



NEWS

Milan mementos: Brown blogs from junior worlds

Reigning world junior bronze medalist shares tales from Italy

By Jason Brown, special to icenetwork.com

(02/25/2013) - **Jason Brown**, last season's world junior bronze medalist, relayed his adventures from the **2013 World Junior Championships in Milan, Italy**.

Sunday, March 3

Today was officially the last day of the world junior championships. There was exhibition practice in the morning, followed by the exhibition in the afternoon. I ended my day going into the city with **Shotaro [Omori]**, [physical therapist] Kim [Bozart] and my parents, and then we met the entire team for bowling.

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition finale practice is always such an experience. The people choreographing try extremely hard to teach us, but it's hard when everyone speaks different languages ... especially when they speak into the microphone in English and I can barely make out what they are saying due to the muffled sound through the microphone's speaker. On top of that, most of the Russians don't speak any English, along with the Chinese, some of the Japanese and others from different countries. So, there are people at the boards translating while the woman choreographing is speaking. Although it is a challenge to get everyone on the same page, I love every minute of it and think it's so fun working together!

After running through the finale for the last time, Shotaro looked at me and said, "This is incredible! We are on the ice with some of the best skaters in the entire world!" We both felt so honored to have this opportunity to share the ice with all of them.

THE CITY

After the exhibition, I was determined to go into the city because I hadn't gotten to yet on this trip! Shotaro hadn't gone into the city either, so my parents, Shotaro, Kim and I all ran to the metro as soon as we got back to the hotel.

The city is so magical. The huge Duomo in Milan is so majestic and powerful, along with the amazing shops and incomparable gelato and creperies. We also went to the Castello Sforzesco and walked around the streets. We had such a terrific time!

BOWLING

It is always such a treat to get together with the entire team one last time on the last night and hang out. On this trip, we all went bowling. The bowling ability of the group varied greatly from person to person, but there were numerous strikes and lots of laughter and cheers.



Jason Brown had a blast in Milan with coach Kori Ade and his U.S. teammates. (Klaus-Reinhold Kany)

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THANK YOU!

We would like to thank U.S. Figure Skating for all its support throughout the week and this entire season. Thank you for sending us to compete in Milan at the world junior championships. Also, a huge thanks to our team leaders, John Cole and Wendy Enzmann; our team doctor, Peter Gerbino; and our PT, Kim. We could not have asked for a more supportive team. Finally, thanks to all of the fans and families who supported us from home and in the stands, and to Milan's LOC for hosting this incredible event. We hope to make it back to Milan in the future!

FINAL GOODBYE

This was such a spectacular event! Team USA left with a total of 17 medals (including the medals awarded for the short, long and overall) and two world junior champions. Last time I left Milan after the Junior Grand Prix, I had to roll **Courtney [Hicks]** out of the hotel in a luggage cart to the bus after she broke her leg, but this time she leaves with a small bronze medal from her short program, a fifth-place finish overall ... and injury free! Everyone who ran the JGP last year was all so excited to see Courtney back here and doing so well. It truly is spectacular that she recovered so well and so remarkably fast.

Our seasons are officially over. We are all super psyched to get new programs and build from what we have learned from this year's events.

CIAO!

Good luck to the world team competing in London, Ontario, later next week ... GO TEAM USA!

Saturday, March 2

The day began with the men's and ladies' last official practice session before competing at the main rink.

MEN'S FREE SKATE

It's hard to describe my feelings preceding the long. Skating last in the free skate was so exciting and nerve-wracking. Shotaro, **Josh [Farris]** and I skated one after another, in that order, in the final group.

While walking around behind the rink after the six-minute warm-up, I could hear Team USA cheer the minute Shotaro stepped onto the ice. [My coach] Kori [Ade] watched on one of the TVs in the backstage area and told me Shotaro's skate was incredible. When his scores came up, I couldn't help but smile -- I knew he had secured a medal. We became close throughout the week, and I was so happy for him!

Josh skated next. The cheers just kept elevating. I was pacing behind the curtains to the rink warming up, but Josh's skate "sounded" unbelievable. The energy in the rink as he bowed was electric.

I was last to skate, and I knew I had the opportunity to help make history and be part of the first men's sweep from any country. The arena was silent as I got into my starting position ... by the end, I had tears in my eyes. I have been working so hard this entire season, struggling to master and integrate a new jump, and to successfully perform the way I've dreamt was so overwhelming and emotional.

The three of us finished one (Josh), two (me), three (Shotaro). We were very proud to sweep the podium, all so honored to be representing Team USA ... definitely an experience I will never forget.

