

At the time of writing this, I am here in Rupholding which is the Biathlon Mecca of central Europe. I think this is the 7<sup>th</sup> time I have been here for races and the crowds and their enthusiasm never seem to waver.

For me the season started on the 5 January when I flew into meet Mark at Oberhof for World Cup #4. Mark has been in Europe training in Obertilliach and doing IBU Cup races in various locations as a good form of training whilst also building race pace up. The training and time at IBU Cup did no harm and Mark obtained a Q time at the World Cup of Oberhof to enable a start in the next Trimester of WC that he chooses to take part in.

Sam Drummond was unable to get to Europe for IBU Cup races this year, yet the void was quickly filled by Alexei Almoukov. Alex has taken up the sport in the past 7 months and learned how to shoot in Russia where he went with his father Nick, to train in both Skiing and the required shooting disciplines. Alex has Russian heritage and lived there for the first 7 years. This year on his training trip back to Russia he joined a Biathlon club that has a number of other members currently on the Russian National Team.

After a very impressive IBU Cup debut in Altenberg (GER) Alex obtained the necessary Q time to enable him to start at the World Cup here in Rupholding. Thus our Australian Team at World Cups doubled to two which is our full nation quota number for males. We still have two quota numbers for females that are going begging....

The full quota for the males also means that we now have a full team heading to Korea for the World Championship races in 3 weeks time. Tomorrow is the sprint race for Mark and Alex and then it is time to pack up the wax cabin clean up our apartment and head on down to Antholz in Italy for the next World Cup race.

The European Winter has been very good so far with excellent snow falls in all regions and a true taste of cold weather being felt. Hearing the heat waves in Australia recently makes me glad I am over here for a while. Development of the sport and our Athletes here or in Australia is an ongoing thing. To further aid that, I have just taken delivery of two new rifles to put into the stock of ABA rifles.

New rifles gives a much better chance to get people interested in the sport when we can offer up to date equipment and a group of people dedicated to helping get people motivated. With a junior team currently in Canmore training for the World Junior Championships there is plenty of people going to be coming back to Australia and keen to talk about the sport and the opportunities it offers.

To keep track of results from Mark and Alex or the World Junior team check the IBU website of [www.biathlonworld.com](http://www.biathlonworld.com)

Ski on -- Paul C

ABA National Coach