Valais. They had some very good skiers in the team, some close to breaking into the national team. Many of these skiers I already knew through racing and had formed some strong friendships. This was one of the reasons behind my decision to stay on in Switzerland. The ski training with the team was extremely valuable to me and the development of my technique; however it wasn't my only training. I trained 20hrs a week with no troubles as I was in such close proximity to the ski trails. I was able to ski, eat rest and train again and again without fatiguing to the point it affected my sessions.

This trip was close to ten weeks, my longest by far and an experience I will never forget, something I will always cherish. I have learnt enormous amounts about the lifestyle of a skier, both on and off the trail. I learnt how to better manage myself outside of training and recover more effectively for my own body. Training I now feel is the easy, as in simple component of building an athlete's performance. I now see nutrition and recovery as the most complex components and deserve more recognition for the role they play in the development of an athlete.

Last of all I'd like to extend my most whole hearted thanks to all on the committee of the Birkebiner Nordic Ski Club and Kiewa Valley Sports and Spinal Physiotherapy/ Mount Beauty Medical Centre from whom I received grants which helped fund my trip, it really means a lot. Thanks to everyone else who contributed to developing my skiing this year and assisting me in going overseas last year. I may have never been able to experience this opportunity without all the support, thankyou.