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Bratislava Brown: U.S. champion blogs from Nepela

Charismatic skater checks in from his first competition of 2015-16 season

Posted 9/30/15 by Jason Brown, special to icenetwork



Jason Brown competed in his first Ondrej Nepela Trophy. -Jason Brown's instagram

U.S. champion [Jason Brown](#) is in Bratislava, Slovakia, for the 2015 Ondrej Nepela Trophy. He is keeping a blog for icenetwork.

Friday, Oct. 2/Saturday, Oct. 3

Jogging around

The weather in Bratislava has been absolutely beautiful this week, and I woke up Saturday morning to another gorgeous day. So, I decided to go for a jog outside in order to fully wake up before having breakfast and heading to the rink for my official free skate practice.

It's such a cool feeling to just jog aimlessly around a new city. You don't really know where you are going or what you will see...it's an adventure! If any of you reading this is ever in a new city, I recommend taking some time to just get lost in the beauty of the scenery and the unknown sites that lie ahead. After my exploration jog, I met up with my dad at the hotel dining room for breakfast.

Ladies and dance finish up

The ladies free skate started the final day of competition here in Slovakia, with Mariah [Bell] finishing 13th. Following the ladies event was the free dance, in which Maia [Shibutani] and Alex [Shibutani] took home bronze! I wasn't able to be there since I was getting ready for my event, but I heard they were amazing. I know they are both excited to build on this event moving forward.

Men's free skate

The men's free skate was the last event of the competition. Like I said earlier in the blog, I find it so exciting to compete new programs early on in the season. Going out there and getting to a starting point that I can grow from is a process I always look forward to.

I had the best time performing for the great, supportive Slovakian crowd. To be able to bring back a medal for Team USA in the process is a huge cherry on top! Thank you, everyone, for all the love and support this week. All the well wishes I received on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and via text really meant a lot. You guys rock. :)

Night on the town

Because I was in the last event of the competition, I didn't have any time to really see much of Bratislava, aside from the walk from the hotel to the rink and my jog around the hotel area. So, I was determined to go into the Old Town area of Bratislava before I left the next morning.

Kori [Ade] and I got back from the rink after the awards ceremony around 10, and we took a taxi and met up with my family in Old Town. It was amazing! Bratislava is truly a beautiful city: from the old, intricate architecture to the narrow cobblestone streets, to the big squares and the breathtaking churches. Although I never had the chance to see the city during the day, it was incredible to be in the center of the city at midnight with everything lit up.

Travel back home complete

Once we got back from Old Town around 1:30 a.m., I began packing up. Nate [Bartholomay], my roommate, was still up, and we talked, packed and then went to bed for a few hours before waking up at 5:30 to catch our bus. We took the bus from Bratislava to the Vienna airport, where we then all split up to

our gates. Mariah and I flew from Vienna to Chicago and then to Colorado Springs! We made it back to the Springs around 9:30 p.m. Sunday night. Our journey has officially ended.

Hope you all enjoyed following along with my blog! I loved sharing with you all a little about my trip. :)

Next stop...SKATE AMERICA!

Thursday, Oct. 1

The first day of events begins

Today marked the first day of events here in Bratislava, starting with the ladies short program, followed by the men's, and pairs shorts. The dance teams had another day of practice before their events begin.

Our team leaders at this event, John Cole and Deveny Deck, are also judges. So, one minute they are on our panel and then the next they are rink-side playing the role of team leaders. They have been working so hard this week -- a huge shout out to them!

Ladies and pairs short programs

Mariah [Bell] was the first American to skate. She wrapped up the ladies event, skating last in the final group. She currently sits in 13th and is looking forward to Saturday's long program!

Gretchen Donlan and Nathan Bartholomay sit in fifth after their short program. They've been skating together for just over a year now, and every time they skate, they continue to get better and better as a team! They will be skating their free skate friday afternoon.

Men's short program

I've been getting so excited the past few weeks to start my international season, so finally taking the ice for my short program Thursday was just the best feeling! I love competing, and it's truly the biggest honor representing Team USA.

I had a great time performing my short, and I now have an international starting point for the season to build upon. I'm currently in second going into the long program Saturday. I look forward to another great day of competition where I have another opportunity to learn, grow and perform my new programs.

That restaurant...

At every event, there is always "that" restaurant you find yourself going to over and over again. It's basically the restaurant you first go to and, if you like it, it tends to become that go-to place throughout the

competition because you are too afraid to be adventurous or try something new. So, basically, the moral of the story is that we went to this Italian restaurant for our team dinner, and I've been back every night since!

The family is (almost) all here

Fortunately, my parents typically come to all my events, whether they are in the United States or held internationally, but my mom broke her foot over Labor Day, so she was unable to make the trip. Although she couldn't come, I was able to see her during my layover in Chicago on the way to Slovakia, so that was awesome. I loved spending some time with her, seeing her new boot and watching her motor around on this special scooter for people who can't put any weight on their leg.

On the other hand, my dad, my aunt Gayle and my cousin Lisa flew over, as well as my dad's friends from England. It's so fun hanging out with them during the event and hearing them cheer from the stands! So lucky to have such an awesome and supportive family. Every event with them is a real adventure. They are crazy in the best of ways. :)

Wednesday, Sept. 30

How'd you sleep?

After walking into the dining area for breakfast the morning after your first night's sleep at a competitions, the conversation starter is always, "How'd you sleep?!" Some people slept 12 hours straight...others couldn't fall asleep until 2 a.m. Some woke up at 2 a.m. and then couldn't fall back asleep.

