

Meet Our Neighbor: Skier Zoë Taylor

Ansley Park has an elite athlete in our midst. That is, she is in our midst for seven months a year. From December to April, 16-year-old **Zoë Taylor** and her mom, **Michèle**, move to Steamboat Springs, Colorado, so that Zoë can spend most of her time training in Telemark skiing. A sort of hybrid of downhill and cross country skiing, the sport originated in the late 1800s in the Norwegian county of Telemark. It is characterized by the distinctive Telemark turn, difficult to learn, but graceful when executed by an expert like Zoë. While Telemark skiing is not so well known now it is gaining in popularity, and advocates for the sport hope to see it included in the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in South Korea.



Zoë in Winn Park

Zoë's parents, **Kenneth** and **Michèle**, met when stuck on a ski lift in a snow storm, so it's hardly surprising that Zoë has skiing in her blood. She began skiing at age 2. At age 6 she was introduced to Telemark, and she competed in her first Telemark Nationals when she was 11. She took sixth place that year, and she took second place at the NASTAR Nationals the following year. At age 13 she was invited to be a member of the Developmental Team of the United States Telemark Skiing Association, as its youngest-ever member. Zoë is now the youngest member of the A team, having moved from the Development Team after last season. She consistently placed in the top 20 at World Cup races last year as well, with a 13th place finish in one of the Classic races, as well as a silver medal at the U.S. National Telemark Championship. On January 14, Zoë had her first 1st place finish as an elite woman in Vail, Colorado, beating out last year's national champion, so her season is off to a strong start.



Zoë on the podium for her silver overall finish at 2011 Nationals

Zoë is a junior at Paideia, where, despite her demanding schedule, she maintains an excellent academic record. Her accomplishments are garnering lots of attention. Women's Adventure Magazine called her one of the two strongest competitors on the National Telemark A Team. A less expected honor came from the White House, where in 2010 she was invited to attend a reception with President Obama in recognition of Jewish American Heritage Month, where she rubbed shoulders with such luminaries as Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sandy Koufax. No doubt she'll continue to keep distinguished company as her career evolves.



Zoë enjoying her gold medal win at a recent race in Vail

Ansleyphile had a few questions for Zoë, who graciously took time away from the powder to answer them.

Ansleyphile: How do you manage your schoolwork at Paideia with your challenging training schedule? How has the school accommodated your need to be away for over half the academic year?

Zoë Taylor: Paideia has been truly amazing. It's definitely not easy balancing a tough academic schedule and my crazy training but so far it has worked. We've gotten creative with some classes; this year I will be Skyping into my Lit class. Paideia, however, has done everything to make this annual transition smooth and successful, and

they have worked very well with Steamboat Springs High School, where I take classes to keep up with my subjects.

Ansleyphile: What is the most difficult thing about spending five months away from home each year?

Zoë Taylor: The hardest part is being away from my family. My father and brother (before he left for college this year) have always stayed in Atlanta while my mother and I move. My father is extremely supportive, but it is hard on all of us to spend the time apart.

Ansleyphile: What are the next competitions coming up for you?

Zoë Taylor: World Cup events in Austria and Slovenia. Over the course of the season I will also attend World Cup in Steamboat Springs, the US Telemark Nationals in Gunstock, New Hampshire, and Junior World Championships in Spain.

Ansleyphile: Do you expect Telemark to be accepted as an Olympic sport?

Zoë Taylor: There has been a push for the Olympics since the '80s, however it's never been as strong as it is now. We have an amazing team who are all determined and hard working. The International Federation of Skiing has made some changes to make the sport more exciting for spectators in anticipation of the 2018 Olympics.

Ansleyphile: What do you most hope to accomplish as a skier?

Zoë Taylor: I hope to be US champion one day. I also hope to place in the top three in World Cup races in the upcoming years.

Ansleyphile: What do you most hope to accomplish apart from skiing?

Zoë Taylor: I hope to continue to do well in school, and someday possibly go to medical school and become a doctor.

Ansleyphile: How would you describe the feeling of competing in a Telemark race?

Zoë Taylor: When I'm in a course no feeling can compare. My mind is completely blank and all I focus on is staying on my feet and pushing myself to my limits. Before races there is an overwhelming feeling of friendship and humor between the racers.

Telemark racers are friendly and funny, very rarely getting overly competitive.

Ansleyphile: In what ways do you hope to inspire other teenage girls?

Zoë Taylor: Through skiing I learned the importance of maintaining a healthy body. I have talked to several groups of young women and plan to talk to more about the importance of body image. Young women today are faced with peer pressure and pressure from the media to fit into a certain mold. I hope to inspire girls to use activity, sports, or anything else they are passionate about to feel comfortable in their bodies and respect themselves.