

Balancing Act

Junior jumping sensation Jenna Mielzynski prepares for the biggest tournament of the summer.

BY ERIC BUTTERMAN

It's all about preparation, understanding how much time you have and not overshooting your target. Jenna Mielzynski has had to remember this over the past few years as she divided her time to make room for both her passions: skiing and her studies. As valedictorian of her graduating class at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, and the recipient of the biochemistry award and athlete of the year, it's evident she has the balancing act figured out pretty well. With, no doubt, a bright academic future ahead of her, the 21-year-old's skiing goals haven't changed: She's setting her eyes on the jump prize at the 2009 World Championships this August. Despite finishing first in jump

at the 2008 Junior U.S. Open, however, Mielzynski realizes she has to be patient as her skills improve with age.

"I'm not ready to move to a higher ramp," she says. "I feel like perfecting my jumping form at a 5-foot ramp is important if I want to jump far and jump safely off of a 5.5-foot ramp." But ever since she flew 154 feet at the Mossy Oaks Jump Tournament in June 2007, her confidence has grown by leaps.

"On that jump, my timing was perfect," Mielzynski says. "And when you can get great timing to the bottom and hold good position into the ramp, that strong kick off the top will make you feel like you're flying."

Beyond support from her parents — mom, Heather, a former member of the Canadian national team, and dad, Andy, a water ski photographer — it was seeing Canadian skier Jaret Llewellyn that inspired Mielzynski to try for greater feats.

"I loved how easy Jaret made jumping look," she says.

"He just makes it seem so effortless and has so much power at the bottom of the ramp."

Even though her favorite

event is jumping, Mielzynski knows she has to improve her slalom if she's ever going to be a solid three-event competitor — her best score is 2 at 38 off [11.25 meters]. "I need to get the new techniques down because slalom has changed a lot in the last couple of years," she admits.

One exercise that should help her slalom goals is visualization. "You don't have to be on the water to get your practice in," she explains. "You need to see yourself completing your goal before you do it. I've also learned to not pay any attention to what other skiers do in competition. I just compete with myself more than anything."

That's not to say she doesn't want to win. In fact, she shares a dream many skiers have — for water skiing to become an Olympic sport so she could represent her country against the best. Still, while she waits for the Olympic Committee to finally see the light, the 5-foot 7-inch hopeful knows a top Worlds showing wouldn't be a bad consolation prize one day. "I just want to be the best skier I'm capable of being," she says. It appears she's well on her way.



ANDY MIELZYNSKI (2)

