

## 2019/20 – Overseas Athlete Report

### Hannah Price

Last year, two weeks after my final year 12 exam, I headed off to Europe to train and race in my frog-coloured suit for the very first time. 2019 had been a whirlwind, balancing training and racing with study. However, after finally achieving my long term goal of qualifying for the *Australian Junior Team*, I was ready to enjoy the reward.

Excited and very jet-lagged, we landed in a distinctly snow-less Zurich on the morning of the 9th of December. A short van-ride later, we finally found the white stuff when we arrived in Davos - our home and training base for the next 6 weeks. The fact that the World Cup would soon be held there meant that we got to share the trails with our skiing heroes as they trained and tested skis for the races. It was pretty surreal to ski past Sadie Bjornsen and Sophie Caldwell on my way to intervals, barely able to contain my excitement! A few days after settling in, we got to see them in action, watching the races on our rest day. It was easily one of the most incredible experiences of the trip to see such a high standard of racing. When you've spent years watching the World Cup on Youtube, it's easy to assume that the competitors are somehow superhuman. However, seeing them ski right past me - spit on the face and all - reminded me that they're just like us (except faster and stronger and older). It was pretty inspiring to watch.

A few days later, we left Davos for St Ulrich in Austria for our first set of races. It was a FIS OPA Cup which meant we were racing against Juniors from all across Europe as well as a few from Japan, Brazil and Turkey! With such a large and competitive field, I initially felt pretty intimidated. I'd never raced at such a high standard before but reminded myself that, while I came from an "underdog" nation in this sport, I could still give it my best shot. Due to low snowfall, the course for both races comprised a ribbon of snow over a couple of fields. The race organisers kept it in great condition for the sprint race (where I was super happy with my qualifier) however on the morning of the 10km Skate race, it started raining and the limited snow quickly turned to slush mixed with mud. It was probably one of the toughest races I'd ever done but I was happy to have pushed hard in spite of the tough conditions.

Once we'd all changed out of our saturated race suits, we headed back to Davos for another training block. Christmas Day was celebrated with Level 3 intervals, a Secret Santa and home-made pizza and pavlova with the senior athletes. While it was a little bit different for the norm, it was awesome to spend the day belting out Mariah Carey and training hard with my team mates. Over the New Year, we stayed in the tiny town of Filisur, half an hour's drive from Davos. There wasn't enough snow to train there so we skied in Davos in the mornings and then enjoyed running in the spectacular mountains (and stopping to pat the occasional cow along the way) in the afternoons. However, every day brought news of the catastrophic bushfires back home and I couldn't help comparing the snow covered mountains of Switzerland to the snowfields being threatened across New South Wales and Victoria.

From Filisur, we drove to Campra in the more Italian part of Switzerland for the Swiss Cup (and also my final set of races with the team). The weekend comprised two classic races on a challenging course with a few tricky (or mildly terrifying) downhill. It was also a great experience to watch the older athletes and the European girls and see where their

strategies and technique differed from my own. While Nordic Skiing is ultimately an individual sport, you learn a-lot from the people that you are up against!

My last 2 weeks with the Junior Team were spent back in Davos. We put in some great training and spent a bit of time appreciating the ridiculously beautiful views on long distance workouts. A highlight was also hearing all about the Aussies' awesome results at the Youth Olympics just a few hours away in Lausanne. However, on the 19th of January, I had to say good bye to the team as I went to spend some time skiing with my family before heading home. My final race for the season was the Marcia Gran Paradiso Euroloppet in Cogne, Italy where I was super happy to come in as the 4th woman. It was a 25km skate going up and down the Aosta valley. We were blessed with a bluebird day and it was one of the most picturesque races I've ever done. Even though I wasn't with the team, the locals seemed fascinated by my Australian race suit and a local TV station even interviewed me to confirm that it DOES in fact snow in Australia.

This trip was enlightening, inspiring and a little bit scary but also ridiculously fun. I'm so grateful to my parents, coaches, awesome team mates and of course, the **Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club** for their support in making the trip as fulfilling as it was.

*Hannah Price*  
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