LADIES FREE SKATE

The ladies free skates were all very impressive, and because of such close marks in the short, no one had a big advantage going into the long, making it even more exciting and suspenseful. The entire U.S. team sat together in the stands decked out in red, white and blue, cheering them on.

Yasmin [Siraj] started off the U.S. ladies, skating beautifully. She smiled the entire time and enjoyed every minute. She finished ninth in the long and 11th overall.

Courtney skated later in the event, first in the final warm-up. I have never seen her jump bigger than she did today! She flew across the ice, finishing the event in fifth.

Samantha [Cesario] skated last in the entire competition. We were all standing when she got on the ice, waving our flags and screaming ... and from the moment she started until she finished, we were all transfixed by her performance. By the time she hit her ending pose, we were all on our feet screaming. She finished the event in fourth.

It's moments like this, when the whole team is sitting together in red, white and blue paraphernalia, all cheering and supporting one another, that I feel especially proud to be a part of Team USA.

Friday, March 1

The day started off with the 45 junior ladies taking the ice to compete for the first time in the short program, while the dancers competed their free dance later in the night. While this was taking place, the men had a day off from competing and had a 40-minute practice at the practice arena. It was a bit sad leaving the ice knowing it was the last time I would skate at that rink. I made sure to take a lot of pictures to capture the memories. :)

LADIES SHORT

The ladies short program was an extremely long event ... a little over seven hours from start to finish, along with four ice resurfacings. The point spread between all the girls after the event was insanely close. The second- and third-place skaters going into Saturday's long program are tied, and second through fifth all have 53-point something.

All three Americans did a wonderful job. Yasmin sits in 13th, only about six points out of first. Courtney finished third after the tie-breaking technical mark but is essentially going into the long tied for second, and Samantha rocked the house, skating into the lead by less than a point. After her scores were announced, the power went out at the rink. We were all joking that she was Beyoncé at the Super Bowl ... it was one lights-out performance! There were two more ladies that had to skate, so when they finally got power back, about 12 minutes later, the two girls got to warm up again on the ice for six minutes before competing their short programs.

FREE DANCE

The dance event was a huge success for all three U.S. teams. All of them were extremely psyched about their performances. **Lorraine [McNamara] and Quinn [Carpenter]** skated a breathtaking program to *Romeo and Juliet*, finishing ninth. They were extremely happy to finish in the top 10. **Kaitlin [Hawayek] and Jean-Luc [Baker]** finished seventh, placing sixth in the free and pulling up from their 11th-place finish in the short. **Alex [Aldridge] and Daniel [Eaton]** were the last U.S. team to take the ice. Their connection throughout their performance was stunning, and they won a silver medal for the free dance and the bronze medal overall.

MY APOLOGIES!

I am terribly sorry for the delay in the blogs. Once I started competing, it was hard to keep up with them. There will be two more coming, about the events on Saturday and Sunday. Thank you so much for being patient. Hope you like the last two!

Thursday, Feb. 28

WHAT A DAY!

The day began with the official short program practice ice for the men at the practice rink, while the official free program practice for pairs was going on in the main rink. Dance and ladies had practice later in the afternoon at the practice rink.

MEN'S EVENT

Due to the fact that there were 37 men competing, the short program event was more than five hours long. It was weird to grasp the fact that I was taking an hour nap while my event was going on. Not only did I sleep until 12, but I then went down for an unbelievable lunch buffet before getting ready and finally head over to the rink to compete.

The men's event for Team USA could not have gone any better! It was so incredible to have a U.S. sweep in the short. Josh skated an incredible short program to take the lead. Shotaro shattered his season's best in finishing second. I finished the short program in third. It wasn't my best skate -- I messed up my combo -- but it was definitely a program I am proud of, and I learned a lot from it and can't wait to apply what I've learned in the long and in the future.

We had a small-medal ceremony following the event along with a press conference. It was so cool! I've never done a small-medal ceremony for the short program. We are all extremely thrilled and can't wait for the long on Saturday. We drew the last three spots in the

long: Shotaro skates 22nd, Josh 23rd and I close the event skating 24th. It will be nonstop excitement!

PAIRS

Britney [Simpson] and Matt [Blackmer] were scheduled to compete their free skate at 8:01 p.m. I was determined to make it to their performance, but I had to quickly have dinner beforehand. After getting back to the hotel from the men's press conference, it was 6:30, so I quickly changed, ran downstairs to dinner and caught the 7:30 bus to the rink.

We pulled up to the arena at 8, and I sprinted off the bus to the front entrance. The guy checking for entrance tickets said I wasn't allowed to enter the arena through the front, that I had to take the athletes' entrance around back. I bolted around back as fast as I could, hoping I would catch at least part of their skate.

