

A Year of Growth:

The Story of How the University of Wyoming Nordic Ski Team Became an International Host

Honors College Senior Capstone

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Abstract

In the Fall of 2019, the Kinesiology and Health department at the University of Wyoming signed a contract with Shanghai University of Sport stating that we would host and train ten of their athletes to become competitive Nordic Skiers. Rachel Watson and Christi Boggs, the coaches of the University of Wyoming team, traveled to Shanghai to handpick the ten athletes that would become a part of their family-like team for a whole year. In August of 2019, the athletes from Shanghai joined me and the rest of my teammates. While we originally thought we would just be teaching them how to ski, it turned into much more than that. In the whirlwind of combining our two cultures as we shared almost every day together, I realized we were in the midst of an incredible story that needed to be shared. With the outlet of my Honors Capstone, I took a creative route and decided to write short stories in a blog format of the time that I shared with my Shanghai teammates. Knowing that this epic adventure could not be told by just my perspective I collected the writings of my teammates to add to my blog. In the end, I published the full timeline of the Nordic Ski season of 2019-2020 on the University of Wyoming Nordic Ski Team website to showcase the wonders of my teammates and our experiences.

The Blog

The link below will take you to the University of Wyoming Nordic Ski Team website where I have published all the written memories from my teammates and myself. Each post is a moment in time that stood out to that author from the 2019-2020 Nordic Season. All the authors are recognized, and each bring their own style and personality to their post making the blog the complete picture that it is.

<https://www.uwyonordic.com/blog/category/uwsus-partnership>

Critical Reflection

As I began the journey of the Honors Capstone I was lost. My junior year at the was an overwhelming time and I was met with many decisions about my future as well as making sure I was on the correct path to finish my time at the University of Wyoming with a degree in Kinesiology and Health as well as an Honors minor. To accomplish receiving my Honors Minor one of the obstacles I had to overcome was the Honors Capstone that was required of me.

One of my guiding forces was the University of Wyoming Nordic Ski team that I had been a part of since my freshman year. The community created by the coaches Christi and Rachel was all inclusive and accessible to anyone that wanted to join. This goal of theirs was taken to the next level when we welcomed ten athletes of different backgrounds from Shanghai University of Sport to our team. Christi Boggs, along with her co-coach Rachel Watson had been encouraging me to be involved with my new teammates. I worked with the new athletes two extra mornings a week teaching them how to roller ski. We wanted to establish their technique before they even stepped on snow. I also joined Christi and Rachel's class, *The Art and Science of Nordic Skiing*, that was designed for the Shanghai athletes to learn the culture of Nordic Skiing. My life which had always circled around Nordic Skiing since I was in high school was now consumed with brand new aspects of the sport. Teaching someone who has never seen the snow to Nordic Ski was impacting me far more than I had predicted. In my moments of uncertainty about my Honors Project I turned to my coach and mentor Christi for advice. She encouraged me to take my experiences from this unique year and run with it.

Hearing her advice, I realized that the year and my time with my international teammates was flying by. One day we were just meeting them, and the next it was late January, and they were competitively racing along side of me. I wanted to hold on to every second, but in the chaos of doubling our team things were moving swiftly. I decided that I wanted to have the chance to reflect on what I was a part of and began writing moments that stood out to me. I jotted down notes after *The Art and Science of Nordic Skiing* classes about the wonderful things that my new teammates said that made me an impact on me. Sharing these with Christi and Rachel we stumbled upon the idea for my Honors Capstone. We discussed how the year was moving by so quickly and that it should be recorded somewhere.

We decided on a blog format since in the past my teammates and I had been encouraged by our coaches to contribute to an existing blog they called, "*Radiating Dendrites*". This blog was used for the current athletes, alumni, and coaches to write about anything and everything. Inspired by this I began writing the blog I titled, "*A Year of Growth*". I was given the opportunity to reflect on memories such as when we first met our new teammates, our fall camp, climbing Medicine Bow Peak, and much more. I was filled with joy as I reminisced on this time, and I was grateful for the opportunity to prioritize this writing.

I knew that I was only showing one part of the story with the blog posts that I was creating. Moments that I found memorable were personal to me, and I was unintentionally hiding the important moments my teammates had experienced. I asked for help in making a complete timeline of the 2019-2020 Nordic Ski season and my teammates lovingly obliged. I was sent a handful of stories, some that I did not even know happened, that filled my heart. Adding my teammates' perspectives to the blog began making it a full picture. I wanted to give

them the opportunity that I had given myself to reflect on a year that was impactful to each of us in a different way.

While I did want to create this space to remind my coaches, my teammates, and I of our unique experience I also wanted to share it with the Nordic Ski community. Publishing the blog on an online platform of an already established website was the perfect sharing space. Christi and Rachel after their twenty plus years of coaching had created quite the ripple effect. Having athletes join their team from across the nation, and now even from overseas, they had touched many hearts and cultivated everlasting connections. I wanted to share this transitional year of the University of Wyoming Nordic Ski Team becoming an international host with this intertwined web of people. Not everyone can say that they raced alongside athletes from Shanghai, or shared laughs over an authentic hot pot, or watched ten athletes completely transform in one year. This journey my Shanghai teammates went on was truly inspirational. It is not easy to leave your home to learn a sport you know nothing about. I wanted the Nordic community Christi and Rachel had created to be inspired by their perseverance and accomplishments.

While currently the blog has had few visits, it is still in its early stages and I have hope it will see the traffic of old and new University of Wyoming skiers alike. In August of 2021 ten new athletes from Shanghai will be joining the team after me and many of those that were a part of the first year of this University of Wyoming and Shanghai University of Sport have left. I hope the stories saved by my blog can offer some guidance as the beautiful chaos repeats itself. In the beginning it did seem almost impossible that we would be able to make competitive racers out of distance runners and climbers, but I want the new generation to know all the

unexpected positives that can happen. I know that years down the line I too will peek back to my blog for the bittersweet effects of the tales that I will find there. It was a year not just about racing, but about building a new community by mixing almost opposite worlds together in the Nordic Ski space.

My goals of creating a space for past moments to be shared with a wide audience have been met. I am proud of the timeline that my teammates and I were able to create, but that does not mean my Capstone project was perfect. I do have the regrets of not starting sooner to realize my goal of capturing the whole timeline of the 2019-2020 season. Writing in reflection often causes details or even full stories to be left behind. But, even if I could remember all the moments, there were too many special instances I had with all my teammates to have included them all. I also fear that the blog is not as well rounded as it could have been. I am grateful for my teammates that contributed. I had stories sent to me from the Shanghai athletes after they returned home, a skier that had graduated and moved away from Laramie, and many of my teammates that I still had the chance to ski with after our Shanghai teammates left. They gave me beautiful moments to share, but I could have asked for more and reached to other outside sources. I could have asked members of other teams, other coaches, or race officials to tell me their thoughts and feelings when seeing the University of Wyoming team double in size. Having an outside perspective, someone not surrounded by the team every day, would have provided a whole new lens for my blog.

All in all, the journey that I went on with my incredible team during the 2019-2020 season was like no other. I am grateful for the memories, recorded in my blog and not, that we created together. I would like to thank the many authors that contributed to my blog, Rachel

for encouraging me to explore this creative project, Christi for handling the logistics of my blog, and all the readers that I hope will gain something from the “*A Year of Growth*” blog. I am not looking for this blog to change lives, but to bring smiles, laughter, and maybe some bittersweet tears.