

Q&A

JAKE HOLDEN

Style

story by **LAURIE WALLACE-LYNCH**

You could be the next champion snowboarder! Former Olympic Snowboarder Jake Holden of Belfountain, who is now the Assistant Coach of the Canadian National Snowboardcross Team, shares his secrets on how to think, train and act like an Olympian.

Holden was a member of the Canadian National Snowboardcross Team from 2010 to 2014. He ranked in the top 20 overall in the Snowboardcross World Cup in 2013 and went on to compete in Snowboardcross events at the 2014 Sochi World Olympics. Holden retired from competition after the Olympics and went on to coach the Ontario Provincial team before becoming the head travel coach for NorAM. Last year Holden joined Canada Snowboard as National Snowboardcross Team Assistant and NextGen Coach.

He travels extensively with the team to training camps and snowboarding events. When we spoke in late September, he was headed to the training camp in Switzerland with Team Canada, helping the team produce results and get on the podium. He also works with riders from the Snowboardcross NextGen Team, which is designed to help Canada's next wave of snowboards transition to the Senior National Team.



Racing a 6man heat World Cup race in Switzerland during the 2012-2013 season.



Holding the Canadian flag in Russia at the 2014 Winter Olympics while watching Alpine Snowboard events.



Sideroads: How old were you when you first started snowboarding?

Holden: “I started snowboarding at age nine but I started skiing when I was about three or four years old. My parents were avid snowboarders as well. I spent a lot of time at Caledon Ski Club—I could almost walk to the ski hill.”

Sideroads: I understand you competed in Judo for 10 years and were the Canadian Junior National champion before you switched to snowboarding. What made you make the switch?

Holden: “At the end of high school I had to commit to one sport or the other, and I chose snowboarding because I was doing well at it and I wanted a sport that I could do outside. This

was the deal breaker for me.”

Sideroads: When you were a kid racing down the Caledon ski hill, did you dream of being in the Olympics?

Holden: “Going from being an amateur snowboarder to competing in the Olympics has always been the big picture goal for me from an early age.”

Sideroads: How does someone go from being a weekend warrior snowboarder to being on Canada’s National Team and competing in the Olympics?

Holden: “I started out participating at the local Caledon Ski Club in all of their programs and then started to travel to the Provincial series of events with Ontario Snowboard. Next came NorAM—the North American events, and this is where I started gaining points which helps qualify you to compete for a World Cup Spot. I then moved out west to Canmore, Alberta to join a team, lots of us went on to earn World Cup spots, then I made the National Team! I didn’t compete in the 2010 Olympics, but I was a forerunner to the events and got to train on the track ahead of the competition. This amazing experience inspired me to train, so I put my head down and four years later I represented Canada in the Olympics in Sochi.” »

Standing at the bottom of the Olympic SBX track in Sochi, Russia with teammates Rob Fagan, Kevin Hill, and Chris Robanske.

SOCHI 2014

FAVOURITES

Sports “Snowboarding, golf, swimming.”

Hobby “Doing stonework.”

Book “Confessions of an Economic Hitman by John Perkins.”

Hero or Mentor “My grandfather. He is no longer alive, but I really looked up to him growing up.”

Travel destination “Austria. I snowboarded there several times and love it.”

On Your Bucket List “I one day want to live on a lake.”

Words to Live By “Anything is possible!”

«**Sideroads:** Thinking back to 2014 when you competed in the Winter Olympics, what was your best memory?

Holden: “My first memory when I think of the Olympics is meeting and getting to watch the other athletes compete in various sports, but participating in the Olympics was the best highlight of all. I of course had watched the Olympics on TV but it is so thrilling to see it live. I was so proud to be competing and representing Canada, and although it was great fun, I still had a job to do and was very focussed on that.”

Sideroads: What was behind your decision to retire from the sport at age 27 following the Olympics?

Holden: “I had a series of accidents and some pretty bad concussions and was frightened of getting another head injury, so to be honest, after the 2014 season, I had a feeling inside of me that I had to move on. It was a gut reaction and a part of me told me it was time to move on.”

Sideroads: How difficult was it for you to make the transition from athlete to coach?

Holden: “I was fairly lucky with the transition. Not long after my decision to retire, I got a call from a friend who was working with the Ontario Provincial Team and asked if I could help coach



on weekends. It was a great way to go snowboarding, so I said yes. Then I became the travel coach and helped run the Ontario Team for two seasons. I then got hired by the National Team in September of 2018, and this is my sixth season of coaching, which is awesome. “

Sideroads: How is the Canadian Snowboarding Team looking this year?

Holden: “The team is looking good. We have a few athletes coming off of injuries and are ready to return to competition protocols but the team definitely have podium potential!”

Sideroads: What is your best advice to young people who dream of becoming Olympic athletes?

Holden: “My best advice is to not give up on your dream. It’s about commitment toward the goal of excellence. Through my coaching provincially and nationally, I can name five athletes right now who all are super talented and all they had to do is commit to make it to the National Team which is almost a given to go to the Olympics. It takes hard work and commitment. It’s not supposed to be easy. You need to learn to love the struggle and push through the training to make you a better competitor. Remember there’s always someone else who is busy building mental toughness who wants it as much or more than you do.

“I would also advise kids to do as many sports as you possibly can in addition to your love sport. Be open-minded about other sports as cross training helps the body and the mind as you relate movement patterns.

“Visualization is also huge. You need to be able to memorize a course and run the track by memory to help you prepare. Strength conditioning, visualization and preparing—what happens off snow is almost as important as what happens on snow. Collisions



Racing a 6man heat World Cup race in Switzerland during the 2012-2013 season.

and accidents do happen, but if you are strong and healthy you bounce back easier.”

Sideroads: Competing at your level in any sport can be expensive with travel, equipment and other costs—how were you able to manage financially?

Holden: “If you are going to compete, you have to realize that there’s no way you can do it on your own. Snow sports in particular are expensive, so you have to put yourself out there and ask for help through fundraising. I funded myself with the help of my family and we ran fundraiser dinners at big venues three years in a row with silent auctions and more. Once you get to the National and NextGen you basically are in a pool of carded athletes and the government offers some funding, but it’s a minimal monthly amount so you need to do your own fundraising.”

Sideroads: What has been your biggest challenge or the most difficult feat to learn?

Holden: “The hardest feat for me was overcoming injuries; going through the process of rebuilding mind and body gave me some powerful moments. I dislodged my shoulder a few times and had shoulder surgery which put me out for a year. I got stronger because of my injuries and more determined to get back to the sport.”

Sideroads: What do you do in your off time when you are not travelling to training camps or coaching?

Holden: “I work with the family business—my dad runs Denson Landscaping and I own and operate a division of the company called Stoney Links and do unique stonework such as outdoor fireplaces, kitchens and other stone work. It helps me balance it all.”

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