

2018/19 Overseas Report

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I write this report on the first week back in Australia as I'm reflecting on this journey I have just experienced. This trip to me has become the most fulfilling yet. Whilst it was not my first time overseas nor my first time racing abroad there were still multiple new experiences such as my first individual start at a world junior event, but more on that later.

The trip began as a solo two weeks of training, but I wasn't alone.

Whilst there were no Australians there in Goms, Switzerland where I had chosen to begin my trip there were many swiss athletes and friend to make my stay enjoyable. The first week of training consisted solely of running, roller skiing and gym work as the snow had not yet arrived, but by the second week we were on snow and even racing. My first and only swiss cup of the season. It was, at the time the hardest sprint course I had ever skied, so too in distance but with repetitions of one ridiculously steep climb. The distance course wasn't much nicer either essentially mimicking the sprint course with an additional 1km extra per lap. This took the overall race to 6 laps of brutal punishment. My results were not my greatest at this event, nor did I expect them to, but it was quite a way to start the season. On December third I made the trip across Switzerland to Davos, the base of the National team camp where I met Valerio and Darice, the rest of the team were to arrive in the following days. In the next three went from 3 to 8 and the well. Then came the the transfer of Darcie group to join the rest of by Callum Watson and the next 2 and a bit week out in preparation for the weekend in Valdientro. environment was eager to race and of all the skiers at the was shaping up to be a



days our numbers team was training Davos world cup and and I from the senior the Juniors headed Teresa Rimann. For the group trained flat first 3-day race The team amazing, everybody inspired by the efforts Davos world cup. It great 3 days in Italy.

We crossed the border into Italy two day before the racing commenced and ended up in the small valley town of Valdientro. It was a quaint little place, but we were there for the racing, not the views. I was to take on all three event and did so, however the weekend didn't seem to go my way at all. One corner saw me crash out of the sprint race. The skate distance was not my best skiing overall feeling fatigued. To cap off the weekend was a mass start classic 15km distance. It was a monster of a race to begin with but it became all the more of a challenge when I was caught up in a pile up 500m out of the start gate and had a pole break, no surprises there, it wasn't long before I received a new pole courtesy of an Italian coach and later a pole from Callum. I was dead last at this stage and had a lot of catching up to do as the other races skied on. I caught the rest of the field and started picking up places one and two at a time, it was particularly satisfying to overtake the skier who'd fallen on me

and caused the pile up. But the race was far from over as each lap ticked over, I was increasingly tired, and the lapping began but it too wasn't without its dramas. I happened to be overtaken by the lead skiers on an off camber and icy corner. The lead skier was right behind me at this stage close enough to touch me which ended up happening. With his skis right up on mine his impact knocked off balance and ended up sliding out with the leader too getting tangled up and ending up off course on his back. We both clambered back into the race but by this time the win for him was out of reach and I too had lost a bit of time and a few positions. I ended the race exhausted but aside from being apart of two crashes that were somewhat out of my control I was happy with my performance. I had skied strong in the hill climb areas and had not let an undesirable race start mess with my head. But this concluded the first of two race weekends prior to the finale in Lahti.

With the weekend in Italy now behind us we settled back down into a strong training routine now armed with information on the key things we could improve on in future racing. We Remained in Davos for a short period longer before jumping on a plane to Sweden. This was also to be my first time in Scandinavia.

If I were to summarise Sweden in three words they would be; beautiful and snow choked. I don't think the country could function with anymore snow on the ground that what fell while we were there. Our first week was spent in Östersund whilst we raced in Asarna. We stayed in a beautiful family home that had a few extra mattresses thrown in to accommodate us all. It was a great communal area and awesome team Environment. At this stage Tom McMahon also arrived to provide extra coaching and waxing assistance along with a boost to the already awesome atmosphere amongst the team.

Fast forward a day or so and we are racing in Asarna, 40mins or so outside of Östersund. The race weekend was another three-day event comprising of a Skate distance, Classic sprint and mass start distance to cap off the three days. I competed in the sprint and skate distance and whilst I again had issues in the sprint, I managed to ski my best ever skate distance race to date. This positive result for me was surround by great performances by everyone in the team making the team vibe transcend into absolute astonishment at all the success everyone had that weekend. We were really starting to feel like this was the ideal preparation for Lathi Finland.

Moving on from Östersund and Asarna took us to Bruksvallarna. This area was an ideal training ground with the ski trails walking distance away and another beautiful home. We also welcomed Tom Hoogenrad into the team over from the states as he to gear up for the coming weeks. This area was amazing for the majority of the time but became subject to quick moving and pretty full on snowstorms resulting in some quite blizzard like training sessions and ridiculously large snow falls. We spent just over a week there in preparation for Lathi. The training there really hyped up as we began the final training block, trying to iron out all the kinks we could in our skiing to give us the best opportunity for good results in Finland in the coming weeks. The intensity was also brutal with sessions that resulted in people physically being sick trackside as we pushed each other to the limit. By the end of the week everyone was tired but as fit and technically sound as they could be before the Junior World ski

Champs (JWSC'S) in Lahti in the coming week. All to do now was to rest, recover and prepare to do all again in the biggest week of racing in the junior calendar.

JWSC's 2019 was an amazing experience for me, even just skiing in the stadium was enough to give you a buzz. To reunite with fellow athletes and friends was another great thing although meeting would be brief until the events were over as we were all focused on performing to our best. The small yet incredibly loud Australian cheer squad was another positive. Having people, you know screaming your name and urging you on is always a brilliant feeling. We had two days preparation prior to the official start of the JWCS's and we used this time to get familiar with the course we were to spend the next week racing on. It was an absolute monster of a course with little to know gradual climbs but numerous hills so steep they appeared like brick walls in front of you. Some seemed to go forever, especially when you were 7-9km through the hardest 10km you'd ever skied. And of course, what goes up must come down and what we went up we came down in similar fashion as the down hills we just as steep as the ups in places, so we carried a lot of speed but at the cost of a very small recovery. I think this was a major factor in to why Lahti was so brutal. You were never able to let up on the gas. Even on the downs you had to just go and no matter how short the recovery you had to be ready to give it your all on the next uphill. This short recovery sent me deeper and deeper into redline with each hill. This is what makes Lahti the hardest course I have ever skied, coupled with the desire to perform you best on the worlds stage. Of the three individual races available to me I did two and of course we had the team relay to end the weeks events. The sprint destroyed me and the 10km just obliterated what was left. Each event was just so steep and so fast paced it was unimaginable and I was in awe of how some people still managed to repeat performances better than my absolute max again and again.

I was considering doing the 30km mass start but for the sake of my team and myself I refrained and focussed on the relay ahead as I didn't want to let the boys down. We worked well as a team and whilst still finishing last managed not to be lapped and finish before the beginning of the presentations. The guys all skied their hearts out, so it was the best performance we could've produce on that day, so we were all happy.

This trip like all others before it in my still young skiing career has eclipsed all its predecessors in terms of the quality of new experiences I have had, the quality of racing I have been apart of and the overall enjoyment I fell at the end of it. I guess it is a little greedy to wish it never over but that is how I feel. I take this as positive reinforcement to the fact that I truly love skiing and ski racing and that it is what I want to pursue for many years to come. With that all being said I wish to thank all those involved with making this possible from both a developmental standpoint and an athlete but also from a financial point of view.

The funds, generously given to me by the *Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club*, helped me afford all that I needed on this trip to not only make it physically possible but also productive in my growth as a skier. So, I'd like to thank you all for that and I hope that we can continue this relationship into the future. Thank you all and I hope you had a brilliant summer or winter wherever you were.