

Toby Miller has a Renewed Motivation to Compete After Time off the Snow

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Like many young athletes, snowboard champion [Toby Miller](#) spent his childhood cheering on many great competitors in his sport. Now, the 21-year-old snowboarder is training for what he hopes will be his first Olympic Games — and getting ready to compete against some of those same icons he grew up watching.

“I mean, it’s pretty surreal to put myself back in my seven-year-old snowboard boots, to think that I am competing against the idols that I looked up to so much,” Miller says. “I don’t think I would have believed it. They’re my childhood superheroes and mentors and they’ve become great friends of mine.”

The snowboarding community is tight-knit, and some of the people Miller says he met during his early competitions have become lifelong friends. While Beijing 2022 could very well be Miller’s first Games where he competes, the Team Toyota athlete has attended the Winter Olympics in the past. In 2018, Miller accompanied his good friend Shaun White to watch him compete in PyeongChang.

“PyeongChang with Shaun was an incredible experience,” he says. “It’s the most amazing event as an athlete, and it made me more excited and more motivated than ever to make the 2022 Olympic team. It fueled the fire inside of me leading into this next run.”

Not only was attending the Olympic Winter Games as a spectator motivating for Miller, but it also helped him mentally prepare for what to expect. Experiencing the excitement firsthand erased some of his nerves, helping him to realize that the Olympics is just another competition.

“It’s the biggest event in snowboarding and there’s nothing like it,” he says. “But it also became a reality for me that while we’re all striving to compete in the Olympics, it’s also just a competition. It’s the same people you’re competing against all year, every year, just on the main stage.”

And while his nerves are calmer, the young snowboarder is still energized for Beijing. He took some time off the snow due to the pandemic and an injury, but now Miller is looking forward to getting the competition season started.

“I’m really excited to put the boots back on and show the world the tricks I’ve been working on,” Miller says. “It’s going to be intense. It’s going to be a lot of emotions and I’m going to soak it in and love every part of it. I genuinely just can’t wait to start competing again.”

An Early Start

Miller grew up in Big Bear Lake, a ski town in Southern California. He first started skiing with his family at a very young age, before switching over to snowboarding when he was six years old. Miller’s parents have always helped fuel his dreams and even moved the family to Lake Tahoe when he was eight to give him the opportunity to ski on bigger mountains with better parks and more seasoned coaches.

“They’ve been supportive of my dream since day one,” he says. “I’m very thankful for them and everything they’ve done and continue to do.”

In 2007, Miller was invited to compete in the slalom in the United States of America Snowboard and Freeski Association (USASA) Nationals at Snow Summit in California. At Nationals, the top-ranked youth snowboarders from each region compete against one another, so Miller raced against more serious young athletes for the first time. According to him, it was heaven.



“You’re competing against people from all over the country,” Miller says. “That was the first time I traveled for snowboarding and saw what other kids my age were doing. It was really cool having so many like-minded, young kids running around the mountain who had the same passion for the sport as I had.”

Miller has been competing ever since. At 13, he won the halfpipe contest at the USASA National Championships — and landed his first sponsorship deal. He made the 2017 and 2019 World Championship teams, finishing in fourth place in 2019. In 2018, Miller won the Junior World Championship, placed second at the 2018 Copper Grand Prix and took third at the 2018 Dew Tour.

While Miller can be found training with Team USA in Europe, California and Oregon, he primarily rides in Colorado with White and White's coach, J.J. Thomas. Because snowboarding is an outdoor sport, training in different locations helps the athletes prepare for any unpredictable weather conditions that they might face during the season and at major international events, including Beijing.

"Beijing is going to be cold," he says. "One minute it could be sunny and nice out, and then 20 minutes later, it could be windy and snowing. You need to practice all those different scenarios and be ready for whatever the day has to throw at you."

Getting Back on the Snow

Miller also credits his snowboarding community for helping him stay motivated through tough times, like when the onset of the pandemic shut down ski resorts and kept the team off snow.

"When COVID-19 first hit, we missed out on a couple of key training camps that we usually get to every year," Miller says. "It's at those camps where we usually learn new tricks before the upcoming season. Missing those and being off snow for an extended period of time was a real challenge."

A professional snowboarder since he was 13 years old, Miller is comfortable with the packed training schedule and constant travel, so taking time off during the pandemic was frustrating. But he says the experience made him want to be on the snow more than ever and fully commit to his training. Luckily, he spent much of the time in the company of White and Thomas.

"We'd be working out together and count down the days until we could be back on snow to keep each other motivated," Miller says. "Watching the way that Shaun trains has taught me a lot about the way I should train. Whether he knows it or not, just watching him and the way that he snowboards has been helping me for years."

While training in the off-season, Miller discovered a passion for fitness. To stay as physically strong as possible, he spent three to four hours in the gym Monday through Friday, preparing for training camps and competition. When Team USA finally returned to snow, Miller says he'd discovered an entirely new motivation to compete. This same motivation helped Miller when he was rehabbing an injury earlier this year.

"Unfortunately, I've had my fair share of injuries," he says. "But it's part of the sport. When you're pushing yourself and trying new tricks, injuries are part of that."

Miller gives himself a little bit of space to be frustrated, and then after a short period of time, he flips the switch to focus on physical therapy and work on getting as strong as he can to get back on his board. Time on the snow is valuable to him, and he plans to do whatever he can to continue to train and be out on the mountains competing.

"As a competitive snowboarder, I thrive on the adrenaline and the pressure of competition," he says. "I'm just trying to use all that pressure as motivation, to turn it into fuel to go do what I show up to do."