

Making Trails His Trade

Ski captain heads west to kickstart career in recreation

Tuesday, October 22, 2019

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Ben Allen '19 has his mother's concern for his whereabouts to thank for his initial introduction to skiing.

After graduating last spring with a degree in [sports studies](#), Allen is now taking the first steps toward making sure the sport – and outdoor recreation more broadly – are a part of his professional path.

Allen began skiing in seventh grade because his mother wanted to make sure he and his brother were in the same place after school. The activity quickly developed into a

passion, though, one that carried him through high school and to UNH, where he spent four years on the ski team and acted as a captain during his senior campaign.

“It’s so hard to know what to expect as a freshman, but looking back and thinking about all the things I could have done here, I’m happy with where I am.”

The Portland, Maine, native also interned with UNH coach Cory Schwartz during his final year, dipping his toes into the recruiting process and other aspects of leading a program, and for the first time began to ponder a future that might involve coaching the sport he grew up competing in.

As late as March of his senior year, though, he was still unsure what his next step would be. So when he landed a job as an adventure camp counselor in Sun Valley, Idaho, – where he’d be able to work in the ski shop and as a ski instructor during the winter, and potentially build a connection with the Sun Valley Ski Education Foundation – the pieces really started to feel like they were falling into place.

“It’s so hard to know what to expect as a freshman, but looking back and thinking about all the things I could have done here, I’m happy with where I am,” Allen says. “UNH has really helped me become a better person and prepared me for the future.”

That preparation included a pair of internships with Schwartz, the longtime ski coach who was a big part of why Allen chose UNH (Allen describes Schwartz as “kind of an icon in the ski world.”) The latter of those internships took place last spring and allowed Allen to connect with a few recruits, which provided an interesting look behind the curtain.

Reflecting on his ascension to a captain role after coming in as a wide-eyed freshman himself, Allen was able to look at the recruits and picture their potential path through the program.

“I can see myself maybe being a college coach in the far future, so it was kind of interesting being on the other side of the table,” Allen says.

It was a UNH connection that opened the door for Allen to land the counselor job in Idaho, too. Allen was taking a class taught by lecturer Sean McLaughlin, who shared tales of some of his previous career stops with the students, including a stint living in Sun Valley while conducting research.

Inspired, Allen sought McLaughlin out to discuss his future, and when McLaughlin floated the idea of being a camp counselor and Allen seemed intrigued, he set Allen up with a connection he had who was looking for some help. One phone interview later, Allen was making plans to head west.

“From the time I went in to talk to Sean until I had the job was less than a week,” Allen says.

Allen had never lived anywhere outside of New England before but had spent two summers doing ski training at Jackson Hole in Wyoming – where he first “caught the western bug,” he says – and has spent time with his brother in Salt Lake City and Moab, Utah, so the prospect of moving across the country wasn’t particularly daunting.

He also knew a handful of people who would be in the Sun Valley area, and would be living 14 other people on site, giving him the same sort of built-in network to socialize with as the ski team when he arrived as a freshman at UNH.

For now the position allows him to work in various roles while staying connected to outdoor recreation, something he’s always been drawn to – but it also allows skiing to continue to play a role in his life, which is something that was important to Allen as he plotted his future.

“It’s definitely something I wanted to keep in my life,” Allen says of skiing. “I went from athlete to captain to intern, and it’s like following steps where you really start to see the sport differently. So being a coach when I’m in my 40s or so? Who knows?”

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