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Colorado-based, Kootenay frequenter Seth Morrison busts a massive Misty 7 on location with Matchstick Productions, while shooting 2002's *Ski Movie III: The Front Line*, Bella Coola, BC.
Photo: Dave Norehad

INTERVIEW
NEED THEY SAY MORE?

Unbreakable

Big mountain ski god Seth Morrison on music, mom, and his *Matrix* moment in Meadow Creek

By Darren Davidson

LIKE BASEBALL'S BARRY BONDS or basketball's Kobe Bryant, Seth Morrison is part phenomenon, part puzzle. Since his legendary 1993 debut performance, when at the age of 19 he floored judges and spectators at the US National Extreme Skiing Championships—on a pair of 213-centimetre Super G skis—the mop-topped, quiet American has achieved iconic status throughout the world's snowsport scene.

“His skill in the big mountains is rivalled by almost no one,” says *Powder* magazine editor Derek Taylor. But because of his decision to

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avoid competition in favour of his passion for pure skiing, major sponsorship contracts with corporate heavyweights, like Target and Red Bull, haven't been offered—a fact that aptly fits his counterculture image and, at times, introverted persona.

Morrison, 35, competed in the X-Games and a variety of high-profile extreme skiing events until 2001, when he left competition to focus on film roles and the development of other business projects, including his work as a member of the K2 Factory Ski Team and part owner of British Columbia's Retallack Cat Ski Lodge, located in the West Kootenay, which he and fellow US ski superstar Tanner Hall bought into in 2006.

“Seth is one of the most famous and underappreciated athletes in skiing,” says *Powder's* Taylor. “He’s always appeared to be fearless. And as he’s grown older, that’s only been amplified.”

Born November 30, 1973, in Murray, Kentucky, Morrison moved to Vail, Colorado, with his mom at age six, where he excelled as a ski racer. A lifetime later, he has appeared in a rack full of ski movies, winning back-to-back Powder Video Award Readers' Polls in 2003 and 2004. Morrison has survived heinous wipeouts, avalanches and, 11 years ago, a horrifying helicopter crash in Chile that took the life of pro photographer T.R. Youngstrom.

To this day, he's a tireless off-season trainer and mountain biker, busy year-round with sponsors, product development, media and life. He's building a new house in Frisco, Colorado, a place he's chosen to live given that the ski season at nearby resorts starts in mid-October, usually on man-made snow. *KMC* Deputy Editor Darren Davidson spoke with Morrison over the summer.

KMC: What's it like being 50 feet off the ground, upside down, in the middle-of-nowhere mountains—with the cameras rolling?

Seth Morrison: It's pretty much unexplainable. Mostly because of where we are and what we're doing. Half of the experience, for me, is being out there in these remote places. The only time most people see the mountains we're skiing is when they're flying over them in jets.

What's been more important to your career: talent or state of mind?

Being completely into what you like to do, so state of mind.

Is there any moment, when you're in the midst of a major descent or huge air, when you're actually able to consider, even for a second, what you're really doing? Is it 100 per cent focus, or is there a moment in which you can consider the “now”?

There was a cliff I hit in Meadow Creek, BC, a few years ago. It was a double flip, probably one of my biggest airs. It was like I had a *Matrix* moment. Everything slowed down. I was almost looking at myself from out-of-body. It was weird. Initially when you jump off a cliff you get that feeling—you realize how big it really is—you get that fearful, floating feeling. But with this one I was halfway through the air, and I had this other

“IT WAS A DOUBLE FLIP, PROBABLY ONE OF MY BIGGEST AIRS. IT WAS LIKE I HAD A *MATRIX* MOMENT. EVERYTHING SLOWED DOWN. I WAS ALMOST LOOKING AT MYSELF FROM OUT-OF-BODY.”

Big-ass back flip, Bella Coola, BC, from Matchstick's 2003 film *Focused*. Photos: Blake Jorgenson.

feeling that I'd never had before... It's only 30 seconds of your life, but all of a sudden it felt like 10 minutes. I got slapped back into reality when I hit the ground. I snapped the toe piece off my mounting plate, bent the other one and broke a couple ribs.

How many times have you fallen and not been able to get back up?

