

Joanne Firesteel Reid "The USBA doesn't have a huge budget, but they try to do their best."



New exclusive interview on Biathlon Live! For the writing of our Horizon Biathlon No. 1 report on biathlon in the United States, Joanne Firesteel Reid was kind enough to answer a few questions.

- First name: Joanne
- Name: Firesteel Reid
- Date of birth: 28 June 1992
- Place of Birth: Madison, Wisconsin
- Nationality: American
- Instagram: jfiresteel

You come from a family of athletes, your mother won a bronze medal at the 1980 Olympic Games and your maternal uncle is five times Olympic champion and legend of his sport. So I think that sport in general is a culture in your family?

« I definitely grew up more sports focused than the average person does. However, I do think it's pretty common for athletes to have children who are athletes, because that's the lifestyle they have, and they raise their children in it. Without the support of your parents in those developing years when you don't have personal finances or mobility or even much vote over how your life is organized, it's really hard to get into sports- or any sort of activity- at all. It's easier to get to competitions, practices, acquire equipment, because without the support of

your parents in the developing years. Mine were supportive of all activities my brothers and I ventured into.

I actually grew up in California, however, about a four hour drive from the nearest snow. I wouldn't say my path to a winter sport was in any way normal or easy or obvious. For most of my younger years I swam for about a decade, ran for my middle and high school, played soccer most of the way through, and did very little skiing as it was so far away. It was in a way quite astounding that I ended up competing collegiately and then doing biathlon as my livelihood years later, even acknowledging my family history in winter sports. »

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?

« This is an interesting question because I think people often forget the immense size of our country. My family lived the closest I think of any of my teammates that started the Utah World Cup, and they live a 12 hour drive away. They did fly to Utah and they did watch all my races ! I hope they had a good time! My place of residence is about four hours from Soldier Hollow and I do train there a lot in the summer, so in a way I would say I was the only athlete able to compete here on a home course. »

You have just had a successful season with particularly good results at the World Championships in Ostersund. What are your objectives for this upcoming season?

« I don't set results oriented goals like I think most athletes do. I'm more concerned with performance itself- I want to be better technically in skiing and shooting, I want to hit more targets and ski the course better. However that manifests itself, whatever rank and place that leaves me with, will be what it is. Achieving excellence is more important to me than the results sheet. »



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

« I'm our team's altitude girl. I live high, train high, play high. My state of residence is the average highest altitude of any state in the Union, and the closest skiing to my house is higher than 3200 meters. I doubt I'll have to adapt much, it's much harder for me to race at low elevation than high.

Our coach (Armin Auchentaller) is from Antholz, and I'm sure he'll have a plan for training us up for his home venue! »

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?

« In every success story, you see a small struggling group go through a turning point. I think Susan, Tim, Lowell and Clare took us through that turning point already and we are on the upswing. We have better coaching, better staff, better support than we ever have, and it's coming out in better team results than ever. Our training group is strong, and I think we can look forward to getting better every year. Nothing happens overnight, but I think we are getting there. »

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?

« Our athletes, even the most highly paid ones on our team, hover very close to the poverty line. That's not the fault of USBA, but of the USOC, which pays its CEOs many millions dollars and the athletes basically nothing they are very poorly paid. USA Olympians don't get paid to go to the Olympics, and they get paid very little per medal.

USBA doesn't operate with a huge budget, but they try to do their best. Depending on the year and how tough our budget is, we can pay anything from just the plane ticket over to the entire expenses for the World Cup. For the most part, our organization tries to make sure that World Cup is never self pay, but even that happens sometimes.

A bunch of my teammates decided to join the US Army to have an income for expenses. That's a rough path and a major investment because you have to leave for four months, during which you can't train, but afterwards you do have a steady salary to pay for the biathlon life.

There isn't really a good solution, since you can't work a full time job and do biathlon »



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?

« Obviously North American companies who have never heard of biathlon have no interest in sponsoring a team doing it. We find most of our sponsors in Europe, and sometimes in Nordic sport hotbeds like the Midwest or New England.

I think that it's misleading to think that Susan got sponsors quickly- she got two sponsors that didn't offer her a whole lot, and one of them backed out the next year and gave her a rough time when she didn't consistently podium every weekend. She has to perform at a level higher than her European competitors in order to keep a lesser level of sponsorship for companies, because that's how unknown America is as a biathlon nation. (However, her equipment sponsors of course stood by her throughout her career).

I do much better fundraising through donations by generous individuals than dealing with corporate sponsorship. »