

The Skiing Olenicks

Carbondale's Olenicks are high achievers

By Sue McEvoy, Echo staff writer

Editor's note: As we bid goodbye to the 2010 Winter Olympics, completely saturated in medal counts and media hype, we want to showcase some local talent. The athletic Olenick siblings of Carbondale didn't appear in Vancouver, though we're mighty impressed with them, none-the-less. Here's what it's like to get really, really good at something – Guinness-world-record good, in fact.

They're Carbondale kids, and were all born at Aspen Valley Hospital. Peter, now 26, Michael, 24, and Megan Olenick, 22, first started skiing at Buttermilk, where their father, Bob, operated the restaurant at the base lodge.

"They all learned to ski at the age of 2," says their mom, Molly Garland. "I'd have Meg in a backpack, Michael on a leash and Peter skiing along in front. Only lost Peter off "the Couch" once [the comfy, quad chair on Aspen Mountain]. Not bad, one out of three."

Since that time, each of these three Olenick offspring has competed in freeskiing events around the world. They've been sponsored by companies from Obermeyer to Solomon, and have appeared in films by Warren Miller, Poor Boyz Productions and Teton Gravity Research.

All three went from Powder Pandas to the Aspen Valley Ski Club (AVSC) every weekend of every winter of their young lives. They were inspired by instructors Chuck Severy and Vince Lahey. Instead of racing on skis, all three Olenicks developed an addiction to air. After that, it was summer ski camp at Whistler where Peter worked as a coach and Michael and Megan volunteered as diggers, building jumps on the Blackcomb Glacier.

They worked to become fast and fearless in the air. They pooled their Christmas money to buy a trampoline and practiced tricks year-round using that and diving boards. As the sport of freeskiing developed, they were right there, developing with it.

A Guinness world record

Michael retired from competition last year to pursue his dream of attending law school. However, this year's Winter X Games, held at Buttermilk in late January, featured Megan in the Slopestyle event and Peter in the Superpipe and Big Hit contests. Megan finished fifth in her event and Peter had a disappointing showing in the Superpipe.

So, it was the last event on the last night of competition that proved to be a true Olenick high point. In a first-time X Games event, ESPN ended the night with Superpipe High Air. Six competitors took turns attempting the biggest amplitude above the 22-foot pipe.

In his next to last attempt, Peter reached 24' 3", the highest thus far. And on his last drop he soared to a gold medal and Guinness World Records height of 24'11".

In his seventh X Games, Peter won his first gold medal and the whole family was there to celebrate. Megan was watching from the bottom of the pipe.

"I could not believe he could go that high, let alone win and get a world record," she says. "It was an amazing feeling to see him stand on the top of the podium with the biggest smile on his face."

Michael was standing at the top of the pipe, as he always does, to provide sibling support.

"I just tell them they can do this, for them to picture it as just another run and not to get too nervous," he says of the vigil he takes at the top of each event for Peter and Megan.

While freeskiing events take place all around the world, the Olenicks also make time for skiing in adventure films. Peter describes his schedule.

"It usually starts in the fall with big airs in Europe on giant scaffolding," he says. "In Switzerland, Sweden, Germany and now London and Barcelona. Then we are in Colorado for a while, through X Games. Then Vermont, then wherever it is snowing – sometimes

Japan or Canada. Then back to Europe for some more contests and filming.”

The fifth annual Aspen Snowmass Open was held at Buttermilk, Feb. 11-14. This event offers athletes the chance to compete on the same course used by the X Games before it opens to the public. At the Open, Megan took second place in the women’s Slopestyle.

When the kids retire?

Mom Molly stays caught up in the excitement year round.

“Our favorite part is witnessing the camaraderie between the pros,” she says. “Our dining room table is like the United Nations with Norwegians, Swedes, Canadians, French and Americans all sharing stories.”

Staying healthy throughout the competition season is always difficult. So far, the three Olenicks account for four torn ACLs, three broken collarbones, numerous injuries to wrists, thumbs, and shins, and some tendonitis.

Asked what she’ll miss when the kids all retire, Molly has a quick answer.

“I won’t miss witnessing the disappointments they all go through,” she says, “and I really won’t miss trips to the Orthopaedic Associates.”

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