Never. Even when I've broken my ankles, I still got up and skied away. Actually, there was one time. When I crashed in a helicopter.

It's a cliché question, but what were you thinking as the helicopter was going down?

All I remember is closing my eyes.

How far did the chopper fall?

About 100 feet.

Both your skiing and your career took turns for the better not long after. Why?

I had more drive to do what I was doing. I wanted to be in the best shape I could be in. It was a matter of either continuing to do what I was doing as best I could, or go find something else to do.

You've been interviewed hundreds of times. If you could interview anyone in history, who'd it be?

Benjamin Franklin. (Laughing) I don't know where that came from. Maybe Einstein. Franklin was the guy with the wooden teeth, one of the nation's forefathers, smokin' weed back then and who knows what else was going on with those guys. And they're the ones responsible for what we have today. They're the ones whose word we follow.

You've obviously got great presence of mind, extraordinary commitment, courage. What person in your life has had the most influence on your character?

Mostly my mother. My parents divorced when I was six. She's had a partner ever since, and he wasn't so supportive of my skiing. But my mom was the one to push me to ski race and bike race and kept me out of trouble, that's for sure.

Were you a good kid?

I was pretty much fine 'til I started out on my own. (Laughing). Then things went awry. She definitely helped me get to where I needed to go.

You must have been influenced by some of the legendary ski athletes you worked with.

After I started getting sponsorships and began filming, I started working with people like Trevor Peterson, Eric Pehota, and lots with Dean Cummings in Alaska. The times I skied with Doug Coombs were huge stepping stone days. You can't learn what you learn from guys like that by reading a book.

A lot of skiers and snowboarders have envisioned themselves in an avalanche. You've been in a few. What was the most surprising thing about the experience?

In Alaska, two years ago, it was the first time I'd ever taken a ride all the way from top to bottom. It felt like the whole mountain was going. You have a feeling of being out of control. We surfed Trestles [a famous break near San Clemente, California] a few years

ago. The waves weren't that big but when you go under, you stay down for a long, long time. It's like that [in an avalanche]. You're spinning all around. You can't tell which ways is up. I was getting tugged headfirst down the mountain. There's no control. I managed to sit up out of it when it came to a stop.

There's a lot of big slough and slide footage in ski movies nowadays. Is skiing avalanche terrain being glorified?

I wouldn't say so. Considering where the level of skiing is at nowadays, you have to expect avalanches. Even if the conditions are low. Anything could happen at any time.

Who are your top three favourite musical acts of all time?

Bob Dylan, Sex Pistols and Sid Vicious.

Where do you get what you deem to be reliable information on politics, the environment, the world?

I skip around the internet, the big news channels, from all over the place. I just read part of the *Power of Now*. I watch movies. Check out the Vice site at VBS.TV, and get

the magazine too. There's a ton of interesting stories you'd never know about.

GQ did an article a few months back on how the Chinese are attempting to control the weather. Do you think we'll be skiing in another 50 years?

In different places—besides indoors. But it's hard to say. All this global warming talk.

Are you an Al Gore skeptic?

Pretty much. I know the poles are melting and all, but there's been crazy weather changes in a lot of places. I think it's all naturally occurring weather patterns. They're making it sound like it's going to be 200 degrees in 10 years. I think dramatic change is a long ways off, like for our kids' kids.

Speaking of things people don't know about, how'd you end up buying in to Retallack Lodge? It's always been fairly well off the map.

We were up shooting with Poor Boys Films one year. A few friends and I bought in together figuring it'd be a fun thing to be a part of.

What have the Kootenays got that other places you've skied haven't, if anything?

It's always snowing. Every time I've been there it's been insane powder.

Would you rather the place stayed off the map, or are you more open-minded to the inevitabilities of development?

It's fine to tell people about places. Nelson isn't the easiest place to get to, so crowds are something you really don't have to worry that much about. But every time I'm there, I see a magazine or film crew. And I haven't noticed any more people.

What would you do if someone said tomorrow, "Seth, your career's over."

I'd keep skiing. (Laughing). Being in the mountains with fun people and great snow is a perfect dream. And I'll always want more.

When it does end, whether tomorrow or in 50 years, how do you want to be remembered?

As a person who helped change the face of skiing. ☐



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