

2017/18 Oversea Report

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My season started a little differently to most. This year I was first in La Grand Bornand of France staying with my girlfriend Iris Pessey. We were lucky to get some early snow this year and started skiing straight away, the season never looked back as it continued to snow and end up being one of the biggest in years.

Soon enough I met up with the rest of the Aussies in Davos, Switzerland for the first of the races. I was questioning my shape a little leading into this season but managed some solid results in the Swiss cup leading into the first World Cup in Davos. This World Cup has never been a favourite of mine but this year I managed to open up with a top 50 result and my best result ever on this course putting some of my previous doubts to rest. The following World Cup in Italy consisted of only distance racing and therefore some lesser results on my behalf but still happy with where things were headed.

The following month consisted of some solid training. I had 2 weeks back in France over Christmas with no racing as I headed into the first stage of the Tour De Ski. I was able to have another good race finishing just 3 seconds from the top 30 I'd always dreamed of. This year I opted to race just one stage of the tour and continue to train hard over the following 2 weeks. In the middle of these weeks of hard training there was a continental cup race which I participated in, aka I skied very slowly and had some rubbish results. As it was always the plan to train through these races I tried to wipe the results from my memory.

I had a week of easy training leading into a month of World Cups followed by the Olympics. I was so glad to have that easy week and looked forward to the city sprint in Dresden, Germany. On arrival, the course was ankle deep slop and a bit of a demoralising sight to be seen. When you're near on 90kg, soft snow is never a good thing, but come the morning of the race they'd trucked in more snow and salted the hell out of the course making it a very fast and icy course, I was smiling. I had my best result to date, qualifying equal 26th and just 5 seconds behind the winner, I was absolutely stoked. After being so close yet so far so many times before, I'd basically given up hope on ever qualifying for finals on World Cup so as you can imagine I was pretty emotional about this one. My heat in the finals didn't go amazingly, I had a bad start but quickly regained contact with the other skiers, despite feeling really good I ended in 6th progressing no further. The following day Cal and I had another ripper in the Team Sprint. We lost touch with the leaders on the first lap as Cal was caught in a 3 man pile up in the exchange zone but we were able to regain contact and finish in a very tight 6th just 1.2 seconds behind the winner, unfortunately we were pretty unlucky not to progress to the final falling just 0.5 seconds short. The following two weekends went well for me too. I had my best ever classic sprint result on World Cup with a 44th in Slovenia and another solid result the following weekend in Italy just inside top 50. I was feeling really good and stoked with where my form was 12 days out from the Olympics.

The classic sprint was my first event and I was feeling confident leading in. Unfortunately it wasn't the result I was hoping for. I felt lethargic, my skis weren't great

and I battled with the poor conditions that the gale force winds brought with it. I finished 65th and it just wasn't my day. I was devastated, to get all the way there and be in the shape that I was in and end up skiing that badly was pretty gut wrenching. I looked forward to the 15k and I was happy to be back on the skate skis. I started solidly but finished a lot slower, it was a fairly decent result for me but nothing special, I was soon realising that the shape I had been in was no longer there and I was unfortunately on the downward side of my peak. The Team Sprint was a decent one, Cal and I finished 22nd but unfortunately we were a way off our goal of making the final. I had been undecided about starting the 50k classic, the last event of the games, but as I was feeling pretty disappointed with how it had all played out so far I wanted to have another crack. It was a tough course and knowing my training had been very sprint focussed I knew it was going to be a massive job. I was going pretty well until about the 30k mark when I started to cramp pretty badly, at this point I was feeling there was no chance I was going to make the finish, I just took it one step at a time. I just focussed on making it up every hill and looked forward to every feed I was given. Somehow I was able to keep it together making it to the finish without losing too much time ending up in 56th. It was an absolute physical and mental battle to keep going when I thought I was completely done so I was pretty happy with it and happy to end on that note.

My season was originally going to be done after the Olympics but we had been invited to take part in a city sprint race in China in late March. Iris and I continued with our plan to have a short holiday through Asia then went to China from there. I was sure my shape was going to be horrible after sitting on a beach with minimal exercise being done but somehow I was able to ski quite well there finishing 28th in a pretty solid field. It was a great way to see China with some great company and also finish the season on an enjoyable note.

I am now back in France for a little while before I return to Australia. A big thanks to the Birkie Ski Club for their ongoing support, it's great to be a part of such a supportive club especially in a season like this one with so many highs and lows. I'll see you all out on the trails in Falls very soon!

