



NEWS

The Inside Edge: The new quad king

Sarah and Drew catch up with Brandon Mroz after he lands first-ever quad Lutz

By Sarah S. Brannen and Drew Meekins, special to icenetwork.com

(09/20/2011) - **Brandon Mroz**, the 2009 U.S. silver medalist, landed a beautiful quad lutz in the short program at the Colorado Springs Invitational on Sept. 16. The element scored 14.27 points.

Mroz has been landing quad toe loops, quad loops, quad flips and quad Lutzes daily in training. We told Mroz that the jumps look easy for him, and he laughed.

"To some degree, it feels easy for me," he said. "I'm not saying they are easy. I was at a point where my technique was well established. I just decided to try, and I guess I've been successful. I like jumping, I like pushing boundaries. Maybe by doing these quads I can push the sport a little."

"He will try as many as he can train in the program, but the emphasis is to show his improvements in the components," coach Tom Zakrajsek said. "It has been part of the plan for a while. It was also part of the plan to increase his jump height this year now that he is much stronger."

Mroz has had a solid quad toe loop for a while, and we wondered whether that made the other quads easier.

"For sure, having the toe was some help," he said. "I had the toe for a while, and I understand the amount of work it takes to do the quad, so I think it helped with the other ones. I understand the pressure of doing it in competition."

"There is a specific timing and technique to teach on a quad takeoff, and Brandon and I have been working on that for several years," Zakrajsek said, adding that he had talked to Mroz's childhood coach, Doug Leigh, about which quads he thought Mroz could learn.

Both of Mroz's programs this season were choreographed by Jeff Buttle; the short is to "Mack the Knife."

"My long is to something no one's ever heard of before: Carmen," Mroz told us with a laugh. "It's a great program, very tough. It's going to be an exciting program."

Watch a video of Mroz's quad lutz on icenetwork.com [here](#).

Jason Brown Down Under

Jason Brown made the long trip home from Brisbane, Australia, a week ago with a pretty nice souvenir: a Junior Grand Prix gold medal. We talked to the 16-year-old Brown a couple days after he got home, and he said he hadn't had a lot of trouble with jet lag after the 14-hour trip to the other side of the world.

"It was actually a lot better than I thought it would be," he told us. "Kori [Ade, Brown's coach] made me stay up until 10 that night. I woke up at 4 the next morning, but then it was pretty good. The adrenaline helps."



Jason Brown and coach Kori Ade feed a kangaroo while in Brisbane, Australia. (courtesy of Jason Brown)

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Brown said that he only had one 40-minute practice session a day, which left a lot of time for sightseeing in Brisbane.

"It is gorgeous there," he said with enthusiasm. "The hotel we were staying in was in the center of the town, so that was amazing. The river went through the center of town. It's so pretty. Everything was walking distance. We walked around the whole city. I don't even know what I expected, but it was unbelievable."

Time for the obvious question: did he see a kangaroo?

"One day we went to this koala sanctuary, and I got to hold a koala and see kangaroos," he said. "They eat kangaroo there! We were talking to the concierge about it, and he said the country was infested with them. They sell kangaroo claws; it's so bizarre. The only thing I could think of was, 'Is it a back-scratcher?'"

Brown said he was really happy with his short program in Brisbane, and he's working hard to add the triple Axel to his repertoire.

"I had a few mistakes in the long, but it's early in the season, and I still have time to grow. We're working on different patterns, making some transitions harder. The Axel is really, really going well -- I've been working on it for a while."

Three days after his return, Brown was still struggling with the time difference.

"I got in at 5 at night, went to bed at 10 and had to go to school the next day," he said. "The hardest thing that I feel is that I'm always tired. The first two days back I got really dizzy every time I spun. Whenever I got to bed, I don't ever want to get up."

'Ice Champions LIVE' show Oct. 1

When Drew competed in his first U.S. Championships, as a novice in 2003, he was impressed and rather star struck to find himself in an elevator with U.S. champion Michael Weiss. We spoke to Weiss recently, and he told us about his first time at the U.S. Championships.

