

## Clare Egan: "Most American biathletes don't make money."



As part of our first long format entitled "Biathlon in the land of cowboys", we collected a multitude of testimonies, including that of the American "number one" last season, Clare Egan. Athlete representative on the IBU Executive Board, she explains the difficulties of being a biathlete in the United States...

Last season 2 World Cup events were held in North America, including 1 in the United States in Salt Lake City (Soldier Hollow, Utah). How did you experience this week of competition in your country? Has your family come to encourage you?

*« I loved competing in the US. The atmosphere was very different from European races, in a uniquely-American way. The fans were loud and having a great time, with many families and kids. I had almost 40 friends and family members travel from across the country to see me race, which was special. They will probably never get to see me race again. »*

You have just had your best season in your career with good results at the World Championships in Ostersund and a remarkable 3rd place at the Oslo mass start. We are now only a few weeks away from the new season, what are the objectives for this year?

*« My summer training has gone really well, and I'm excited and confident for the upcoming year. I hope to continue improving, and to be more consistent so I can move up in the overall ranks. One of my goals is to win a medal at the World Championships. I know I can do it! »*



Clare Egan on the last podium of the winter of 2018/2019 © IBU

**The next World Championships will be organised at an altitude of 1700m. Have you adapted your training accordingly? If so, in which way?**

*« I like competing at high altitude, especially in Antholz. We are at a training camp now in Utah, USA which is at a similar but even higher elevation than Antholz. So I will be well-prepared both physiologically and in terms of my racing strategy-- you have to pace yourself differently when there is little oxygen. »*

**In 2017, during an interview for the IBU, you told us that you spoke 6 different languages and in particular that you learned French at school because your state (Maine) is very close to Quebec, a French-speaking province in Canada. Have you ever been to France except during the 17-18 World Cup in Le Grand Bornand? Or are you planning to come and visit our country one day?**

*« I have visited Paris twice, as well as Nice, Avignon, Lyon, Grenoble, Correçon en Vercors (l'hotel de Marie Dorin Habert!) and Le Grand Bornand. I also studied at l'Université de Fribourg in the French-speaking region of Switzerland for one semester so I have some experience living in a French-speaking place. Mais j'aimerais revenir en France! I would like to visit Toulouse, Marseille, and go on a wine and cheese tour. Also maybe if I continue biathlon, Martin will invite me to his festival in Annecy. »*



The American team this summer on the Corrençon-en-Vercors shooting range © IBU

**It has been a little over a year since you were elected athlete representative on the IBU Board of Directors, can you tell us about your role, what it means and the topics covered?**

*« Until last year, there was never an athlete on the IBU Executive Board, which means that all decisions were made without any athlete voice. Now that we have a voice on the board, it is very important that we take it seriously and use it. So I am really working hard to set a good precedent for what it means to be responsible in this role. I work with my colleagues (Martin Fourace, Aita Gasparin, Erik Lesser, and Daniel Böhm- the last of whom serves as the athlete representative on the Technical Committee). We represent athletes in the IBU, and also to help the IBU communicate with athletes.*

*In the past year the IBU has done several major projects including writing a totally new Constitution. This was very important to athletes because it introduced integrity-related changes that will ensure more honest and transparent governance. For example, the new Constitution includes a Biathlon Integrity Unit that will independently manage all anti-doping and ethics breaches. Athletes, including our Committee, should now be able to focus on sport-related issues, as the major integrity problems seem to be behind us. »*

**Your country is number 1 in many fields and many sports, but biathlon is a sport that is not very developed and not well promoted in relation to the potential that such a country could have. How do you see your sport evolving since your beginnings?**

*« Since I started biathlon in 2015, the US won its first biathlon World Championships medals for both men and women (2017 by Lowell Bailey and Susan Dunklee). This was a huge success for our team, where we showed that we can compete with the best in the world. In 2018, cross-country skiers Jessie Diggins and Kikkan Randall won the first XC Olympic medal for the US since the early 80's. Biathlon is building on the success of the very popular and successful cross-country program.*

*Unfortunately, our TV is monopolized by four men's sports (baseball, American football, hockey, and basketball) and there is almost no room for anything else. It's also important to remember that most of our giant country doesn't have any snow or winter sport culture. So introducing a new winter sport is not easy! But with our success at the highest level, we hope to grow interest at the development level, and eventually to spectators everywhere. »*



Clare Egan on the women's relay at the 2019 Ostersund World Championships © Robert Henriksson

**Lowell Bailey in an interview for the NPR website told that biathlon in the USA still faces budgetary problems. How does USBA help you when travelling in Europe? Do you sometimes have to pay certain expenses with your own money?**

*« The US Biathlon Team is privately funded. We receive no government support. Our athletes are also not paid by the government or military, as is common in Europe. And most of us (including me) have no personal sponsors. So most US biathletes do not make any money. The one exception is that US Biathlon pays its top National Team athletes a small monthly stipend, and of course if you succeed at a very high level, you can win prize money. US Biathlon covers most of the sport expenses for the World Cup team (travel, food, housing, training camps, racing, coaching, ammunition, etc.), though not all. And all IBU Cup/development athletes pay for all of their own racing/travel expenses. »*

**Similarly for sponsors, some time ago Sunsan Dunklee had stuck a sticker on his rifle that said: "Millions of viewers. Your ad here" which allowed her to find sponsors quickly. Is it difficult for you to have brands that want to be your sponsors?**

*« I will have the same sticker in December!!! Watch for it, and tell me if you know anyone who wants to sponsor me, any of my teammates, or the whole team!!! »*



Clare Egan, Susan Dunklee & Joanne Reid © IBU

**For many years the carrying of weapons has been a difficult subject in the United States, especially since every year many armed attacks cause many deaths in the country. Your compatriots Lowel Bailey, Sunsan Dunklee and Joanne Reid spoke out on the subject in the Washington Post, you even tweeted in support of what they had said. Can you tell us more about the relationship between biathlon and weapons in the USA in general?**

*« Weapons are very controversial in the US, but the laws are extremely relaxed compared to in Europe. Some Americans believe very strongly that "the right to bear arms" (the right to own weapons) is a fundamental right, which gives people power against the threat of a corrupt government. This ideology goes back to the 1700's when the US was first founded and there were local militias fighting against the British army. However, many Americans nowadays believe that that ideology is outdated, and that we need stricter laws.*

*Of course for biathlon we use weapons every day, and I am not opposed to ownership of a biathlon-style rifle. But I do think that we need much stricter gun-ownership laws, and that we should ban assault-style weapons that are designed to kill people in war. I think European countries have sensible gun-ownership laws, and the US should have the same. »*