

# Balance

By Michael Somppi



A balanced lifestyle is key to success and happiness for everyone, however for a high performance athlete, it is often the biggest contributing factor to success or failure. As an amateur athlete, money is often tight and receiving a post-secondary education is generally essential for future financial stability. The common challenge for all amateur athletes is: how do you balance work, a post-secondary education, and full-time training and competing? When an athlete graduates from high school and is suddenly faced with many options to pursue, how does he or she know what will be ideal for their performance?

The first step is to realize everyone has a different balance point. The key is to find the right balance point for you based on your current situation. As your situation changes, you need to adjust your balancing act accordingly.

Since graduating from Hammarskjold High School in 2006 I have constantly refined and adjusted to find my optimal balance point as an amateur athlete. Fresh out of high school I attempted to balance a full course load in engineering and competitive skiing. My skiing suffered. The next year I joined the Thunder Bay training centre and continued with my University education at a slower rate, only taking a few credits. I would say it worked out pretty well. My skiing improved and my grades remained good. Check mark for balance that season.

The next year I tried to do the same, however increased travel and focus on skiing led to lower grades in school and a hectic schedule at times. The balance was no longer optimal. In the following years I have opted for no school and focused all my attention on skiing. It seems to have worked out so far for me as I have made consistent improvements and now I'm on the Senior National Ski Team! I have always tried to work during the spring and summer months to financially support myself, however during the fall and winter months, skiing is my sole commitment.

***" there is a lot more to being a successful athlete than simply training for many hours "***

After reading this you might be wondering, what does this guy do all day if all he does is train and compete? As I have found out over time, there is a lot more to being a successful athlete than simply training for many hours. I spend more time now taking care of my body so I can get the most out of each training session. This means sleeping nine hours a night and napping during the afternoon when I need to, preparing healthy meals, enhancing my recovery with ice baths and epsom salt

baths, stretching, technique sessions with a strength coach, and regular visits to massage therapists, physiotherapists, and chiropractors. I have also worked more closely with my coach in developing a personalized training schedule and kept my personal blog up to date (for once). Taking proper care of equipment, most notably skis, is another big time commitment. Preparing new skis or freshly stone ground skis for the winter isn't a short process when you don't have a hot box.



Of course there are always other commitments life requires such as groceries, laundry (I have a lot when I'm constantly training and making clothes dirty!), appointments, family events, and you need to make time for friends and girlfriends/boyfriends. For example, this summer I have been more focused on training than ever before and recently it was starting to wear on me. Although it was before the final day of a hard training camp and I was exhausted, I went out to see an Arkells concert on a Saturday night with my girlfriend. I had a great time, slept in the next morning and managed to have a solid four-hour rollerski on Sunday to finish off the training camp. For me, this is a once in a

blue moon night, but sometimes it's important to do to keep the balance.

I do find I often need something else in my life to keep busy and avoid boredom. Anything with deadlines or a specific schedule is difficult because my daily schedule is constantly changing and I'm often on the road at training camps or competing. This past off-season (since May 1st) I have been on the road for a total of 83 days and I will be on road again to start the race season on November 30th. Fortunately I have found the perfect fit for me: an Internet based language program (Rosetta Stone) that I can chip away at whenever it suits me. The only downside is I don't always have the best Internet connection when I'm on the road.

If you are seeking your optimal balance point to lead a healthy, successful life then put some thought into all of your current commitments and consider the priority you place on each. Recognize when you are feeling overwhelmed by a busy schedule and identify the factors causing your stress. Do you wake up in the morning ready to seize the day, or do you roll out of bed, eyes half open shuffling over to your coffee machine. How often have you caught a cold because your body was run down and your immune system wasn't able to fend it off? If you can recognize warning signs that you are getting worn down by your daily schedule then you will have the opportunity to make adjustments before it negatively affects your performance.

To demonstrate how each individual has their own balance point and for another perspective, I interviewed fellow team mates Harry Seaton and Erin Tribe.

### ***Interview with Harry Seaton***

**MS:** As a 4th year member of the training centre I know you have tinkered with finding the right balance for yourself to optimize performance. Aside from training and competing full-time, what other commitments do you currently have on your plate?

**Harry:** 3 courses at Lakehead University (Fall semester) and occasional work.

**MS:** From what I can see, you seem to thrive on a busier schedule. Would you agree?

**Harry:** Yeah for sure. I like to keep busy.

**MS:** You opted not to join the training centre in Europe for a three week training camp and instead joined the National Team for shorter 1 week training camp in Whistler this Fall. How has being in Thunder Bay for the better part of the off-season worked for you? Has it made balancing work and school easier?

**Harry:** Yeah, balancing everything was easier because I was here (Thunder Bay). Being here is good primarily because I can do other things than skiing. I have established myself in the community for work as well.

**MS:** When you are overwhelmed by a busy schedule how does it affect your training and how do you deal with it?

**Harry:** Sometimes I have to mix up the training schedule. I have to do my own thing a couple days a week to accommodate my schedule. I can't always train with the team because of my schedule. Sometimes I have to do a little less to prevent myself from getting too worn down.

### ***Interview with Erin Tribe***

**MS:** As a third year member of the training centre you are currently balancing a job, school, and full-time training, correct?

**Erin:** Correct. Two courses (fall semester) at Lakehead University.

**MS:** Do you feel this is optimal for you at the moment?

**Erin:** I believe it is for me. Three (courses) may be a little bit of a stretch.

**MS:** When you are overwhelmed by a busy schedule how does it affect your training and how do you deal with it?

**Erin:** I deal with it by planning out my day in writing so I know what to expect and know when I have to be where. I try to get a good night sleep before and then it usually works out.



See you on the trails when the snow flies!

Michael Somppi

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