While running up the back steps into the arena, a lady standing at the bottom of the steps kept yelling, "No skate! No skate!" I was so sad. I assumed they had an ice resurfacing before the final two groups of pairs ... but then, out of nowhere, Matt, Britney, Haven [Denney] and Jessica [Noelle Calalang] come outside to tell me that the event hadn't even started and that the Zamboni had broken while resurfacing before the event. An hour-and-a-half delay, a lot of speculation and a replacement Zamboni later, the event began.

It was an insanely intense event from the beginning all the way until the last scores were announced! Matt and Britney were the first of the U.S. teams to take the ice. They skated a beautiful program, hitting both their throw triple Sal and triple loop with ease. They finished in 10th in the final standings.

Jessica and Zack [Sidhu] skated shortly after, nailing a ginormous throw triple Lutz at the end of their program and had a great performance, finishing ninth in the overall standings.

Finally came **Haven [Denney] and Brandon [Frazier]**, who skated first in the final warm-up group, and they just brought it. Without a dull moment in the entire free skate., it was truly a spectacular performance which won them the small silver medal in the free and an overall first-place finish in the final standings. They are officially the 2013 world junior champions in pairs ... what an amazing title to have achieved. It was definitely deserved. They leave Milan with a small bronze (short), small silver (long) and the overall gold medal.

I talked to Haven this morning, and she kept saying that she still can't believe what took place. They will take the ice for the first time as world junior champions on Sunday in the exhibition.

Wednesday, Feb. 27

FIRST DAY OF EVENTS

Today marked the short programs of the pairs and dance competition. The ladies and men both had practice ice at the practice rink during the day.

DANCE

The day began with the short dance competition, and by the end of the night, the pairs had finished their short program as well. All the dancers seemed very pleased with their skates in their short dance. I, unfortunately, missed most of their performances because the men's official practice ice was going on at the same time.

I made it to the main arena with just enough time to see the end of Alex and Daniel's skate. I was screaming from the stands, jumping up and down when they finished! They finished in third after the short dance, and they drew second in the last warm-up group for the free dance.

Quinn also had a brilliant performance, skating as zombies in their captivating short dance. They finished eighth in the segment and are skating third in the third group.

The last U.S. dance team, Kaitlin and Jean-Luc, also had an amazing skate, finishing 11th and drawing fourth in the second group for Friday's free dance event.

PAIRS

Sadly, while the pairs were skating, I was getting ready for bed due to an early practice session tomorrow, so I can't exactly tell you how it all went and how they feel, but I can tell you what I do know ...

Haven and Brandon skated an incredible clean skate, ending in third place heading into their long tomorrow. Jessica and Zack finished in eighth, and Britney and Matt ended ninth in the short program. All throws from all three teams were all nicely landed, and the short program scores are all crazy close, so anything could happen in the long, making it one super-exciting event tomorrow night!

MEN'S DRAW

For some reason, I get the most nervous to draw at events. I haven't quite figured out why, but when my hand goes in to grab a number, my eyes are shut and my hands are shaking. To be completely honest, I've figured out that, no matter which number I pull, the key to a happy outcome when you draw is to have reasons that all six spots are great spots. So, in the draw today for the short program, when I drew sixth in the sixth warm-up, I told myself I will have an opportunity to take my skates off and do a little off-ice jumping and then re-tie my skates so they feel perfect.

Josh and Shotaro both drew in the seventh and final group, drawing first and third respectively. We all can't wait to compete tomorrow.

TOMORROW'S PREVIEW

The competition continues, and for some, it comes to a close. The day begins with the men's short program event, where Josh, Shotaro and I will take the ice, and the day ends with the pairs free skate, wrapping up the pairs competition for the week. Britney and Matt, Jessica and Zack, and Haven and Brandon will be finished with their competition events when tomorrow ends! Dance has a day off of competing and has practice, as do the ladies.

Please keep sending good vibes! Ciao for now.

Tuesday, Feb. 26

FIRST DAY'S CHALLENGE

Another travel tip is to stay awake the entire day once you get to your overseas destination. I don't even let myself lie down, even though it's extremely hard to fight the urge. In this case, it worked. Once my head hit the pillow at 10 o'clock, I was out until I woke up the next morning at 8.

FIRST PRACTICE

Today began all the first official practices, which ran from 7 a.m. to 10:05 p.m. between the practice rink and the main rink. Most of our practices throughout the week are in the practice rink, except for the pairs. They only skate in the main rink due to a dangerously low part of the ceiling which could cause problems for the pairs while doing lifts.

