



NEWS

The Final Word: Chicago's Brown still riding high

Hao Zhang re-injures shoulder; Takahashi questions transitions score

By Lynn Rutherford, special to icenetwork.com

(12/15/2011) - With **Jason Brown**, what you see is what you get. And what you see is one happy kid.

"I am almost always happy," the 17-year-old Chicagoan said on Dec. 15. "I absolutely love the skating process. I love the journey. Some days are lower than others, but it's all just great, to be honest.

"I love when people come up to me and tell me they like my skating. I remember watching nationals and Olympics as a kid, and when skaters came off the ice, people wanted their autographs. Just to be one of those skaters now is unbelievable."

The morning after he won the **Junior Grand Prix Final** in Quebec City, Brown hadn't yet come down from his high. He called waking up early for exhibition practice "a big bonus" and the senior men he was able to watch before his own free skate "an inspiration."

"I was definitely a little shy," he said. "The crowd was crazy for **Patrick [Chan]**, and just seeing that excitement made me excited myself."

Not even questions about the triple Axel, the difficult three-and-a-half revolution jump he is working hard to master, derailed his enthusiasm.

"Of course I don't mind talking about it," he said. "As long as no one gets annoyed by all of my 'It's getting closer, it's getting closer.' As long as no one gets bothered by that, as long as they respect, I guess, where I am with the jump and how we decide to put it out there, and when."

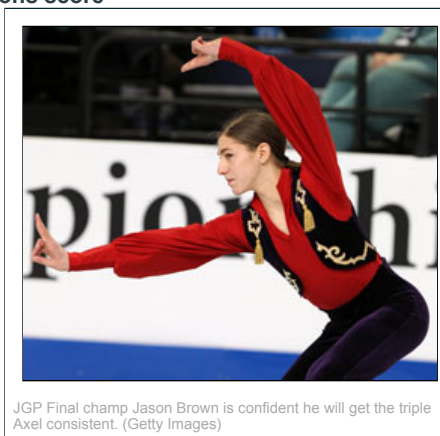
Heading into Quebec City, Brown and longtime coach Kori Ade planned to try the jump in one or both programs. Those plans changed after early practices.

"We were definitely planning to try it here, and the day of Kori goes, 'It's not ready to be shown for the first time. It's not where it should be,'" Brown said. "It wasn't looking the way it was looking at home, so Kori decided that it wasn't in our best interests to do it. It's definitely been a struggle to get this jump."

He is hardly the first skater to wrestle with the maneuver. Chan, the reigning world champion who dominates the sport, had his battle with the triple Axel when he was about Brown's age. It remains an ongoing project, although the Canadian says it is getting easier and easier. Two-time world champion **Stéphane Lambiel** never fully mastered the jump, although he had a fine quadruple toe loop.

Brown is confident it will come in time.

"I work a little with Dartfish, about once a week," he said of the computer imaging system favored by many coaches, including Chan's trainer Christy Krall. "I used to do once a week with the pole harness, and we're doing more and more now."



JGP Final champ Jason Brown is confident he will get the triple Axel consistent. (Getty Images)

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Ade has also brought him to Colorado Springs, where he worked with Kathy Casey, and to Lake Arrowhead to work with former Australian champion Anthony Liu.

Brown would also like to add a quad to his repertoire, but he has resolved to wait until the triple Axel is solid.

"I think at the moment I'm taking it step by step," he said. "The main goal now is the Axel. Here and there, depending on the day, I might try a couple of quads. If my triple Salchow is good that day or if my triple toe is good that day, we try it. And we work on the pole harness once in a blue moon."

In the free skate at Quebec City, Brown placed a close second to China's fleet-footed **Han Yan**, who hit a triple Axel, quad toe and triple-triple combination. When short program results were added in, he defeated the Chinese by 2.48 points.

Brown's performance quality, reflected in program components scores, made the difference, and for that, he gives credit to Ade as well as choreographer Rohene Ward, a former U.S. competitor now touring with *Holiday on Ice*, and Rob Peal, with whom Brown works twice a week to touch up his programs.

"Since I haven't been the one who has had the most tricks, it's definitely a main goal to keep working on my program components and keep connecting with the audience," he said. "When Rohene choreographs, he's so emotional. We talk through the program and what everything means.

"This summer he came to the rink and said, 'I want you to skate to ['Flow Like Water' from *The Last Airbender* soundtrack]. I just heard it; you have to do this.' That excitement helped me try to emote to it more."

Keeping a regular a schedule at Highland Park High School, where he is a junior, helps ward off too much pressure.

"There are not a lot of kids who are homeschooled in Chicago," he said. "[School] is a nice break. It's nice to wake up in the morning and go skate, then go to school and then go back to skating.

"My parents are totally for school. School comes first, skating comes second. There are definitely times when I wish skating came first. It can be stressful. Two days after finals, I leave for nationals. On the Junior Grand Prix Circuit, I did JGP Australia and had only two-and-a-half weeks at home and then left for JGP Italy. There are tough moments, but I love the process and I love balancing it all."

Brown tore the house down at the **2011 U.S. Figure Skating Championships**, skating an inspired free and earning a standing ovation. He would like to better his ninth-place finish this season but is still uncertain about competing on the senior Grand Prix in 2012-13.

It all comes back to the triple Axel.

"I don't think I could do anything without it on the senior circuit, especially in the short program," he said. "I would love to make the junior world team again. That's my goal right now.

"I definitely do feel pressure [about the Axel], but I try my hardest. It's definitely something I need, and I so know that. It's something I've worked on for a long time now, and it's a struggle, but it's been such an amazing life lesson throughout the whole thing that I think it's a blessing in disguise not to have it yet."

Bits and pieces from Quebec City: China's **Dan Zhang and Hao Zhang** made a fine comeback to competition this fall after sitting out 2010-11 partially due to Hao's shoulder problems. The three-time world pairs silver medalists aren't out of the woods yet, though. Hao had to abort the final lift in their free skate and left the ice clutching his left shoulder. The team dropped from third after the short to fourth overall. The next morning, asked how his shoulder felt, Hao said, "Very bad." . . . Russian world silver medalists **Tatiana Volosozhar and Maxim Trankov**, who placed a close second to German world champions **Aliona Savchenko and Robin Szolkowy**, are also skating through injury. Trankov announced they would skip the upcoming Russian championships in order to allow his strained groin, as well as unspecified injuries to her leg, to heal . . . Citing the need to rest, neither Savchenko and Szolkowy nor recently crowned Grand Prix Final champ **Carolina Kostner** of Italy will compete at their country's upcoming national championships . . . Judging in the men's free skate raised eyebrows in the Japanese press corps. 2010 world champion **Daisuke Takahashi** had a near-clean outing to "Blues for Klook," but was edged by Chan, who faltered on the landing of two quads and fell on a triple Lutz. (Takahashi also stepped out of a quad.) One judge gave Takahashi a 5.5 component mark for transitions and linking footwork, some two points lower than any other judge. "I don't think I am the best with transitions, but I don't think I am the worst," Takahashi told Japanese reporters.

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