

Alumni Spotlight



While attending Burke Mountain Academy, Diann Roffe became a World Cup alpine ski racer winning the World Championship Gold in GS at 17 years old (youngest ever in the sport of Alpine Skiing) and an Olympic gold medalist. Over the span of her eleven-year career, she represented the United States in four World Championships, a Pan American Games, and three Olympic Games, winning a gold and silver medal in 1994 and 1992 respectively. This year she was in Sochi for the Olympics with the USST Foundation. Here is her reflection on the Games.

A little over two months ago I was fortunate to have a lengthy phone conversation with Warren. It was refreshing to hear the pride and excitement in his voice after watching Mikaela win in Sochi. Warren was so passionate about the sport, and while I was glad to have a chance to speak with him, I was deeply saddened to hear of his passing. We all (students and alumnus) have been provided the opportunity to be exceptional individuals in one way or another thanks to Warren's vision for BMA. In my discussion with Warren we bantered about the nature of seventeen year old world champions and the differences between Mikaela and me. Warren was as curious as ever!

In 1985, there was no internet, no social media, and girls did not wear (much) make-up. When I arrived at BMA in 1982 I realized I needed skis for both training and racing along with better running shoes. I must confess, I did not have a grand plan about what I would accomplish in school or ski racing. I had no idea that the mandatory road bike that I brought to school was WAY too big for me. Jeez. I bought it at the local hardware store, it should be fine right? That alone tells you how much time I sat on a bike before Burke! I preferred soccer, running and skiing. We had no weight room and no science lab, but we did have FUN. We must all be thankful for being BMA graduates and navigating success in our own unique ways.

Most importantly, I want to say that because of my time at BMA, I know how to laugh, lose, barf gracefully, hug my friends, WORK, relish complete exhaustion and blow the doors off what I thought was possible. I stopped ski racing twenty years ago and realized it isn't fancy titles that define who I am, that definition happened when my world expanded while at BMA.

I was so proud to watch my fellow Burkies in Sochi! I was invited to attend with the USST Foundation. My role was to spend time with our US Ski and Snowboard Team Foundation Trustees and share with them the inside view of the events, rules and the mind of the athletes at the games. It had been 20 years since competing in Lillehammer, and I could finally watch the Olympics without wanting to compete myself!

Having competed in three Games, worked for Turner Broadcasting in Nagano and for the USOC in Salt Lake, I was surprised at the industrial feel of the Sochi games. In my era, the games were a boost to the local economies and celebrated by the local cafes and commerce. In Sochi, after arriving at the airport, we took a bus to the mountain cluster and security check point. We then loaded smaller shuttles which took us to our hotel. The hotel was finished and about 100 yards from Putin's Sochi compound. The entire trip took place on brand new roads and trains surrounded by concrete highway barriers so we could not view the local area. The shops were all state run. I felt like I was caught in the "Truman Show" with Jim Carey. We saw only what Putin had decided we should see.

Since I was only at the Games for 8 days, I missed the slalom events sadly, but I was able to watch the DH training and races. The last raining run for the men's downhill was icy and fast. Bode looked unstoppable. Race day brought a completely different slope due to sun and high temperatures. My heart went out to the guys as I saw the top of the course was shaded and hard, but no longer icy. The bottom was bathed in sun and much too soft for the line Bode likes to take. The aggressive line that was winning training runs would prove to be detrimental in the race. The areas of the bottom of the turn where he likes to stand hard against the forces and hold a clean fast line would crumble underneath him as the snow deteriorated. It was difficult to watch and my heart went out to him.

The Olympics are a living breathing thing where luck counts and emotions run rampant. Julia Mancuso is perhaps the best big event performer I have ever seen. We went NUTS watching from the stands! She is so good at creating a perfect storm of success! She truly believes in herself and knows there is nothing to lose when competing in the Olympics.

The Nordic venue was beautiful and Scandinavian in looks. The snow was a different story. It was so hard to see the heavy slushy snow clinging to the tops of the skis. It was a game changer for everyone. Good and bad. Just imagine how this affected the normal race prep routines and legs. I was fascinated with watching the sprints.

Sochi was an amazing experience and the Olympics are always full of surprises. Mikaela's success was no surprise. Her win was easy to predict. That does not mean it was any easier for her. In fact, I think being the favorite is incredibly hard! I am proud to see her work SO hard and tackle such a great sport with joy and emotion. Her love of skiing is so evident and makes us all wistful for that joy of nailing just the right acceleration in any turn, on any snow... Yeah... Good stuff.

Today, my husband Art Pursel and I live in Camp Hill, PA with our son Tripp. I co-own a company called ALPINEOne Inc. We specialize in lockers and drying systems for ski areas, as well as universities and sports teams. I am spending a lot more time on snow with my family and coach at Roundtop. Life is good! ■