I gathered from everyone that it was a very successful day. "Great practices," "Like the rink," "Ice feels good" and "Very happy to take the ice for the first time" were just a few of the comments I heard. I personally love that reassuring sense of that first practice ice, feeling that I can still do everything after travel, on a foreign ice surface, at a high-profile event and at the tail end of my season.

PRACTICE RINK

The practice rink is about a 3-5 minute walk or a six-minute bus ride from our hotel. It is located in a huge facility which houses a swimming pool, a bowling alley, a skating rink on the first floor and a big concert hall on the second floor. I've heard there is a lot more, but I haven't had the chance to really explore. Getting lost is extremely easy; like a maze, every door leads you to a different place, room or stairwell.

MAIN RINK

I had the privilege of competing in Milan at the Junior Grand Prix in the fall of 2011 along with Courtney Hicks. I couldn't have been more excited when I found out I was coming back, and that we were also competing at the same rink! It was comforting to know that I've skated on the ice before and liked it, but to my surprise, when I walked in for my first day of practice, the familiarity wasn't there. The rink has a fresh coat of paint, the Plexiglas is down, the hockey lines and circles are gone, and a series of tents have been added to the exterior to house media, and the warm-up and skating lounge areas. This updating was probably due to the rink hosting both Italian nationals and junior worlds this year.

ALL TEAM USA MEMBERS HAVE ARRIVED

The 2013 U.S. World Junior Team is complete! Yasmin, her coach Mark [Mitchell] and Yasmin's mom all arrived this afternoon after a long day of travel. Once here, they got settled as quickly as they could because Yasmin had a late-night practice a couple of hours after their arrival. Along with Yasmin, U.S. Figure Skating's Mitch Moyer and Katie McCarter also arrived today after scoping out Graz, Austria, where the 2014 Olympic skating team will train in the time between the Opening Ceremony and the competition days. It's Katie's first time traveling overseas. She loved Graz and is really pumped to be in Milan. This is the first international skating event she's been to, and we are so honored that we will be a part of her first experience.

DÉJÀ VU

Ever since leaving Milan one year ago, Kori and I have been craving the amazing Italian restaurant Zio Provolone, which we nicknamed "Denny's" due to its uncanny resemblance to the American diner-style restaurant. The restaurant is located across the street from the hotel Idea, where we stayed last fall, and although we aren't staying there this time, the officials for this event are ... so, we devised a plan for how to get to our favorite "Denny's." We took the shuttle bus from our hotel to the rink, then got on the officials' bus from the rink to their hotel, and, finally, walked across the street to ZIO PROVOLONE! Jere Michael, Courtney's coach, came with us -- it was a real privilege getting to talk to him and know him better -- and he fell in love with the food instantly. Jere had the task of bringing Courtney and her mom food from there because we found out they have been craving it for over a year, too!

TOMORROW'S PREVIEW

The first day of competition begins for all our dance and pairs teams. Six U.S. couples will take the ice to compete. For the men and ladies, tomorrow is a lighter day, with only one practice, so I'm hoping to do lots of cheering afterward for our teammates. For those who are reading this, please send good, positive vibes ... GO TEAM USA!

Monday, Feb. 25

TRAVEL DAY/DAYS BEGIN!

It's weird that when you wake up in your bed -- in my case, Saturday morning -- you realize that you won't sleep in an actual bed again until Sunday night. The overnight travel feels more like a long flight than a full night's sleep lost.

I woke up at 6:00 a.m. on Saturday so I could get one last practice in before heading to the airport. Leaving the rink before a big event is always exciting ... It reminds me of how supportive my friends and other coaches are, and the love, hugs, good-luck texts, calls and conversations mean so much to me!

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

The more opportunities you have to travel, the more you learn what works for you and what needs to change for next time. Over the years of competing internationally, I've learned some things:

- I make sure to always have water, and drink as much as possible while traveling.
- I bring lots of food so I am never stuck being hungry while wondering when the next meal or snack will be served.
- I have a couple movies or TV shows on my computer just in case they don't show them on the plane.
- I walk around and stretch during the long flight overseas, but one thing Kori and I both definitely continue to struggle with is how to pack under 50 pounds ... So, knowing that we've found ourselves unpacking, repacking and reorganizing our bags at the airport check-in desk, my mom bought each of us a digital luggage scale; when Kori and I checked in this time, we knew we were ready to go and would not need to cross our fingers hoping our bags weren't overweight as we put them on the scale!

Overweight bag problem = checked ... I truly recommend this gadget to anyone who flies!

