



A Day in the Life of an Olympian

Have you ever wondered how an Olympian spends a typical day? Sara Schwarz shadowed two-time World Cup skeleton champion Jeff Pain.

It's 6:30 a.m. There is no need for alarm clocks in Jeff Pain's household as Kyle, four, and Thomas, two, are up, hungry, and ready to play. Pain spends these precious hours of the morning helping his kids get ready for the day. "It's eggs and waffles for breakfast these days," he says. Once the kids are happy and fed, Jeff squeezes in his own breakfast of cottage cheese and fruit, peanut butter and jam on toast, and orange juice.

Like most dads, he spends the majority of his day working. The first half of his day is committed to his first full-time job, training for skeleton—"tobogganing for big people" as he explains to his kids—while the second half is committed to his second full-time job, running a landscape design business.

8:00 a.m. Pain is off to the Talisman Centre for the first workout of the day. The next two and a half hours are spent sprinting, squatting, jumping, bounding, and skipping. He trains like a sprinter: core and legs and almost never upper body. “Being a head-first sport, aerodynamics is a big part of the game, although it doesn’t do much for my beach image,” he says.

Pain started working with his skeleton coach five years ago in Calgary and produced some incredible results. Three World Cup victories in 2000, 2001, and 2002 preceded a highly successful 2002–2003 season where he won gold at the World Championships in Nagano, Japan, and was second place overall in the World Cup rankings. When his coach moved back to Poland, Pain understandably found that he couldn’t train without him, so all of his workouts are now sent via fax and e-mail.

Because he trains solo or with only one other athlete, how does he stay motivated? “All I have to do is compare training for three hours to working in an office for three hours and I feel motivated.” He finds that training can be mentally draining but says that after so many years it just becomes part of you and what you do. Keeping focus is something Pain never has to battle. “Being too focused is the challenge.”

The all-encompassing motivation is his family. “The more I can understand how to be a champion myself, the better I will be able to teach my kids.”

After training, on his way for either active release therapy or for a massage, Pain snacks on a protein bar “because it is cheap and a good balance of carbohydrates, protein, fat, and fruit,” and a veggie bar. Once a month, during the season, he uses this time slot to go to Banff and see his sport psychologist Rich-

ard Monette of Inner Warrior Consulting.

12:00 p.m. It’s lunchtime, which usually consists of two or three sandwiches or wraps. Occasionally, he will stop at Pita Pit or a Subway for “healthy fast food,” but he much prefers to eat at home.

1:00 p.m. Pain the athlete now assumes



The initial push is the most important element in skeleton.

the role of landscape designer and business owner of his four-year-old company Designsapes. He spends his afternoons either working in his in-home office or on-site with a client. Though he loves his work, one day he hopes that his afternoon job will become more of a hobby instead of his main source of income. “I’d love to do skeleton full-time and make landscaping part-time. Even now, in order to make up for lost time during the week, I almost always do landscape design for six to eight hours on a Saturday.”

5:00 p.m. Pain is at home for his favourite time of the day—family time. He and his wife either take turns making dinner or share the task. Dinner is Pain’s time to load up on protein. One of his favourites is homemade pizza: “Load it up with meat and only a bit of cheese and it’s the perfect balance of meat,

carbs, and veggies.” After dinner it’s bath time, story time, and the kids are off to bed.

7:30 p.m. Canada’s most successful skeleton athlete is at Canada Olympic Park for his second training session of the day which consists of three runs down the track.

Depending on the venue, skeleton tracks are between 1,100 metres to 1,500 metres and generally take just under one minute to race. I ask how he explains skeleton to those unfamiliar with the sport. He causally says that it’s like “taping yourself to the bottom of a car and driving down Deerfoot Trail at 120 kilometres an hour.”

I had to ask then, what’s the appeal? “First of all, I knew it was something I had to try. If I didn’t try it, I would never have known if I could do it.” In 1992 Jeff decided he was going to go to the Olympics—he just didn’t know for what sport. He tried high jump and bobsleigh, which eventually led him to skeleton in 1994.

He loves the challenge: “Being your best and staying at your best are two very different things,” he says. “It’s very hard to win a race, but it is 10 times as hard to win two races in a row.”

Pain’s biggest challenge with being an Olympic athlete is time. He knows that if he weren’t running a full-time business, his athletic performance would improve. “There just isn’t enough time to rest. In a perfect world every training day would include a nap.”

Finally, by 10:00 p.m. Pain goes to bed without setting any alarm clocks. He always tries to get at least eight hours of sleep in preparation for another busy day.

Tomorrow he will get up and continue training for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, where he hopes to have the two best runs of his life. 📌