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12 Months, 12 Top-Riders, 12 Interviews

by Mad40ne

Interview with

Ryan Olfers
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AT THE AGE OF 8 HE RIDES FOR THE FIRST TIME
A UNICYCLE. AT 14 HE IS WORLD CHAMPION IN
INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE, JUNIOR EXPERT, AND 2
YEARS LATER, IN 2016, HE ENTERS THE EXPERT
CATEGORY AND WINS THE TITLE OF WORLD
CHAMPION IN INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE. A GREAT
ATHLETE WITH A GREAT MASTERY OF MANY
REALLY DIFFICULT TRICKS, THAT HE APPROACHES
IN RACE.... TAKING A DEEP BREATH AND SAYING
TO HIMSELF "I CAN DO IT"....

INTERVIEW WITH RYAN OLFERS TWICE FREESTYLE WORLD CHAMPION



IT IS ALWAYS EXCITING TO HEAR AN ATHLETE SAYING, "... THIS SPORT MEANS THE WORLD TO ME...". TWO VERY SIMPLE WORDS, WHICH MAKE US UNDERSTAND THE GREATNESS OF THIS PASSION.

IN THIS VERY PLEASANT INTERVIEW WITH THE 2-TIMES WORLD CHAMPION AND 1-TIME VICE-WORLD CHAMPION IN INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE WE'VE UNDERSTOOD WHAT THIS SPORT MEANS FOR HIM AND WHY HE LOVES IT SO MUCH: THE FREEDOM TO DO, TO CREATE, TO SHOW OTHERS WHAT YOU LOVE MOST AND FOR WHICH YOU HAVE WORKED HARD ALL THIS BEING FULLY AWARE OF THE FACT THAT "... THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT I AM ENJOYING EVERY SINGLE SECOND I SPEND ON THE STAGE, BECAUSE IT AN OPPORTUNITY THAT YOU NEVER SHOULD TAKE FOR GRANTED. ".

RYAN'S MOST IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL RESULTS

UNICON 19:

VICE-WORLD CHAMPION -
INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE EXPERT.

UNICON 18:

WORLD CHAMPION - INDIVIDUAL
FREESTYLE EXPERT.

VICE-WORLD CHAMPION -X-
STYLE EXPERT.

3RD PLACE - SLOW RACE
BACKWARDS EXPERT.

UNICON 17:

WORLD CHAMPION - INDIVIDUAL
FREESTYLE JUNIOR EXPERT.



WHEN AND HOW DID YOU APPROACH THIS SPORT?

I started to develop an interest in unicycle from a very young age. The very first time that I tried a unicycle was in kindergarten. My kindergarten had many unicycles for beginners, which was a big hit for many. I became some sort of addicted to riding it. I was determined on learning to ride it by myself. After a while, my parents got contacted by one of the teachers where she was told that I should try to find a unicycle club because they saw that I was investing all my time into riding my unicycle. A short time after that, I began to ride in a unicycle club, and that was the beginning of my unicycle career.

2014, MONTREAL, UNICON XVII, HERE YOU GOT THE 1ST PLACE IN INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE, CAT. JUNIOR EXPERT. YOU WERE JUST 14 YEARS OLD. WHEN YOU THINK BACK TO THAT MOMENT... HOW DID YOU FEEL TO PERFORM IN FRONT OF SO MANY PEOPLE AT THIS YOUNG AGE?

Thinking back, I was really nervous because it was my first time competing in the expert division. The expert category is known to be the group that everyone wants to see. Because of that, it made me feel excited to show to many more people what I can do and that I was correct by choosing to compete in the expert category.

YOUR ROUTINES ARE ALWAYS AN INCREDIBLY RICH COLLECTION OF HIGH-LEVEL TRICKS, PERFORMED WITH GREAT ACCURACY AND MASTERY, AND THIS IS A CHARACTERISTICS THAT MADE YOU WIN THE TITLE OF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP IN FREESTYLE INDIVIDUAL AT UNICON 2016 IN SAN SEBASTIAN. TELL US ABOUT THE EMOTION OF THAT MOMENT. WHICH TYPE OF TRAINING STAYS BEHIND THAT MEDAL?

I trained a lot my tricks, so I felt secure and safe doing them under pressure. I tried my best to do the tricks while having direct eye contact with the judges, which was really challenging for me. Tania Olsen did my music, and I made the routine myself. I tried to put as many tricks as possible in that small amount of time. Tania helped me with all of my presentation, like what my face should look like and when I should look out at the audience. She has always been very important in my routines and I do not think I would have won without her.