The spectrum changes, but I always laugh because, to be slightly honest, when you sleep great, you want to hear how others slept great and talk about how nice it was to get an awesome night's sleep after a long travel day. On the other hand, if you have a rough night's sleep, you sort of want others to relate to you, so you have that reassurance of "It wasn't just me!" Although everyone had mixed nights of how well they slept, all of us were super excited about the day ahead of us!

European breakfast

In every European hotel I've been to, breakfast is always included. I love European breakfasts! They are very simple but absolutely delicious. They have everything that you would need: yogurt, eggs, fresh cut-up vegetables, a variety of amazing cut-up fruit, meats, cheeses, Nutella, butter, juice and numerous different types of bread. My favorite part of the breakfast is the croissants. I already love bread as it is, but nothing can touch the European breakfast croissants. They are so fresh and, just, wow!

Walk to the rink

The rink is about a 5-to-10-minute walk from the hotel. At most competitions, there are buses that take us from the hotel to the rink, but every so often, the rink is walking distance and buses aren't used. I love it when the rink is close enough to walk because it allows us to get a feel for the city and get some fresh air.

Unofficial practice

This is the first event that I've gone to where the official practice doesn't begin until the first day of short programs. So, they offered open unofficial practice sessions on Wednesday that we could sign up for like any regular session at home, except it was only for the people competing.

My favorite part about the whole thing was that the sessions weren't split up by discipline. Pairs, ice dance and singles skaters all got to skate on the sessions together. It was so much fun! I skated two sessions, and on the second session, the entire U.S. team was all on it together. I loved every minute. We were all clapping for each other and cheering each other on.

It was so awesome to get the opportunity to skate with them because I've never really gotten the chance since we are always all split up. It was just the greatest -- everyone was looking great and it was the perfect way to start off the competition. :)

The group draw

Something unique to this competition was that Wednesday night, we had a draw "party." We all dressed up in business-casual attire and every skater from the event gathered in one room with the referees and the people running the competition.

First, there were some speeches, a woman from a theater nearby sang and a young girl played the violin. After that, the draws began and, one by one, they went through every skater in every discipline, drawing for their short program start order. It was actually really exciting watching everyone go up and draw.

Ondrej Nepela's coach was at the draw! She has been at every single Ondrej Nepela Trophy since it became an event. For those of you who didn't know, Ondrej Nepela was a Slovakian male singles skater who is a three-time Olympian, three-time world champion, five-time European champion and the 1972 Olympic men's champion! He passed away when he was only 38 in 1989, and since 1993, the Slovak Figure Skating Association has held this competition every fall in his honor. It was truly such an honor to meet his coach that night. Once the draw ended, we all went back to our rooms for some sleep.

Monday, Sept. 28/Tuesday, Sept. 29

Wide awake

My journey to Slovakia started when my alarm went off this morning at 3:45 a.m. Generally, I would cringe whenever I have to set my alarm before 5 a.m., but I was so excited. Today's motto was, "The earlier, the better!"

By 4:20, I was in the car of [Mariah Bell's family's] riding to the Colorado Springs airport. Once we arrived at the airport, Mariah and I met up with our coach, Kori [Ade], and our training mate, Alex Zahradnicek, who is competing in Slovakia for France. We all got on the 6 a.m. flight to Chicago, and our adventure to Bratislava began. :)

Making the most of our six-hour layover

We didn't waste any time once we landed in Chicago. We had six hours before our next flight to Vienna, Austria, so we left the airport to go skate. Since I'm from Chicago, and my whole family still lives there, my dad picked the four of us up from the airport and drove us to the North Shore Ice Arena for some extra "layover" practice. It was the perfect thing to do in order to break up the flights and keep us moving through the long travel day.

All four of us would like to thank the North Shore Ice Arena staff for letting us skate on their incredible ice. We so appreciated it and loved being there. Also, some of my family stopped by the rink to say hi, so it was really nice getting to spend a little time with them.

Back to the airport and off to Vienna

After we skated, my dad drove us back to the airport, and before we knew it, we were off on our next flight.

The nine-hour flight to Europe was over in a blink. Between watching movies, walking around, stretching, talking to Kori and wearing fun kabuki masks, I kept myself pretty busy. I'm currently studying Japanese, so I decided to watch *Pitch Perfect 2* in Japanese on the plane. I love how international airlines offer movies in numerous languages.

Once we landed in Vienna, we met up with members of the LOC (local organizing committee), who then drove us the 45 minutes to the hotel in Bratislava.

Don't stop moving

In order to adjust to the new time zone as quickly as possible, it's important to keep yourself moving and active the day you arrive in a new country. Mariah and I went to the gym at the hotel and ran on the treadmills, did some off-ice jumps, stretched and went through some more exercises. After that, we jumped into the hot tub to loosen up and relax our bodies a bit. By staying active, it kept our minds off our exhaustion.

The struggle to stay awake during Team USA dinner

At 5:30, the whole U.S. team met in the lobby for our team meeting. For those who are curious, team meetings generally entail discussing new rule changes and reminders of old ones, logistical information, contact information and other important details.

After our meeting, we all went out to dinner right next to the hotel. We started off the meal with a decent amount of energy considering the long day that preceded. But, as the meal went on and we waited for our food, our energy started to fade. We kept zoning out and laughing as everyone tried their hardest to not doze off at the table! It was so much fun, and we all are so excited about the week ahead.

Tomorrow's preview

Tomorrow, everyone has their first practices in Bratislava. There will also be off-ice opening ceremonies and the draw, which decides the starting orders for the short programs.

Every season brings a new level of excitement, and I feel so lucky to be starting my international season in Slovakia. I'm looking forward to making new memories and creating experiences that I'll take with me as the season continues.

It's bed time. Good night from Bratislava. ;)



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