

Reno's Jitloff finding balance in ski racing world



Tim Jitloff hanging out in his Jacuzzi, one of his sponsors, at home in Germany. Photo/USSA

By Megan Harrod, USSA

He speaks fluent German and lives in Bergen am Chiemsee, Germany. These two things alone make Tim “Jit” Jitloff of Reno unique among his teammates. Like the Europeans, Jitloff is a commuter in his job as a professional ski racer.

However, Tahoe was his playground as a child, and he was lucky enough to have local legends like Daron Rahlves and recently retired teammate Marco Sullivan to look up to on the mountain.

“I watched them growing up and they inspired me to become a ski racer,” Jitloff remembered. “Marco gets embarrassed when I say that because he thinks I’m joking, but he truly had an impact on me wanting to succeed.”

Oftentimes, it's those childhood ski heroes that can make all the difference in an athlete's career—exemplifying how the right mix of passion, determination, grit and perseverance can lead to places never imagined. Like, for instance, the biggest stage in the sports world: the Olympics.

Jitloff is one of those well-rounded athletes who understands the responsibility professional athletes have to exemplify for the next generation of little shredders. He works to show kids that things like humor, honor, kindness and respect are what make people great. While these are character traits that not every professional athlete possesses, hang with Jitloff for a day and you'll notice it straight away. His gratitude and professionalism shine through.

There's life off the mountain, too, and Jitloff—who plays guitar—is inspired by musicians from all walks of life, including Jimmy Page, Dave Gilmour and Bob Marley, but also businessmen like Elon Musk and Richard Branson.

“I like people who do things their own way and create,” said Jitloff. Makes sense, as Jitloff tends to take the offbeat path.

You've likely seen or heard buzz about a newer ski company on the market: Croc Sports, an Austrian-Finnish company started in 2015. And chances are you've heard that buzz because the Californian-born, Tahoe-raised Olympian and seven-time National Champion, Jitloff is the newest member of the Croc team. While in Norway in April for an on-snow training camp, Jitloff ski-tested with Croc Sports. With the switch and his healthy and strong physical condition, Jitloff—often fastest amongst his teammates in training sessions—hopes to translate this speed to race day and find his way back into the top 15 in the world in giant slalom, and onto the podium in 2017.

Jitloff must have a love affair with Italy, as his career-best results—two fifth-place Audi FIS Ski World Cup finishes—have

taken place in Alta Badia and Sestriere, Italy. Last season, Jitloff placed seventh at Alta Badia—his best finish of the 2016 season. These results are something of which he's proud.

"I'm a giant slalom skier, so I am proud of my strong results in Alta Badia the last three years," he recalls. "Alta Badia, for me, has a special place in my soul because it defines the GS art. When I go there, it makes me better."

But Jitloff is quick to note that skiing is not everything. Things like languages, music, culture and history help Jitloff to find balance in his often chaotic life on the White Circus. Seeing situations with a different perspective, remaining open-minded and calm help him to deal with the daily challenges of the life of a professional athlete.

Growing up in Truckee, he shred with his two older brothers and their friends at Alpine Meadows and felt like nothing was impossible. He credits his parents as his biggest supporters and says that they encouraged him to relentlessly pursue his dreams—never standing in the way and always allowing him to find his way. For Jitloff, Truckee was a fantastic little mountain town for kids to grow and learn about nature and the mountain lifestyle.

"It shaped me into who I would become and the time skiing around Tahoe was a cornerstone in my life," Jitloff recalls.

This love for the mountains has translated to Jitloff's new life in Bergen am Chiemsee, where he lives with his fiancé, Anja, whom he'll marry next summer. There, he often mountain bikes and holds himself to high conditioning standards. For Jitloff, conditioning is key.

"Everyone has talent, but talent can only bring you so far. You have to be willing to work harder than everyone else and put yourself through a lot of pain to be able to reach the top," he said. "My journey is a work in progress, but I enjoy the process and I think that's what keeps me strong."

It's hard to reach an elite level in any sport without sacrifice, and alpine ski racing is definitely no exception to this rule. Between travel, on-snow training, racing and conditioning, ski racing is an incredibly full and grueling lifestyle. It is, in fact, your life. Your teammates and coaches become a second family—and, at times, more like a first family. Whether it's leaving your loved ones at home for extended periods of time or missing key life events because you have a race on the other end of the world—that's the life of a ski racer. You have to love it. Live it. Breathe it. And these athletes do. One sacrifice for Jitloff that sticks out in his memory was missing his high school graduation for a ski camp. At the time, he'd have rather been skiing, but was also bummed to be missing a major life moment. These days, Jitloff stresses the importance of balancing his personal life with his sporting life—a contributing factor to his decision to live in Europe.

Jitloff believes progressing through life with constant learning and growth is what really matters in the end. We asked him three questions on what he believes makes a champion.

Ski team: In your words, what makes a champion?

Jitloff: A champion is not just someone wins. A champion is someone who stands for something. Someone who has some substance. Who you are as a person—the real you—is what matters. You can win everything there is to win, but things like humor, honor, kindness and respect are what makes people great. I don't put stock into what you win; I put stock into who you are and how you treat people. That, to me, is a champion.

Ski team: Do you remember the first time you felt like a champion?

Jitloff: I can honestly say that I don't feel like a champion.

I feel like a really lucky kid from Tahoe who got to grow up and follow his dreams. I have had amazing support on so many levels in my career. To be able to do what I love is what makes me feel like a champion.

Ski team: What is the biggest piece of advice you have for aspiring kids who want to be sitting where you are today?

Jitloff: In the end, the journey is what matters. The end goal is not everything.

Jitloff kicks off the 2017 season at the World Cup opener giant slalom in Soelden on Oct. 23.