

White launches quest for 2014 pipe, slopestyle gold at Dew Tour

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

BRECKENRIDGE – Shaun White has been a pro snowboarder for half his life, becoming the most recognized action sports athlete of all time through 13 years of driven competition.

At 26, the lines on his face are a tad deeper, his perspective more aged – and his posse now includes a French bulldog named Steve. Yet the drive to win that defines his board riding hasn't faded an iota.

As he prepares for gold in Sochi's 2014 Olympic halfpipe and slopestyle contests – starting this weekend at the Dew Tour in Breckenridge – he's scheming bigger tricks, even bigger than the back-to-back double-cork 1260s that earned him a perfect score in the X Games halfpipe in Aspen last winter or his famous double McTwist 1260s.

"I see tons of possibilities. There's a lot of things that are happening in slopestyle that can be taken over to the halfpipe," he said Friday morning, with his red mane in a tight bun, and looking dapper in a tie and signature tight trousers during a series of interviews at Breckenridge. "What else can be done? It's my job to take it a little further. I've already set things in motion to try to one-up everything I've done so far."

With a reserved run in the Thursday semifinals, White qualified second for Saturday's halfpipe finals behind Scotty Lago. While White says he won't be throwing his craziest tricks Saturday – the first competition of the season – his bag of tricks has never been deeper.

"I don't really know where the halfpipe tricks are going," White said. "A lot of the judging is off amplitude, so I'm just trying to go as big as I can with certain tricks and variations."

Despite owning more medals from slopestyle than halfpipe, White took off the creative slopestyle training for two seasons in 2009 and 2010 as he focused on halfpipe in preparation for that year's Winter Games. That was because slopestyle was not a medal sport in Vancouver.

His comeback in slopestyle was slow. He failed to qualify in the 2011 Winter X Games slopestyle contest in Aspen and dropped out of the 2012 Aspen slopestyle competition after qualifying last. But then in March, he won slopestyle gold at the Winter X Games in Tignes, France, with three double corks, including back-to-back double-cork 1260s.

Still, after knee surgery this spring and taking off from skateboard competition this summer, White said he is easing into the season.

He won't compete in Sunday's slopestyle contest in Breckenridge, but he will in every other slopestyle contest this season.

"That's where I've got to make my biggest stand: slopestyle," he said.

White said he spent the spring and summer "doing something I don't normally do: living my life." He hung out at his new beach house in Encinitas, and went to New York City for two months, playing music with pals and searching for inspiration.

"You can definitely tell I get influenced by where I'm at," said the longtime clothing designer with a collection he developed with sponsor Target. "I like being influenced by different places, different things. You can tell it shows in the way I ride, what I wear on the mountain and what I'm

wearing off the hill.”

In September, White made less glowing headlines when he was arrested after a fracas at a Nashville hotel. Despite his handlers asking Dew Tour media to avoid asking about the incident, White said, “Let’s focus on it.”

According to the police report, “White appeared to be extremely intoxicated and smelled strongly of alcohol.” He was cited for public intoxication and vandalism. He refuted reports that he was getting some sort of treatment for alcohol abuse.

“There was an assessment that was done, and everyone took that that I’m getting treatment for all these things,” White said. “And it’s more like, ‘Hey you had a mistake. Did you learn from it? OK. Let’s move on.’ And I moved on. I learned my lesson.”

Missing the skateboard season means a slower entry to snowboarding for White. He has spent only five days on snow this winter. Last year, it was the skateboard that opened doors to the new tricks that contributed to last winter’s 100-point score in Aspen.

“The technical aspect of skateboarding helps snowboarding with balance and focus and being precise,” he said. “I learned double corks on jumps onto a foam pit on a skateboard. That was a direct impact.”

Today, White spends his off-mountain time developing his creative style in clothing, videos with GoPro, snowboarding camps at Vail Resorts’ Northstar ski area and even two flavors of gum with Stride.

He parted ways last year with Red Bull after a four-year partnership that included the energy drink giant sculpting a private superpipe at Colorado’s remote Silverton Mountain ski area.

Almost 18 months later, he has yet to enlist a new beverage sponsor, revealing his very particular and intensive approach to sponsorship. His individual brand is likely the biggest in action sports, and he works to keep it vibrant.

“The majority of my process is not based on money. Otherwise, I’d be with Red Bull. We just didn’t see eye-to-eye on certain things. They do things a certain way, and it just wasn’t lining up with where I was heading. That’s why I haven’t jumped on a new one yet,” he said. “It’s quality over quantity for me. I just want to make sure I can give each partnership and things that I do the right amount of attention. The list that gets said no to is massive compared to the list we agree to.”