

Flyin' Ryan Foundation  
50 Lakeside Avenue, Box #99  
Burlington, VT, 05401

Dear Flyin' Ryan Foundation,

It is with great excitement that I find myself writing to you today in order to recommend Mr. Seamus O'Neill as a candidate for a Flyin' Ryan Adventure Scholarship.

For the past three winters, I've had the pleasure of coaching Seamus as a part of the Mad River Glen Freeski team. During that time, I've worked with Seamus on rainy days at Mad River, at three star events here in Vermont, I've traveled with him to a competition in Washington, and to the international, invite only Junior Freeride Championships (JFCs) for each of the last three years. In other words, I've had the chance to coach Seamus in a variety of conditions and environments, as well as spend time with him off the hill. Regardless of where we were, what the circumstances were, or what the weather was doing, Seamus has always impressed me not only with his athletic abilities, but also who he is as a person.

Of course, the Flyin' Ryan Adventure Scholarship should only be awarded to those who are truly exceptional in some way that makes them worthy of the honor. I'm pleased to say that in my mind, Seamus checks that box with ease. To explain why, let me share the story of his season.

Last January, Seamus traveled with fellow Mad River athlete Lynsey Nagle to Austria, where she competed in the Junior World Championships. Being at that event in Austria lit a fire within Seamus and one thing became very clear to him: he would do whatever it took to receive an invite of his own the following year. His pursuit of that goal began immediately, as Seamus returned from Europe with a gratuitous amount of venue photos to study and a burning desire to earn an invite.

The thing about a World's invite though is that they're incredibly difficult to earn, with only four U.S. men receiving invites for the 2026 iteration. To earn an invite, an athlete would have to put together a nearly perfect season. As it turns out, Seamus did exactly that. Over the course of the winter, he competed in one East Coast regional event, two East Coast national events, and one national event in Crystal, WA - a competition that featured a who's-who of North American freeski talent.

Seamus won every event.

As a result, after the regular season, he was the top ranked athlete in North and South America.

Impressive, right? That's just the start of this story. Coming into JFCs, Seamus had a strong lead over his competitors, but he wasn't untouchable. After working the numbers, Seamus and I realized that if he qualified for finals at JFCs, he would secure a World's invite. If, however, he didn't make the cut, it would be very possible for him to miss out on the opportunity.

This left Seamus with a very tricky decision to make: after winning four out of four competitions, there was an undeniable temptation to try and win the event outright. Afterall, it would add a first place finish at JFC's to his resumé as well as complete a perfect season - something that may not have ever happened in this sport. Pursuing that option would introduce significant risk to his bigger goal of earning an invite to World's though. Alternatively, Seamus's other option was to scale back his qualifying run just enough to ensure that he would make the cut for finals, ultimately securing his World's invite. Of course when you're competing against 60 of the best skiers in the Americas, achieving that is easier said and done.

All of these considerations must've put immense pressure on Seamus who was tasked with not only prioritizing his goals and accepting that he may have to sacrifice one in order to accomplish another - but also to remain composed enough to actually accomplish the plan he chose to pursue.

In the end, Seamus played his cards perfectly. At JFCs, he easily made the cut for finals, solidifying his World's invite and giving himself a chance to land on the podium with a strong day 2 result. While he unfortunately missed out on his podium goal, the points he earned from JFCs helped him retain first place in the overall season rankings. He also accomplished something else at JFCs that I think all of us could agree might just be the most important prize of all: Seamus won the Flyin' Ryan Award, highlighting the kind of person he is beyond his athleticism.

All of this is to say, Seamus is arguably the most qualified athlete that I know when it comes to earning a Flyin' Ryan Adventure Scholarship. Not only is his spirit worthy of a Flyin' Ryan award and athleticism worthy of an invite to the Junior Freeride World Championships, but his mental stamina and decision making skills are also incredibly mature. While awards and accolades are always impressive, it was Seamus's ability to make calculated decisions in high pressure situations that impressed me the most last season. Those traits, I believe, are foundational in what it means to be a Flyin' Ryan Adventure Athlete. At this moment, I cannot think of a more deserving person for this scholarship.

Seamus and I both appreciate your consideration of his application. Should you have any followup questions for me, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Thank You,

Matt McGinnis  
Mad River Glen Freeski Coach  
matt@stagedesign.group