"I remember when I was a novice man, in Baltimore," Weiss said. "Chris Bowman was getting off one of the buses, and he walked right by me and looked at me and nodded and said, 'Have a good practice!' He had no idea who I was. It made a huge impression on me. If someone who was the national champion at that time can inspire someone that young, then you should use it."

Weiss started the Michael Weiss Foundation in 2004 to help promising young skaters with their training expenses. Since 2005, he has hosted a show each year to raise money for the foundation; this year's show, "Ice Champions LIVE," is on Oct. 1 at 5 p.m. in the Kettler Capitals IcePlex in Arlington, Va.

"It's a very homegrown event," Weiss said. "It started out at my local practice rink, and it was myself, my wife, my mom, my sister helping out with tickets, my brother-in-law did the announcing, my father-in-law did the music. I didn't want to spend a lot of money and have a huge budget. The purpose of it was to keep almost all costs down so every dime donated could go to the skaters."

According to Weiss' website, the foundation has raised more than \$375,000 since it was started. Twenty-three skaters received support this year, and Weiss says that they have helped about 50 overall. Some skaters get grants for several years.

"I have an older sister [Geremi] who was a skater; she was second at junior nationals," Weiss said. "She and I were racking up skating expenses ... I remember the burden it put on my family. We weren't poor, but we couldn't afford to throw \$70,000 in the direction of skating each year. I saw my parents struggle, and I knew how much support meant. If people cared enough to put together a show for me, it made me want to work even harder to go after my dreams. I said if I could ever reach that point where I could help skaters in that position, then I would do so."

This year's show stars Brian Boitano, Ilya Kulik, Kimmie Meissner, [Richard Dornbush](#), [Ashley Wagner](#), Sinead and John Kerr, [Agnes Zawadzki](#), [Courtney Hicks](#), [Nathan Chen](#), [Emmanuel Savary](#), Caryn Kadavy, Steven Cousins, Dan Hollander and more, as well as local skaters.

"This year we have a number of our past scholarship recipients, so people can see where their support is going," Weiss said. "We've included a lot more recipients this year. When skaters end up making it, they come back and skate the show for us."

For information about the show, visit michaelweiss.org.

We asked Weiss about his growing family; his children often appeared on television when Weiss was competing, and it's hard to believe they're about to turn 12 and 13.

"Annie-Mae just started eighth grade," he said. "Christopher is in sixth grade, and they are both keeping us very busy with their activities. Christopher plays travel hockey, so he's on the ice six days a week, and Annie-Mae is on a travel soccer team. She also sings, and she'll be singing in the show. She's going to sing 'Forget you,' but that may change."

We noted that neither of Weiss' kids turned out to be a figure skater. He told us that Annie-Mae had skated for a while when she was little but dropped it when she got busy with other activities.

"If they wanted to go into figure skating, I would have supported them," Weiss said. "If I could guarantee that the kids had the same experience I had with skating, I would love for them to do it. Growing up as a female figure skater is tough. You have to have a really tough skin, and almost be motivated by criticism. You have to have a certain type of personality. I was lucky that I had an incredible coach growing up, who was really interested in balance. She wanted my life to be as normal as possible."

We asked Weiss how much longer he planned to tour and skate in shows, and he said that that part of his life is soon going to come to an end.

"I'm making the transition -- you know you can't do this forever," he said. "My wife has a successful business selling custom wine cellars. We started a building company. Figure skating will always be a part of my life. I did some Grand Prix commentating last year, but if I'm not performing, then my schedule will open up and hopefully NBC will want me to continue with that."

2011 Young Artists Showcase application deadline

The second edition of Grassroots to Champions Young Artists Showcase, a choreography competition, will get underway Oct. 21. Applications must be postmarked on or before Sept. 21.

"We have some interesting applicants and, of course, some fantastic celebrity judges," said competition creator Audrey Weisiger. "They're starting to pick up now -- we're getting more and more applicants every day. We have a wide variety of people applying."

The finalists will be announced Oct. 1 in a video post on the competition website, <http://grassrootstochampions.com/YoungArtistsShowcase.htm>.

Good luck to all,

Sarah and Drew

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