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## Jason the dream: Boston, Sochi and beyond

U.S. silver medalist recounts dream-like experience at Olympic Games

Posted 4/30/14 by Jason Brown, special to icenetwork



*It was nearly impossible to wipe the smile off Jason Brown's face during the entire time he was in Sochi.  
-Getty Images*

*Jason Brown has just wrapped up a memorable season, winning the silver medal at the 2014 U.S. Figure Skating Championships and representing his country at the 2014 Olympic Winter Games. This is the final entry in his season-long blog for icenetwork.*

If there is one thing I'd like people to take away from this blog, it's how thankful and fortunate I feel for all of your love and support over the past year. From moving away after graduating high school, to competing as a senior internationally for the first time, to making the U.S. Olympic figure skating team, I want you all to know that none of this would have been possible without everyone's encouragement.

My last blog was right before I left for the U.S. championships, and it gives me chills looking back at the last section I wrote a week before leaving for Boston. ...

"Four years ago, I was a junior in Spokane, Wash., watching the senior men take the ice competing for an Olympic spot. I remember it so vividly; the atmosphere was filled with an intense, nervous, excited, anxious, amazing energy that I still have a hard time describing. The crowd was silent as the final group of skaters in each discipline took to the ice to start their programs. Nothing could compare to that eruption from the standing crowd, surrounding those skaters who were alone on the ice in tears knowing that they've just put out the skate they've spent countless hours training for. I was sitting there with Kori [Ade] watching, feeling and experiencing it all!

Sitting by her side, I was overwhelmed after Jeremy Abbott skated a skate no one will ever forget to make his first Olympic team and winning his second U.S. title! We watched as Mirai Nagasu, skating last in the ladies event, went out determined and focused like none other, skating her way to Vancouver, bringing the crowd to its feet!

It's crazy to think that this year I won't be in the crowd watching, but I'll be standing on the ice with my coach next to the rink's entrance. I will be that skater alone on the ice, and I can't wait to experience it from the other side of the boards."

### **Rocky week leading up to U.S. championships**

Three days before I left for the U.S. championships, I was driving back from the rink on a really snowy day. While changing lanes on the highway, my car lost traction on black ice, spinning out of control, hitting the median twice before crossing over four lanes and, finally, hitting the outside barrier, which totaled my car. I sat there in complete shock, unable to process what had just happened. All I could think about was how lucky I was that I didn't hit anyone and no one had hit me while I was spinning out. I quickly made sure I could still move my whole body. Luckily, I found that only my neck and upper back were slightly hurting and locked up. I knew it could have been way worse, so I couldn't have been more thankful.

Little did I realize that the car accident was only the beginning of my challenging adventure to the U.S. championships. On my journey, I had to change my flight twice, only to then miss my flight and get rebooked on another. That flight then got delayed, and I missed my connecting flight. I got rerouted to Chicago and spent the night with my family during my five-hour layover, and finally I made it to Boston only two hours before my first official practice. I somehow managed to stay calm during all the mishaps, being grateful that three days earlier I had escaped a horrible car accident without a scratch. I've learned to just take life in stride and keep a positive perspective. So many things are out of our control, and it's the attitude we bring to these challenges that guides our experience.

### **2014 U.S. Championships**

No matter what was going to happen at the U.S. championships, I knew it was going to be a special event. It was my first time competing as a senior in an Olympic year, and 80 of my relatives and family friends drove or flew to Boston to be a part of it! I was ready and as prepared as I possibly could be.

From the beginning of the year, my choreographer, Rohene Ward, intentionally chose *Riverdance* and Prince to be my Olympic programs. He said whether I made the team or not, this year was all about growth, pushing my limits, giving it my all and leaving nothing on the table. From day one, back in April, I was determined to see his words through.

The week was truly unforgettable. From start to finish, I enjoyed the entire event. I had a blast skating on every practice, and I embraced every second I had when competing in front of the greatest crowds! The atmosphere in the arena during the competition was incomparable.

When it was over, I finished second, and two hours later I received a text informing me that I had been selected for the 2014 U.S. Olympic Team. I broke out in tears and jumped into the arms of my coach, Kori.

### **Team processing in Munich**

Before heading to Sochi, every Team USA athlete had to go through team processing in Munich. Team processing is where you receive all the Ralph Lauren and Nike clothes, a P&G goodie bag, an Olympic watch, a new Samsung phone, get sized for your Olympic ring...and more! For me, it was like a magical dream. I couldn't stop looking around, and kept catching myself with my mouth wide open. I loved every minute of those three hours it took to get through the processing: trying on all the new Olympic gear, making sure it fit, jumping up and down.

Once processed, most athletes left the following morning, but I stayed two days longer and trained in Munich with Felicia Zhang, Nate Bartholomay and Polina Edmunds.

### **Olympic Winter Games**

There is so much to talk about when it comes to the Olympic Games, so I decided to break it up into sections...

#### Village

There were three villages that housed the Olympic athletes during the games: The Coastal Village, which included ice hockey, curling, figure skating, speed skating and short track; the Mountain Village, the largest of the three, housing athletes in skiing, bobsled, freestyle skiing, luge, Nordic combined, skeleton, ski jumping and snowboarding; and the Endurance Village, designated for the athletes in cross country skiing and biathlon.

The Coastal Village was different than I imagined. I was shocked by how casual it was. It was pretty much like summer camp: dorms designated to different countries along both sides of a long street, a gravel path that connected the housing to the dining hall, a fitness center, a recreational/game room, a Sochi shop and a welcome center. Also, because there was no media allowed in the vicinity of the village, everyone acted and dressed very casually, walking around in sweats and their team gear. We all had access to bicycles, so athletes were constantly bike riding throughout the village. It really had such a fun, relaxed vibe.

