

Perfect Season Redux?

Private halfpipe, new tricks elevate Shaun White to new heights

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By: Michelle Hurni

Since 2006, **Shaun White** has had "Olympic gold medalist" stuck like an asterisk next to his name wherever he goes. It's been more than three years since he stood atop the podium in Torino, Italy, and White is champing at the bit to repeat his feat in Vancouver. "Everyone tries to wrap last time and this time together," he says. "But I was a different person at the time. Now it's a whole new ballgame. I have a different mindset. I'm anxious; I want to unleash what I've been practicing."

White didn't just win gold in the Winter Olympic halfpipe in 2006; he went undefeated the entire season. In the process, he became the mainstream face of snowboarding. Even as he jokes around in interviews, he takes that role seriously. He won't share his goals for the season (he calls them "too ridiculous"), but you can bet on him wanting another perfect run.

White has competed at the Winter X Games since 2000. His nine gold and 14 total medals at Winter X are tops all-time in both categories. In 2009, he became the first snowboarder to win back-to-back gold in the SuperPipe.

White was 19 years old when he captured halfpipe gold at the Winter Olympics. Now 23, he says, "It's here sooner than I thought it would be." He's been prepping for the 2010 snowboard season for the past year and says 2009 was different than most years because he was riding to prepare for 2010. "Every season is important, but big events [like the Winter Olympics] don't come around as often."

He's stoked to ride in 2010. In the past, he got the job done, then went skateboarding to get a break from the snow. He skipped the competition skateboard season in 2009 and has focused completely on snowboarding.

Adding to White's excitement is the support he received from sponsor Red Bull, which took two months to build him a private superpipe in the back country of the San Juan Mountains near Silverton, Colo. The Winter X and Olympic-sized halfpipe (22-foot walls) has led Shaun to take an innovative role in the sport for the first time in his career. Instead of landing the hardest established tricks and spins, he invented new ones. Instead of learning one new trick for the season, he now has three huge bangers to add to his 2010 run.

Silverton, an area for expert skiers and snowboarders, gets less traffic in a season than most resorts get in a weekend, and became the perfect spot to keep Shaun's creations under wraps. The superpipe came complete with the world's first on-mountain snowboarding foam pit, which allowed White to put the equivalent of years of riding experience into each day. "The foam pit let me learn what the move in my head should feel like in the air," he says. After pit-sticking a trick, he let loose in the pipe.

Included in his new bag of tricks are double corks, very rarely seen in a halfpipe. And he hasn't just put one double cork into his run; he has two, and he's doing them back-to-back. The first is a frontside double cork 1080, which he's toying with calling the "Double Eagle." He's also doing a switch, which is a Cab double cork 1080 (switch frontside 1080 with a double off-axis flip). Double corks with fewer spins have been done, but when White stuck his two doubles at the USSA Grand Prix at Copper Mountain, Colo., on Dec. 12, it was a first in snowboard competition.

In addition to the double corks, White also learned a switch backside 900. Of course, White nailed more than three new tricks, but says a double cork backside rodeo won't be in his run. Not because he can't do it (he can), but because it's not as natural as he'd like it to be. As far as putting together his run, he will do only what he needs to win; if possible, he wants to minimize his risks.

White needs a pristine landing every time so he can go full speed into the next wall. He tries to stay a wall ahead of his tricks, fully committed to the next trick before he even lands the previous one. If he's unhappy with his run, he analyzes it on video to see what happened, even if it's just a minor error.

White calls the past year of hard work "overpreparation" and says it creates confidence. For him, confidence means knowing the outcome before he even drops in, and that's exactly the mindset he wants before defending his Olympic and Winter X Games gold. And even though there's a target on his back as he aims to repeat his perfect season, he claims, "Fears just don't come into the mix." His plan is to just "show up and deliver."



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Cold kickin' it like a man with his own 22-foot halfpipe should be.



Nate Abbott/Shazamm/ESPN Images

Before the "overpreparation:" White, Winter X 2009.