...AND THEN AGAIN.... 2018 IN ANSAN (UNICON XIX) WE SAW YOU ON THE PODIUM AS VICE WORLD CHAMPION IN INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE. HOW DO YOU GET TO THESE LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE? BUT, ABOVE ALL, HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN SUCH A HIGH LEVEL OVER TIME? WHAT IS THE KEY TO ALL THIS?

I always try my best to do the most difficult routine that I am able to do when I am under pressure. When I train, I usually try to look at all of the tricks from the side line and see what I do wrong. It can be too much weight on the seat, or my feet not being placed right on the pedal for that specific trick. Many tricks have their own blockages. Once you pass that blockage and find out what you precisely have to do to complete that trick, the trick is not as difficult anymore. Then you just have to train that trick repeatedly until it is just muscle memory. I also watch a lot of YouTube videos of freestyles to look at the details in every trick. I watch closely to where exactly their arms are and what they do to complete the trick successfully. I think the reason why I am able to maintain the level that I have, is because I understand the background of the trick and know exactly what to do to complete that trick successfully.



WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE HAVING TO PERFORM IN FRONT OF HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE?

The feeling is a mix of many different feelings. Both excitement and nervousness are some of the feelings that I feel the most when I am about to go on the stage. I always feel excited to show everyone what I have been working hard on. Once I finish my routine, I actually rarely remember what happened in my performance. I forget if I fell or did anything wrong. But I always remember the amazing feeling of performing what I love to do.

BEFORE AND DURING A PERFORMANCE, WHAT DO YOU DO TO CONCENTRATE?

Before my performance, I usually try to stay by myself. That makes me able to concentrate on what is important in my routine. I listen to my music on repeat and practice my emotions in a mirror. During my performance, I always take it nice and easy. I always take a deep breath before a difficult trick and I tell myself "I can do it". But the most important thing is that I am enjoying every single second on that stage, because it an opportunity that you never should take for granted.



WHICH ARE YOUR NEXT GOALS AS REGARDS SPORTS, PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE?

My next goal regarding unicycle is to get definitely the Freestyle Expert gold medal back. Unfortunately, I do not think that I can keep competing on the expert level, as I am getting older and trying to make a career and pursue my dreams. Early next year I am going to move to Paris. There I will go on learning French with the goal to master it fluently. I have always enjoyed the freeness of life and I want to do what I feel like doing, wherever in the world. However, unicycle will always be a part of my life in some kind of way.

I have also slowly begun choreographing and making group freestyles, which I really enjoy to do. Who knows, maybe you will see something at the next Unicon 😊 .

HOW MUCH DO YOU TRAIN? IN YOUR OPINION WHICH ARE THE KEY POINTS FOR A GOOD AND SUCCESSFUL TRAINING PROGRAM IN FREESTYLE?

I only train once or twice a week. I wish that I would be able to train a lot more, but hopefully that will be possible in the future. My trainings are not planned at all. I basically train whatever I feel like in that specific day. One thing that I almost always do when I train is to repeat the difficult tricks, so that I do not get rusty. That has always been the way I have trained and that gives me the motivation to keep going, since I do what I feel like to do. When I am training my freestyle routine, I rarely go through my whole routine with music and everything. Instead of repeating my whole routine, I train only my tricks. That makes me more stable and safer when I do my routine. I go through my routine only 4-5 times in one training session. In those few run-throughs, I give all that I can, and by doing it in that way, I reduce the halfhearted run-throughs that might accrue because of tiredness.

EVEN IN SPORTS SOMETIMES THINGS DO NOT GO THE WAY YOU'D LIKE, WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE FEELING DOWN?

If I feel down at training, I train the tricks that I enjoy doing. In my case it is gliding. I actually rarely feel down when I train. There are always things to do and new tricks to

learn .

YOU RIDE FREESTYLE SINCE 2007 DO YOU NOTICE ANY IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TODAY'S PERFORMANCES AND THOSE OF 12 YEARS AGO?

There has been a huge upgrade in the level of tricks. Our tricks have become a lot more difficult than back when I started. Jumping tricks have also appeared a lot more. Today, many freestyle performances contain a jumping section with a lot of difficult tricks which makes the freestylers stand apart.



WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT FREESTYLE AND WHAT - IF YOU COULD DECIDE - WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE?

Freestyle gives me the opportunity to do what I want and show everyone what I want to show them. It does not have any restrictions which is the way I think it should be. It gives every single unicyclist the opportunity to show how talented he/she is as individual and enable them to leave their impression on the sport. If I could get the opportunity to change anything, I would properly change the point percent distribution. I think there should be a bit more focus on the presentation part of a routine. I have seen many doing a routine with a nice costume and some music, but with no connection to the audience or the judges. The competitor just looks down on the ground and focus only on the tricks. I think freestyle should evolve more into a presentation and connect the rider more to the audience, instead of being a performance during which you just look down and do some tricks to some background music.



YOU DO NOT JUST DO TYPICAL EUROPEAN TRICKS, YOU ALSO LIKE THE JAPANESE WAY OF RIDING. IS IT RIGHT? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RIDING STYLE?

Yes, that is correct. I am very fascinated by the Japanese way of unicycling. It is very different from the European and I love trying to do a mix of them both. Yuuna and I did a mix of Japanese and European style at the last Unicon, which was so much fun to do. I found out that all the arm movements they do are far more difficult, than I had imagined. I really enjoyed my time training with Yuuna, and we have gotten really close. She helped me with the Japanese tricks, and I helped her with the European ones



WHAT DOES UNICYCLING MEAN TO YOU?

Unicycle means the World to me. I have grown up doing nothing but unicycling my whole life. I was only 8 years old and the youngest to be accepted onto The Danish Freestyle team. I have grown up there and I have always talked about the team as my second family, because it truly is. When I was feeling down, I always had unicycle to go to. I would never trade unicycle away with anything else in life. I have gotten the opportunity to travel around the World and meet some of the most amazing people. Unicycle is truly the most important thing in my life.

YOU TRAIN A LOT AND WE CAN ALMOST SAY THAT YOU ARE „MAD“ FOR UNICYCLING... WHAT DOES YOUR FAMILY SAY ABOUT YOUR PASSION? DOES YOUR FAMILY SUPPORT YOU?

My mom has always been very active and interested in my sport. Many of you have properly seen her sitting at the freestyle judging table at several Unicons. She has always been my number 1 fan and she has dedicated so much of her time to the unicycle world. I truly appreciate everything she has done in order to enable me to do what I am really passionate about.



INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE, PAIR FREESTYLE AND GROUP FREESTYLE: WHAT DIFFERENTIATES THEM FROM AN EMOTIONAL AND COMPETITIVE POINT OF VIEW?

Individual freestyle gives the opportunity to show everyone what you can do on your own. It shows your own artistry and skill. Pair freestyle gives another opportunity, that is you can do a lot of other tricks that is not possible to do in the individual freestyle. For many freestylers it also not as scary as in individual freestyle, because you have always your partner by your side.

I think group freestyle gives the opportunity to really be creative. There are many more people and this makes it possible to do formations, which I really like to create. I think that all of the different freestyles specialities have their own special things and I enjoy watching and doing all of them.

OUR LAST QUESTION. A MESSAGE, A THOUGHT FOR ALL FREESTYLERS WHO WILL READ THIS INTERVIEW....

Freestyle is an artistry, and you can express yourself and your creativity through this art. You can do whatever you set yourself to do. Nothing holds you back, except yourself. If you enjoy something, keep doing it and do not let anyone get in between and tell you something different. As long as you enjoy doing something, this is the most important thing.



THANK YOU RYAN. WE WISH YOU ALL THE BEST FOR YOUR STAY IN FRANCE AND YOUR FUTURE PLANS AROUND THE WORLD.

SEE YOU NEXT TIME!

WE WILL BE WAITING FOR YOU IN GRENOBLE AT THE NEXT UNICON.

WE ARE SURE, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SURPRISE US AGAIN. 😊

WE WOULD LIKE TO SAY GOODBYE TO ALL OF YOU WITH THE ROUTINE THAT RYAN PERFORMED AT UNICON 19. SEE YOU AGAIN IN SEPTEMBER WITH THE 8TH EDITION OF "12 MONTHS, 12 TOP-RIDERS, 12 INTERVIEWS". WE WISH YOU ALL A NICE AND UNFORGETTABLE AUGUST. HAVE GREAT HOLIDAYS AND SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wy9ubvaKIHA&t=22s>