

Biography:

My name is Sawyer Popovitch, I am 15 years old, and I live in Kimberley, a small town in British Columbia. I grew up skiing at our local ski hill, and it has become a huge part of my life. Over the past few years, I have gotten into competitive freeride, and I have gotten the chance to compete in the Junior World Championships in Kappl Austria this coming January. I am so stoked to be able to represent my hometown and Canada at this major competition. Skiing means so much to me and I have made so many friends along the way. When I can't ski, I love to go mountain biking, hiking, dance, and cross-country skiing.

Personal Essay:

My name is Sawyer Popovitch, and I am a 15-year-old freeride skier from Kimberley, British Columbia. I was born and raised in Kimberley, and I've been skiing for as long as I can remember. Kimberley is a very small town in the Kootenays with no freeride team, or really any freeride terrain. Because of this, my parents taught me how to ski, and I've had to teach myself all of the other aspects of freeride.

I didn't start competing in freeride until I was in fifth grade. My first competition was the junior 2* at Kimberley Alpine Resort where I placed second with zero knowledge of freeride skiing and how events worked. That's when I realized how much I needed something to look forward to during the ski season, and a way to challenge myself. I didn't get to compete the next year because of COVID, and the year after that, there was no competition at Kimberley because our main chairlift was burned down by an arsonist. That was my first year in U15, and because we couldn't compete at my home hill, we went to Fernie Alpine Resort for their 2* event. For that competition, we still knew very little about freeride due to the lack of access to freeride coaching at the time, yet I still had a lot of fun and finished eighth. Eighth grade we went back to doing only Kimberley, and I placed second in the competition again. At this point, we had learned a bit about freeride and how line choice is a major part of your score, but we still had no idea how to actually pick a line. After this competition, I decided that I wanted more competitions to look forward to instead of putting so much pressure on the one comp a year.

Last year, for my last year in U15, we started by going to three comps, all regional events. I ended up placing first in all of them, and it looked promising for me to qualify for the JFCs (junior freeride championships). To do that, I had to do a 3* (national event). We signed up for the Lake Louise event at the last minute, and I placed sixth in my first ever national event. Because of this, I made it to the JFCs in Breckenridge Colorado and placed

thirteenth. Making it to this competition was a big deal for me, coming from a small, relatively unknown town in the Kootenays.

This past season was my first year in U19, and my first comp season with a better understanding of freeride. Going into the season, I had learned a lot about line choice, scoring, and what works for me. I was super nervous about the extra challenge that being in an older category presented, especially since I had seen the level that some of those girls were competing at. My first competition was at El Colorado in Chile. The competition was part of a camp where some of the other girls in my category were coached on the venue by an ex-freeride world tour athlete, which meant that they had all skied the venue before, and knew all of the features on it. Since everyone that I was competing against was either a part of the camp or from Chile, I was the only one who had never been on the venue. I ended up placing fifth, which was great for my first comp in U19. I think that this was the most challenging competition that I've done in U19 so far. After El Colorado, I competed at Kicking Horse's 3* where I placed second, at Kimberley's (my home resort) 2* where I placed first after hitting a techy road gap that I had looked at but never hit, and at Red Mountain's 3* where I placed first which was a huge shock for me.

Because of these placements, I qualified third for the junior championship in Kirkwood, California. Qualifying for this event in such a high placement was super exciting for me. Kirkwood was an amazing ski hill, and the competition was one of the best that I've ever been to. It was organized so well, and everyone at the event was amazing, it reminded me of why I love competing in freeride. I qualified sixth for the finals, had great finals run, and placed third in the competition. Because of this, I moved up to second in the rankings and have qualified for worlds in January in Kappl, Austria. I am so excited for this opportunity to represent Canada and my hometown at this huge competition, and I think that this will be an incredible experience.

I think that, in a way, having no coaching has made me love the sport of freeride and skiing that much more because it has made it more of a challenge for me, and it has pushed me to figure out a lot on my own. I've had to learn how to trust my instincts when picking a line which also involves taking risks when I'm unsure, and these things have helped me to develop my own style. Having to learn so many things through trial and error and learning how to enjoy that process has made the sport of freeride more of a personal journey for me.

While I had heard about the Flyin Ryan foundation, I didn't know what it stood for and what it was all about before the JFCs in Kirkwood, California, where they brought a lot of

awareness to your organization with their Flying Ryan award. Since then, I have tried to learn more about it, and I have thought about how important the foundation is and how cool it is that it exists.

I connect with the Flyin Ryan Foundation because their mission to support younger athletes matches my goal of helping the next generation of freeriders and skiers in my community. Knowing how long it took me to learn about freeride and how many challenges I've had to overcome along the way; I am very motivated to try and pass on everything I've learned to the next generation. I want to inspire them to grow and push themselves with confidence, passion and encourage them to develop their own set of core values, just as the flyin Ryan foundation encourages.

I am reaching out to the foundation for support to go to Austria in January and to make this opportunity possible. This opportunity is the culmination of years of dedication, perseverance and growth in a sport that I've had to navigate on my own. Making it this far is super exciting, but it's also a chance to show other kids from small towns that it's possible to overcome challenges and achieve big goals. With your support, I would not only be able to focus on training and competing at my best, but I would also be able to focus on carrying forward the values of passion, determination, and community that both freeride and the foundation stand for. Being able to compete at this high of a level comes with very high costs, including travel, training and competition fees, all of which are becoming a burden for my family. I'd love to have the opportunity to be a part of the program while also having the chance to represent myself, my hometown, my country, and the foundation at worlds.

Core Values:

1. Always have fun
2. Do it for yourself, not others.
3. Have an open mind
4. Always push yourself to be better
5. Value your friends and family
6. If you really love something, teach it to others.
7. It doesn't have to be fun to be fun