There were two U.S. living quarters in the Coastal Village, and the figure skating team occupied the fifth and sixth floors of one of them. The halls were adorned with USA paraphernalia, and our team leaders decorated our rooms with posters they made of pictures our parents had sent, and big Fatheads of us! As we were on the top two floors, the views from our rooms were stunning. One side had an incredible view of the Black Sea, and the other had a view of the village, some of the Olympic Park (including the burning torch) and the mountains. There truly was not a single bad view from where we were located!

### Dining hall

The dining hall was one of my favorite places to go because it was that one central place where you eventually got to see everyone during the Games. It was always so exciting to enter the dining hall, anticipating who you may get to see! It was such a great place to meet people because you and your teammates would see friends from different countries and sports, and they would then join you, and before you knew it, you would find yourself talking and becoming friends with some of the best athletes from around the world!

The dining hall was open 24 hours, and the selection of food was immense. Some of the sections included: Asian cuisine, Italian, Russian, American, salad bar, fruit bar, DESSERT bar and a McDonald's that was completely free for the athletes ... all you had to do was tell them what you wanted off the menu! I'm not going to lie, once I finished competing, I definitely got a daily McFlurry.

### Team event

This year marked the inaugural figure skating team event in the Winter Olympics. It was such an honor to have been selected to compete for my team. Since the event was new to everyone, we didn't know exactly how it was going to run or how the placements and points were going to fall in the final standings ... but that made it that much more exciting!

The event started with 10 teams, but after the short programs, only the top five teams advanced to the free skate. Each team had its own booth with its country's flag behind it. During the event, the booth would be full of your country's teammates, team leaders, coaches, etc. When I went out to compete my

free skate, I thought I was going to be super nervous because, for the first time, my skate was going to affect the results for my entire team, and they were all there in the BOOTH!

To my surprise, those nerves quickly turned to excitement when I heard my teammates screaming from the side of the rink. It felt like home, and I just wanted to do the best that I could to make them proud. Once I finished my skate, the U.S. team got into the kiss and cry to await my scores with me and my coach.

Then, I got to sit in the booth to cheer on Gracie Gold, and Meryl Davis and Charlie White! They both delivered flawless skates, and when Meryl and Charlie's scores came up, we were all in the kiss and cry jumping up and down knowing Team USA had won the bronze.

### The medals ceremony.

The medals ceremony was one of my most emotional experiences of the Games. Before the ceremony started, I told Simon Shnapir how I couldn't figure out how this was all happening and how I had to be dreaming. ... Jokingly, he responded by saying, "You are dreaming. You are going to wake up, and it is going to be the morning of your short program in Boston!" It was such a surreal moment that I literally had to take a minute to make sure I wasn't dreaming!

When they called the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA to step onto the podium, all eight of us held hands and stepped up together. I gazed out in front of me to see the dark night's sky with the bright, burning torch illuminating the area. I saw my parents and my coach, and I began to cry. I never really cry for happy moments, but I just couldn't help it. I looked to either side of me at my teammates, all wearing their Olympic bronze medals, and felt completely humbled that I got the opportunity to be a part of this. I was surrounded by seven national champions. They were the people that I admired most in the sport. Combined, those seven athletes had won 15 national championships! They were people who I was too nervous to approach a year ago because I was star struck, and now they were my teammates. It brings me to tears just writing about it. ... We had done it, and we did it as a team.

### Individual event

The excitement continued throughout the individual events. It was such a thrill to finish the short program in sixth and not only skate in the final warm-up ... but skate LAST at the Olympics. Although my final free skate didn't live up to its potential, I gave it my all and fought, doing the best that I could in that moment. I finished my Olympic run in ninth, having learned a lifetime of lessons and taking away an experience I will cherish and remember for the rest of my life!

Throughout the next week, I had the honor of cheering on my teammates who still had their events to go ... and I didn't miss a single skate! I was fully decked out in red, white and blue, proudly cheering on Team

USA. I had the privilege of watching Meryl and Charlie become America's first-ever Olympic ice dance champions ... and I stood out in the rain, my body filled with goosebumps, the next night to watch them receive their medals. I watched and screamed like crazy when the U.S. ladies brought down the house during both their short programs and free skates. I couldn't be prouder to be an American, and not only skate for Team USA but serve as America's greatest fan!

## Post-Olympic fun

Although the 2014 Olympics have come to an end, the excitement continues. The entire U.S. Olympic and Paralympic team was invited to Washington, D.C., to visit the White House and meet the president and first lady. I've never frozen mid-sentence like I did when talking face to face with the president! We attended the "Best of U.S." awards show, and I could not have been prouder when my coach, Kori, won the USG Building Dreams award. I spoke to Matt Lauer before performing *Riverdance* on the *TODAY* show. I was in a daze while skating on the Rockefeller Rink in New York City. I got a taste of Hollywood when I was invited to the *Divergent* premiere, where we got to walk down the "red" black carpet, get interviewed, meet and take pictures with the stars of the movie, and interact with fans before making it to the theater. ... I literally thought I was dreaming!

Currently, I have the privilege of being a part of this year's *Stars on Ice*! It's hard for me to grasp that I get the chance to perform across the country, with skaters I look up to, in a show that my role model, Scott Hamilton, founded. It's been such a blast, and I'm so excited to be in the next five shows (Chicago, Minnesota, San Diego, Anaheim and San Jose). It is truly such an incredible show, and I feel so honored to be a part of it.

## Farewell

That concludes my last blog entry of the year. I've loved getting to share my experiences with you all, and I hope you guys enjoyed what I had to say. Although this year has come to an end, the next one is just beginning. ... I'm looking forward to the upcoming season and excited for the journey ahead!



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