

Jake Brown "Soldier Hollow was a great experience"



New exclusive interview on Biathlon Live! For the writing of our #1 Horizon Biathlon report on biathlon in the United States, Jake Brown was kind enough to answer a few questions.

- First name: Jake
- Name: Brown
- Date of birth: 28 March 1992
- Place of birth: Saint Paul, Minnesota
- Nationality: American
- Instagram: wjakebrown

For people who don't know you yet, can you introduce yourself in a few sentences and explain how you came to biathlon and how your formation went?

« I'm from Minnesota, a northern, flat, lake-laden state in the USA. The Minnesota winters are cold and the Minnesotans who like to stay active often find cross-country skiing as a way to enjoy the winter. I started skiing in my parents backyard as a 3 year-old, but it wasn't really until I joined my high school ski-racing team in 9th grade that I got hooked on the sport. From early on I was a strong skate skier and excelled in distance freestyle races while competing for St. Olaf College and later Northern Michigan University. After graduating university and finishing my NCAA skiing eligibility, I was given the chance to join the US Biathlon senior development program at age 24 and couldn't pass it up. At first biathlon appealed to me because all the races are in the skate discipline and a distance of 10k or longer, but I soon found that I also loved the mental challenge of the sport. 2019-2020 will be my fourth season of biathlon and my second with my club team, the Craftsbury Green Racing Project, which is

sponsored by Concept 2 (maker of the Ski Erg and Row Erg) and based out of Craftsbury, Vermont. »

After two and a half seasons on the European circuit and on the world circuit since Ruhpolding, is your first World Cup point your best memory on an international race? If not, which one is it?

« I have a lot of great memories from last season. The most memorable will likely be the whirlwind of racing my first World Cup, the relay in Hochfilzen, Austria. I was racing with my IBU Cup teammates in Ridnaun, Italy on Saturday and had a good result, placing 15th with 2 misses. After the race our coach Tim Burke pulled me aside and explained that Paul Schommer had gotten sick on the World Cup, and they needed me to go to Hochfilzen that night to anchor the World Cup relay the very next day. Warming up the next day it was super exciting to watch our guys skiing right up there with the leaders. I craved the opportunity to race with the best. Ultimately I got the tag in 14th and finished 12th with a strong last loop. It wasn't our best result of the year, but I think that day will always be special for me. »

Last season 2 World Cup events were held in North America. How did you experience this week of competition? Did your family make the trip to Canmore to support you?

« Soldier Hollow was a great experience, especially racing the mixed relay. I'd raced at "SoHo" a number of times in college and so am comfortable with the venue. Seeing biathlon friends and fans that I knew also made the race feel more like a home World Cup, but that said, the US is a big country! It takes a full day of travel to get to Utah from where my club team trains in Vermont. My family didn't make it to Utah, but they did come to Östersund to cheer me on at World Champs a few weeks later, which was even better. I missed Canmore due to illness, so I can't comment on that event. I just know it was brutally cold. »



Jake Brown in full effort (Photo: John Lazenby/lazenbyphoto.com)

In a country where the average number of shootings per day is very high and where sports requiring a weapon are practised, is there a particular awareness among young people?

« As biathletes we fall into an interesting space in American gun culture. We are athletes focused on performance in sport, but by our sport's nature we happen to also be gun owners. There is a big difference between owning a firearm for sport vs. owning a weapon for the purpose of violence. We should ensure that we are promoting the former and the safe use of firearms and not the latter. »

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

« I think it's important to train a little at altitude and a lot at sea level no matter where I'll be competing. Sea level training helps me develop power and speed, something I'm not a natural at, while training at altitude gives me the necessary experience to pace successfully during races at altitude. Both last year and this year we've had a national team training camp for three weeks during October in Soldier Hollow, Utah. That's where I am now. I just checked the altitude where we are staying - 1702m, so not bad for imitating the altitude of Antholz. »

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?

« I've only been in the biathlon world for three seasons, so it's tough for me to say which of the changes that I've noticed are significant. Our national team is certainly deeper; while we lost Tim Burke and Lowell Bailey at the top, we have stronger IBU Cup and Junior National teams than we did four years ago, thanks to our national governing body taking a more robust approach to funding development programs. I've also noticed the significant growth of a number of small grassroots clubs in the west (Casper, WY; Anchorage, AK; and Soldier Hollow, UT) to complement the more established clubs that are having success in the east. I see long-term success for United States biathlon as being contingent on the longevity and popularity of these types of community-based clubs. »

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?

« It depends. At the beginning of the season USBA sends us athletes a list of all our events and how much self pay is involved. Some World Cups and usually World Championships are covered by USBA. Some are not. We are happy to now have a title sponsor in Ariens, but we are seeking more sponsors all the time - sponsoring our team is a very economic way for a company to market their product across two continents. We don't just believe this to be true, we know it. The difficulty is convincing American-based companies that biathlon actually is popular in Europe. »



We push on the poles (Photo: John Lazenby/lazenbyphoto.com)

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?

« Yes, it is difficult to find sponsors. Biathlon just isn't as popular here... yet. I usually have to explain to companies what exactly biathlon is when making a pitch for sponsorship. That said, it's not impossible. A number of my teammates have successfully found sponsors, but not without a little extra work, which can mean time and travel away from training. I'm lucky in that I race for the Craftsbury Green Racing Project club team, which is sponsored by Concept 2, maker of the famous Ski Erg and Row Erg. »

A few years ago, some girls from your national team launched "Girls with Guns" to help to develop biathlon for young girls. What do you think about it?

« Emily Dreissigacker and Susan Dunklee were the driving forces behind Girls with Guns; I am merely a distant male admirer of the event. The women's team held a series of biathlon clinics at a number of clinics across the country for young girls to teach them the basics of rifle safety, shooting, and biathlon. It's a great initiative on the part of our women's team to spread the hype for biathlon and women's participation in the sport across the US- they've held clinics in Vermont, New York, and Utah. »