

The Winter Push



By Britt Janyk

Published 2008-02-14 09:42:22

These past few weeks have gone by so quickly, I can't believe that already next week the World Cup circuit will be in Whistler. But am I ever happy to be getting a week of well-needed rest. I'm finding myself cocooning inside a little, renting movies, eating home-cooked food, and catching up with friends. It's great.

This week I want to write a little bit about what it's like on the road when you start to miss home, and get a little road-weary. We spend a lot of time overseas during the race season and when it starts to feel long that's when you really need to dig deep to keep your head in the game. This is what I was experiencing over the last two weeks in Europe.

Although time has gone by quickly it doesn't mean that it's been easy. As a team we have been having a great time and the atmosphere is so good right now, but January is always a tough month. Before Christmas you have tons of energy because it is still very much the beginning of the season and in February you gain some energy because you can see the end of the season nearing and you know that you only have a few more weeks of digging deep and staying focused. January however, is the dark tunnel between December and February. It can seem endless, even when you're getting good results every weekend.

Ideally, I would like to wake up the morning of each race and be excited, fresh and ready to go. Ideally. The truth, however, is that as the season goes on each one of us gets tired, you start to miss home a little, you need space from your teammates, and you get a little tired of the constant travel. It definitely has helped this season to have good results and finishes at every race, but the last two events in Switzerland and Italy I definitely had to work hard to motivate myself mentally.

Throughout the winter I stay in touch with our sports psychologist over email. I find this really helps me to stay focused on what's coming up next and to really take a look at what went well or didn't go well at each race. It's quite easy to just cruise along from one race to the next, forget about the previous event and continue to move forward. I've found in the past, though, that this method usually leads to inconsistent results.

When I write my emails it's a way of thinking out loud, getting my thoughts on paper. They always become more clear once I've done this and then I can properly assess how I want to approach the next race. My emails don't always get responded to right away but that doesn't really matter, the most important part for me is getting my thoughts on a page.

Two weeks ago in St. Moritz, where we had a downhill and a super G race, I was feeling pretty flat. I knew we had two more weeks to go in Europe and it was tough not to think about going home. In order to try and keep my mind sharp I started to focus on the days one at a time. If my mind started to wander ahead I would consciously try to bring it back to the present day.

It was a big learning experience for me that week — I had never felt flat like that for a race. I wasn't too satisfied with my results that weekend, as I struggled in the downhill and in the super G race I came away with a 15th place finish. It was still a top-15 finish and worth points, but I wasn't happy with it. I knew I could have done better. I decided that for the last event in Sestriere, Italy I was going to consciously work harder at feeling energized and positive. It is a lot easier to be negative when we get tired!

After the training runs last week I would write down how I was feeling and draw out the positives from each day. This allowed me to put a smile on my face and to get to sleep at night. Sleep is very important, but if I have thoughts running around in my head I don't sleep well at all, and then I just get more and more tired each day!

When I was on-hill, if I noticed a negative thought running around in my head I really tried to pick up on it, acknowledge it, and then turn it into a positive. This seemed to be working quite well and I was also starting to feel less tired on the hill compared to the week before. I had been yawning in the start in St. Moritz but now I was feeling energized again and ready to go.

It's amazing how powerful the mind can be. I learn more about what goes on in my head every week. It's pretty cool actually.

Over the weekend I came away with a seventh place finish and a 12th place finish. I skied really well in both races and had a few little mistakes which cost me some time, but that's what happens when you go for it. More important was the fact that I had really proved to myself that I can dig deep and keep my head in the game when it counts. It's a good thing I'm writing all of this down here so I don't forget it for the next time!

It is great to be resting this week and I look forward to seeing a big crowd to cheer on the Canadian Cowboys and the Speed Queen's at the races next week.