PLEASANT SURPRISE

We had a short, easy flight from Chicago to Newark (N.J.) to start off the day's flights. After getting off the plane in Newark, a woman working at the gate came up to Kori and asked if we wanted a ride on the airport "golf" car thing ... I assumed it was because Kori's pregnant, but it turns out it was just an extremely long walk from the gate. We needed to get to the gate for our final departure to Milan, so the woman let us take the "car" there. The driver drove so fast our hair blew in the airport wind!

Kori and I truly enjoyed the ride. As we sat in the back of the "car," our driver made beeping noises that sounded just like the "Road Runner" cartoon every time he encountered a crowd, which was quite often in a crowded airport. As we pulled up to the gate, we saw John Cole, our team leader; Gale Tanger; Charlie Cyr, and later, Jessica Calalang's dad and three grandparents! They are all making the trip to Milan to not only support Jessica and Team USA but to celebrate Jessica's 18th birthday today (Sunday)! I can't imagine a better way to spend your 18th birthday than in Italy with your family.

Along with Jessica's birthday, Quinn also celebrated his birthday today. Birthday shout-outs to both of them!

FINAL FLIGHT TO MILAN

The flight from Newark to Milan was a little over eight hours ... the time flew by. I guess when you get the privilege to sit next to one of your favorite people in your life (Kori), you can just talk for hours about all kinds of things and feel like 10 minutes have gone by. I tried my best to sleep, but after about 45 minutes with my eyes shut, I was pretty energized and gave up sleeping. I walked around the plane a little, did some stretching by the bathrooms, watched a few episodes of *Modern Family*, and before I knew it, we were being served unbelievable warm croissants for breakfast and making our final descent into Milan.

Once landed and off the plane, we headed to customs. Without so much as a glance from the customs agent, my passport had the "Italian entry" stamp and I was in the country. It seems a far cry from other countries' customs I've experienced: no waiting, no visa, no paying, no questions to answer!

Once through, we got our luggage and met with the LOC (local organizing committee) to take a bus from the airport to credentialing. Several planes from the states all arrived at similar times, so when I went out to the buses, I met up with Samantha and her coach, Haven and Brandon along with their mothers, and the team doctor, team physical therapist, David Kirby and his wife Holly, and Peter Cain.

WE NEED MUSIC!

Once we arrived at credentialing and we got off the bus to get credentialed, Samantha and I both needed to get our music out of our bags, which were currently under the bus. We tried explaining this to the bus driver, but he spoke very little English and kept telling us that we didn't need music. We thought that was a bit strange because we always need our music when we check in.

Sure enough, when we get to credentialing, we are told we had to have copies of our music to complete the accreditation process. So, we run outside to tell the bus driver, but we get there too late and he's driving away!

Luckily, we found him and the bus about 20 minutes later and quickly got our music and got credentialed.

While waiting to take our photos for the credential, Samantha and I talked about how bad we look in the photos they take because we go plane-to-bus-to-registration before even seeing our hotel! Brandon had the right idea; he took his picture with a huge grin, hat turned sideways, and had his two thumbs up right below his face. It was priceless!

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

For lunch, I joined Samantha and her coach in the hotel restaurant. It was a beautiful lunch. I had a delicious ravioli dish carefully and precisely drizzled with Parmesan cheese -- now I know I'm I'm Italy!

One thing I've learned about travel is the value of learning at least a little bit of the local language. After an hour of miscommunication, I was finally able to pay my bill and have the privilege to have the opportunity to get to know Samantha and her coach better.

TEAM MEETING

Almost the entire team had arrived when we had our team meeting at 5 o'clock. It was great to be all together talking about the week ahead. The only people we were really missing were Jessica and Zack, who are getting in later tonight, and Yasmin, who is coming a little later this week. The whole team wishes Yasmin a safe and easy travel; we all can't wait for her arrival!

FIRST ITALIAN BUFFET

The dinner tonight consisted of an incredible buffet of pasta with tomato Parmesan sauce, a delicious lasagna, potatoes, spinach, chicken breast, turkey, cheesecake, fruit, salad and more. I literally filled up two plates; I just couldn't resist the urge!

Another factor that made dinner so amazing was that all the athletes on Team USA that had arrived by the start of 7 o'clock dinner were there. It was great to be surrounded by most of the team talking, laughing, telling jokes, reminiscing on past events that they traveled on together. It was such a great moment to be a part of, and it made us all excited to compete and support each other through the next week! Developing friendships and bonding with people who have shared experiences is one of the most amazing benefits of being on team USA; John Cole and I realized at the airport that this is our fifth event together!

TOMORROW'S PREVIEW

First day of official ice begins. All four disciplines have two practice sessions tomorrow. Can't wait to take the ice tomorrow. Ciao for now!

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