



Twelve years after her Olympic glory, Ashleigh McIvor is in a 'peaceful, lovely place'

WHISTLER SKI-CROSS LEGEND TALKS MOTHERHOOD, BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AND OLYMPIC LEGACY

BY DAVID SONG

IT HAS BEEN 12 YEARS since Ashleigh McIvor won the first women's ski-cross gold medal in Olympic history, but the mountain still calls to her, and she still answers.

After retiring from sport in 2012, the former Olympic and World ski-cross champion has shared her passion and expertise with a myriad of people near and far. She is prominently featured in Whistler Blackcomb's "Ski with an Olympian" program, where clients can spend a day on the mountain with her or one of several other Team Canada veterans. McIvor also partners with Fairmont Chateau Whistler to ski with guests through the aptly named "Fairmont Gold" package.

Few things excite her more than the prospect of connecting with others over thousands of acres of pristine white.

"This is the best," she beamed. "This is what I want to be doing."

'IN THE MOMENT'

One of Whistler's favourite daughters, McIvor has made significant changes in her life over the last few years. She would formerly spend

GOLD STANDARD Whistler ski-cross legend Ashleigh McIvor isn't harbouring any regrets as she plots the next phase of her life and career.

PHOTO SUBMITTED

winters in Hawaii with retired Vancouver Whitecaps FC soccer player and ex-partner Jay DeMerit and their son, Oakes, but as Oakes began grade school, they realized he would need a more permanent home base.

Although she and DeMerit have kept their Hawaiian residence and find the islands "lovely," the choice was clear when it came to raising their son.

"Of course, home is Whistler," said McIvor. "It's always Whistler, it always will be Whistler."

"Of course, home is Whistler ... it always will be Whistler."

- ASHLEIGH MCIVOR

She, like everyone else, also had to deal with COVID-19 wiping out many of her plans and leaving many more in limbo. McIvor has done her share of speaking engagements, mountain bike films and fitness videos for NordicTrack stationary bikes, but the pandemic hit pause on all those things. Looking back, she feels like the disruptions had a silver lining.

"It forced me to sort of relax and be in the moment and enjoy what was right there in front of me instead of going out and seeking more," said McIvor.

Most of all, she was able to spend more time

with Oakes. McIvor describes motherhood as "the most beautiful thing ever," and has gotten to watch her now seven-year-old son blossom on snow. Oakes missed out on skiing between the ages of three and five due to the family's Hawaiian excursions, which briefly put him behind other Whistler kids in terms of his progression in sport. Young Oakes has since caught up with his peers, and skiing with him is McIvor's "favourite thing in the whole wide world."

Another thing that Oakes shares with many other Whistlerites is his adoration of local mountain bike icon Finn Iles, who earlier this summer became the first Canadian to win in the Elite category of any UCI World Cup downhill race since Stevie Smith did it in 2013. McIvor and DeMerit helped their son meet his hero in November at the Vancouver Gift of Sport Gala, which raised more than \$40,000 to help families put their kids into sport.

Rubbing shoulders with other Canadian Olympians like swimmer Brent Hayden, speed skater Christine Nesbitt and race walker Evan Dunfee at the event, McIvor appreciated the

chance to make an impact by sharing stories and lessons she learned in her career. Scoring a downhill mountain bike helmet in the silent auction that Iles signed for Oakes didn't hurt either.

McIvor calls DeMerit "the most amazing co-parenting partner ever" and praises him for being fully committed to helping her raise their child. The two remain very collaborative in providing for Oakes in every way, and as he thrives, McIvor has had time and space to pursue opportunities of her own.

One such opportunity is the Old School Initiative, launched by former Whistler Mountain Ski Club racer Beau Jarvis to fund young Sea to Sky athletes and connect them with veterans in their sports. Jarvis coached McIvor when she was a preteen, and his initiative helped her connect with up-and-coming ski-cross athlete Emeline Bennett, who competed at the 2022 World Junior Championships this March.

"The next wave [of Canadian skiers] is coming on strong, and it's just great that I can continue to inspire and influence them," McIvor said.

McIvor's influence has been all over the Canadian ski-cross program for more than a decade. A severe knee injury during practice at the 2011 Winter X Games contributed to her retirement, but by then she had already left her mark on a new generation—including fellow Whistlerite Marielle Thompson. The rest is history.

