

When I was 3 years old I looked up at the ski jumps at Canada Olympic Park and told my mom, "I want to go off those". Little did I know it would spark an 18-year long journey in the pursuit of becoming one of the best Nordic Combined athletes in the world. Though this journey did not come without speed bumps and adversity. I have always believed that with hard work and a dream I would be able to beat the odds and be the Canadian that was able to beat the system and have success at the highest level of the sport, and though I was able to have some success, I feel that I have reached a point in my career where I feel it is no longer possible to reach the next level without the support and help that I have never received. With this realization, I have made the most difficult decision to retire. I love the sport with all my heart, and the journey it's taken me on lessons it taught me, and people it has allowed me to meet will stay with me for the rest of my life. It has shaped who I am as a person, and will forever be a part of my identity. But every year continuing in sport has gotten more difficult, to the point where I find myself thinking how much a competition costs me, as to how much I enjoy doing it. It has started to become just as much about money, financial and situational restrictions, and less about what I fell in love with about the sport which is pushing yourself to the limit, the constant pursuit of improvement, and the thrill of competing for your nation on the world stage.

Though I did not reach all of my goals, I have been able to represent my country for the past 10 years at 2 world Championships, Youth Olympic Games, World Cups, Grand Prix's, and Continental Cups. I was able to Score multiple COC points, and Grand Prix points, and a youth Olympic Bronze medal, something that few Canadians have ever achieved.

None of this would not have been possible without the help, generosity, and support from others, thank you:

To the many coaches I have had throughout my long career, I want to thank you for your belief in me, and for pushing me through all of the hard times, and all of the lessons you've taught me. Especially to Chris Jefferies, and Allison Macardle who in the last 3 years have taken my skiing to a level and standard I wasn't sure I was capable of. And to Gasper Bartol, my coach, and my friend. Where do I even begin? You have taken my level to heights that few ever believed possible, including myself. You believed in me when few did, and you sacrificed so much to allow me to compete all around the world and took me to my best ever results and success. There are no words to truly describe how impossible the last 3 years would have been without your help, and support, and I am so grateful for all that you have done.

To all of the families that have helped me, whether it be allowing me to stay with you during a competition or training camp, picking me up when I am down and far away from home, and caring for me like I was one of your own. There are so many of you out there and without your help and support, I would have never been able to get to here.

To my sponsors who invested in me, and gave me an opportunity to represent them internationally, I thank you for believing in my journey and providing me with the essentials to compete in such a demanding sport.

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To other nations, and FIS Nordic Combined. The amount of support I have received from other nations has largely been a reason I continued so long in my pursuit. From helping with ski service during a competition to letting me jump with you on the hill when I had no coach, from helping with travel, accommodation, or letting me join in on a training session. The support I have received from other nations in this sport is overwhelming, and I am forever grateful that there are so many in this amazing community that are willing to help out the lonely Canadian. To the people of FIS Nordic Combined who have always encouraged me to keep pushing, and shown me so much support and encouragement it has always been a motivational boost, and even on the worst of days having a FIS official congratulate me at the finish line has gotten me through so much.

To my countless teammates, from Canadians like Nigel Lauchlun, and Matthew Soukup and the Alberta World Cup Academy, to those from other nations. I have had the opportunity to train with amazing athletes from all around the world, who have pushed me, influenced me and taught me so much. To Jasper good, Adam Loomis, Ben Loomis, Stephen Schuman, Ben Berend, Taylor Fletcher, Bryan Fletcher, Grant Andrews, Nina Lussi and countless others from the USA, who have treated me as one of their own, and always encouraged me, welcomed me and supported me since I was 9 years old and first came to the US. We have been on so many adventures and journeys, and I will cherish the memories forever.

To Wesley Savil, who has been a teammate, mentor, idol, coach, manager, etc. etc. etc. You've taught me so much over the years, from when I was just a tiny hopper and you helped me tie my jump boots, to now where I know you're always there when I need to talk. I've always looked to you as inspiration and guidance, and you've always been there for me.

To my girlfriend, Julie, who when we first met I was still recovering from my brain injury, and helped me get back to being an athlete there really is no way to thank you. You've supported me through everything, the good days and the bad, the hard times and the months I've been gone. You've helped me get through so much, and always pushed and encouraged me even though I know it was hard for you to see me leave. You've sacrificed so much for me to be able to pursue sport, and knowing that no matter the result, having you to tell me that I did amazing, and you were proud of me has always gotten me back on my feet. I love you.

And of course, to my parents and family. From when I was that 3 years old in a car seat saying I wanted to go off those ski jumps, you have made all of this possible. From carrying my skis up the jump when I was 6, to traveling the world to cheer me on, absolutely none of this would have been possible without your love and support. And I'm sorry for all of the family vacations and events I've missed. I will make up for them now, I promise.

I will always be grateful that I have been able to have this opportunity that so few are able to have. Though I didn't reach all of the goals I dreamt of, the experiences, friends, and lessons I have learned far outweigh any result I could ever achieve. The sport will forever be a part of my

life, and I know that this is not the end of my involvement. As one journey ends, another begins, my plan is to begin my post-secondary education with the hopes of working as a physiotherapist or chiropractor. So many have helped me with injuries and kept my body running. I hope to be able to provide future athletes with the help and support I received (talking 'bout you Aaron!). I also hope to be involved with the future of Nordic Combined in Canada. I hope and believe I will not be the last Canadian Nordic Combined athlete, there are still many young jumpers out there looking for a new facility to call home. I plan to help make that possible and allow these athletes to continue to grow as the future of the sport, and hopefully begin to help organizations such as Canadian Sport Institution, and Own the Podium, realize how development in sport, and longevity will have a greater impact on results, then just supporting the few at the top.

Thank you to all who have made this journey possible, I look forward to the future, and will hold onto all of the amazing memories from the past!

Nathaniel Mah
Former Nordic Combined Athlete