

Big dreams take big money for ski racers



Cheyenne Brown at the Junior Championships at Mt. Bachelor in Oregon. Photos/Provided

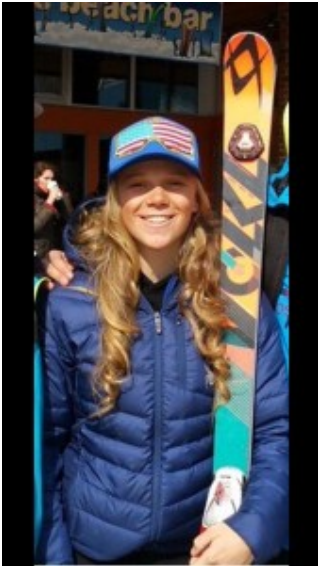
By Jessie Marchesseau

Anyone who has spent at least a few days on the slopes can tell you that skiing is an expensive pastime. But the cost of a weekend ski trip pales in comparison to the expense of being a ski racer.

Each season, racers and their families fork out thousands of dollars to get a shot at a podium. They pay for ski passes, coaching and training, race entry fees and gear, including multiple pairs of skis, boots, goggles, helmets and race suits. Then there are the travel costs to get to each race, about 20 per season, such as gas or airfare, hotels (most races last two to four days) and food while on the road.

Long-time Squaw Valley Ski Team coach Lee Schmidt said it's not unrealistic for families to spend upward of \$50,000 on a

season of ski racing. Some help is available through scholarships, sponsors and donations, but he admitted nearly all of the members of the U.S. Ski Team come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds.



Cheyenne Brown is on quest to make the U.S. Ski Team.

Regardless, a big pocketbook is not necessarily a requirement to be a successful ski racer. Take Cheyenne Brown of Soda Springs for example. At 15, Brown has only been ski racing for four seasons, but has racked up some pretty good finishes as a member of the Squaw Valley Ski Team. Last season she was one of six girls in her age group from the entire western region to qualify for the National Championships in Sugarloaf, Maine. At the Junior Olympics, Brown was the highest placing girl from the western region. This year she has set her sights on a spot at the Junior World Championships.

"She's very dedicated. She sets very high goals and can reach those goals," Schmidt, who has coached Brown for the last two seasons, told *Lake Tahoe News*. He said she is a good example and a leader for the other girls on the team, both on and off the slopes.

Brown was born into a skiing family; she was on skis before her first birthday. Her grandparents, Norm and Karen Saylor, were the former owners of Donner Ski Ranch. Her brother was a racer for a while, as was her mother. Now the family runs a ski shop in addition to a firewood business and a shirt printing company.

"We're all blue collar. We work hard," Cheyenne's father, Mitch Brown said of his family. "You do what you can do, and Cheyenne helps out a lot."

He estimated they spent between \$5,000 and \$10,000 on ski racing last season.

So why does a self-proclaimed lower middle class family dedicate so much of their income to making sure Cheyenne gets to ski race?

"For the love of the sport, you know," he said. "You love it; your kids love it. And we wish we would have had the opportunity to do the same thing."

So even though it's expensive, they make it work. And Cheyenne is a big part of it. When she's not skiing, working out in the gym or doing her schoolwork she is often working. She attends a charter school to better accommodate her racing schedule. Cheyenne is a busser and hostess at Village Pizzeria, runs the child care at a local gym, coaches softball, acts as a scorekeeper for the men's softball league, takes babysitting jobs and works at all three of the family businesses.

After eight-hour days training on the ski slopes, Cheyenne will stop into the ski shop in the evenings to help out. She works alongside her mother, Mitzie, designing and printing T-shirts and sports jerseys. And when it comes to the firewood business, Cheyenne can run the backhoe, the loader and the saw.



Competitive ski racing is in Cheyenne Brown's blood.

"She knows that the money we earn goes into the ski racing fund," her father said. "She's not afraid of hard work."

Nonetheless, she could still use a little help. Cheyenne applies for ski racing scholarships each year and has received aid from entities such as the Squaw Valley Ski Team and Lake Tahoe Ski Club Foundation. She gets discounts on gear from her sponsors including Völkl skis, Bollé goggles, Briko helmets and Olympic Bootworks, but they don't offer up any cash. She also accepts donations on websites she has set up with organizations such as Make A Champ and Go Fund Me.

Cheyenne has every intention of taking her ski career all the way to the U.S. Ski Team like her friend and mentor Resi Stiegler, and that means dedicating summer months to skiing as well. She has attended off-season camps in the past at places such as Mt. Hood, Mt. Bachelor and Mammoth, but this year she has made an even bigger commitment. Starting at the end of July, she will be spending almost a month training alongside big name skiers and coaches in New Zealand.

“It’s very hard here in Tahoe to get better if there’s no snow,” she said. And though a ski trip to New Zealand may seem like an unnecessary expense to some, Cheyenne said that’s not entirely true, not if you want to really take your skiing to the next level, and she does.

Cheyenne doesn’t mind giving up her summer to skiing. She would be happy if it were winter year-round. Skiing is where her heart is.

“I truly, genuinely love everything about skiing and ski racing ... I love the adrenaline of going fast and arcing the perfect turn,” she said. “I don’t even know what it is. It’s my passion, I can’t even explain it.”

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Notes:

To help Cheyenne pursue her ski racing dreams, donations are being accepted here and at this website.