SEE PAGE 52 >>

Now Hiring!

www.blackcombbarber.com

**BLACKCOMB
BARBER SHOPPE
938-0075
FUNCTION JUNCTION
WE HAVE MOVED!**

FOUR-STAR BUZZ WITH A DIFFERENCE
OPEN 10-6

**We have moved! Now located in Function Junction.
14-1100 Millar Creek Rd, Whistler
Contact us at 604 938 0075**

WHISTLER
IMMIGRATION

DO YOU PLAN TO VISIT, STUDY, WORK OR MOVE TO CANADA?

Let's explore your permitting options!
Our team helps you achieve your immigration goals efficiently, with confidence and less stress.

WE EMPOWER PEOPLE TO LIVE THEIR FULLEST, MOST PROSPEROUS LIFE IN CANADA.

ARE YOU READY TO BUILD YOUR IMMIGRATION PATHWAY?

"UNLOCKING INFINITE HUMAN POTENTIAL"

W: www.whistlerimmigration.com | E: info@whistlerimmigration.com | Members in good standing of the CICC

Mountainside Nails

The luxury of a salon in the comfort of your home!

Pemberton's Mobile Nail Salon

Manicures from \$40 - Pedicures from \$45
Gel and Regular Polish - No Extensions

**Book online or contact
Nikki: 604-203-7167
www.mountainsidenails.com**

Ruby Tuesday accessories ltd

MATT & NAT
live beautifully
MM
Krista handbag

NEXGRIP CANADA
The Ruby boot
Waterproof, slip proof

JUSTINE BROOKS
{ jewelry design }

Located in the Town Plaza Next to The Beach www.rubytuesdayaccessories.com 604-905-6290

SEA TO SKY GONDOLA
ADVENTURE BY NATURE

YOUR ADVENTURE STARTS HERE

SNOWSHOE TOURS
DAILY | \$24.95 per person
Price includes hot beverage & snowshoe rental.
DAYTIME SNOWSHOE TOURS | 12-1PM
Wander through the wintry alpine forest on a daytime guided snowshoe tour.
SUNSET SNOWSHOE TOURS | 4-5PM
Discover an outdoor experience during twilight hours on a guided sunset snowshoe tour.

TUBING
DAILY | \$5 includes unlimited access
Enjoy an afternoon of old-fashioned tubing. Fun for the whole family! Close your day with a cup of hot chocolate or soup in our Summit Lodge before boarding the gondola to return to the base.

MARKETPLACE EATERY
End your day of adventures in the cozy Summit Lodge with some warm drinks and delicious food from the Marketplace Eatery.

For more details visit
SEATOSKYGONDOLA.COM/EVENTS

Photos: Haley Lorraine, Paul Bride, Spencer Watson

SPORTS THE SCORE

<< FROM PAGE 50

A GOLDEN LEGACY

Talk to McIvor about what her teammates have accomplished over the last three quadrennials, and she gets goosebumps. Why wouldn't she? Canadian women have never failed to win Olympic ski-cross medals since the event made its Vancouver debut. In fact, McIvor thanks the likes of Thompson and Kelowna's Kelsey Serwa for continuing to represent Canada and inspire youth so that she no longer has to.

Not that she's in any way withdrawn from the Canadian ski-cross scene. In 2014, McIvor found herself on location providing colour commentary as Thompson and Serwa soared to a memorable gold-and-silver victory in Sochi.

Commentators are meant to be unbiased, but one can forgive McIvor for getting a little bit excited that day.

your opponents in a track-and-field sprint and you will win. There's some luck involved in hockey and soccer, but even so, the path to victory is simple: score more goals than the other team.

On the other hand, ski-cross athletes must accept the fact there are numerous factors beyond their control on race day. "Rubbing is racing," as Serwa often says, and ski crossers deal with far more incidental contact than, say, a track sprinter would. There are rules to penalize intentional obstruction, but oftentimes two athletes will simply bump into each other and go down or slow each other beyond realistic hope of recovery in the race.

"It's one of my favourite things about the sport of ski cross," McIvor said. "You can do absolutely everything in your power to be prepared to go out there and perform on

"I feel like my mind is a very peaceful, lovely place to be."

- ASHLEIGH MCIVOR

Canadian women would again finish one-two at the 2018 Winter Olympics. McIvor had the call for CBC once more as Serwa seized the day in PyeongChang for gold, accompanied by Brittany Phelan of Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts, Que. in the silver medal position.

The storylines continued from there. Thompson blew out her ACL—as McIvor had before—and many looked on with bated breath to see if she would recover in time for Beijing. She did, of course. This February, it was Serwa's turn to put on a headset and bring the hype as Thompson came all the way back from injury, and from a poor start to her race, to grab Olympic silver.

Whistler is not a huge town, and many of its sporting icons are intertwined with each other. McIvor still remembers the impact that Thompson's dad, a teacher, left on her in high school. Years in the ski-cross program have forever bonded her with Thompson and Serwa.

"It's particularly powerful for me to see these local athletes that were really raised in a similar manner to the way I was raised and have similar values and followed a similar path [to success]," McIvor said. "It's really what the Olympic Games are all about: creating stories of setting goals, accomplishing them, realizing dreams, and the lessons that can be taken away from that."

Not many other national ski teams enjoy that kind of camaraderie, at least not that McIvor has seen. Yet where other programs experience turnover, Team Canada has benefited from a rotation of top talent at world-class competitions, where one athlete's success creates a ripple effect that elevates others. It's not something that she will ever take for granted.

'EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON'

Ski cross, after all, involves an element of chance that many other sports do not. Baseball is mostly a numbers game. Run faster than

that day and it still may not work out. I think relinquishing the sense of control that comes with that situation is quite powerful."

McIvor describes herself as a rational, pragmatic thinker, but also someone who goes with the flow. She believes that everything happens for a reason, and that things will ultimately fall into place if she does all she can to put herself in a successful position. That was her attitude back in 2010 at Cypress Mountain, about to throw herself into contention at an Olympic debut event against the best ski-cross racers on Earth.

"I had very intentionally nurtured this deep-seated belief that I deserved to win on that day," recalled McIvor. "It's funny: I actually remember feeling like there would be more people who'd be happy if I won, then there would be if anyone else won. I allowed myself, maybe for the first time in my life, to feel like I was worthy of it."

So, what is next for the inaugural Olympic women's ski-cross queen? Between the joys of motherhood and the curveballs of COVID-19, she hasn't been able to spend as much time on the mountain as she would've liked to over the past few years. McIvor intends to connect with more ski aficionados through partners like Whistler Blackcomb and the Fairmont, as well as pursue more speaking engagements. She's already put the work into being an Olympic champion, and she feels like the more she can share the life lessons from that path, the more worthwhile it will all have been.

Some athletes are devastated—and understandably so—when injuries cut short their careers, but McIvor does not talk as one who harbours regrets. She is content to be in Whistler as she looks to do more skiing, snowmobiling and public speaking, and to renovate her dream home: a 50-year-old cabin in the woods.

"I feel like my mind is a very peaceful, lovely place to be," she said. ■

Sea to Sky Kinesiology



Through:
Active Rehabilitation • Performance Training
Injury Recovery
Strength & Conditioning • Athletic Taping

Katie Sandrin
BSc(Hons)Kin, Dip(RA)
Registered Kinesiologist, Rehabilitation Specialist
and Pilates Instructor

Helping you live a more active life

NOW OFFERING PILATES SESSIONS

To find out more visit: seatoskykin.ca



To book a consultation • Email: info@creeksidehealth.ca • Call: 604.962 2447

Follow on Instagram: [@seatoskykin](https://www.instagram.com/seatoskykin)



EXTENDED HOURS

MON-THURS 12-8PM
FRI-SUN 12-9PM

HOPPY HOUR 3-7PM DAILY

\$15 PITCHERS

+tax

1045 Millar Creek Rd in Function Junction

whistlerbeer.com  



LICENCE TO DRIVE



Christmas stocking stuffer ideas for the new driver!

Graduated Licence Program (GLP)

- Behind the wheel and in-class training
- **Incentives:** high-school credits and less wait time for ICBC road test

licencetodrive.ca | 604-894-1455