

BY LAURA DAILY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM KING



GOING BARI

Brandon and

and



BAREFOOT

Ryan Jameson →
are brothers. Eagle Scouts
champion barefoot water skiers.

Almost everyone was surprised when Ryan Jameson swept all three gold medals at the 2012 U.S. Junior Barefoot Water Ski Championships. After all, a few weeks before, the 17-year-old Eagle Scout learned he hadn't even been named a member of the U.S. Junior Barefoot Water Ski Team.

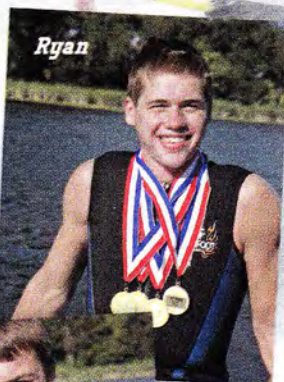
But Ryan, of Troop 18 in St. Cloud, Minn., knowing this would be his last year in the Junior Division, had felt confident he could do it. "I wanted to go out with a bang," he says. "Not being chosen for the world team was a bummer. I had to show them what I could do."

Not only was Ryan the overall junior national champion, he also earned the overall junior bronze medal at the 2012 Barefoot Water Ski World Championships.

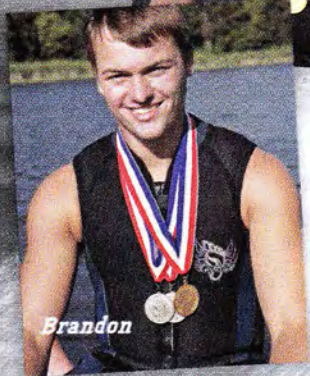
Older brother Brandon, 20, also an Eagle

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Ryan (foreground) and Brandon perform back toe-holds.



Top: Ryan with his 2012 Nationals gold medals. He swept all events (tricks, slalom or "wakes," and jump) and took overall gold. Bottom: Brandon with his 2012 Nationals medals: gold in tricks and silver in slalom and jump.



Scout, nearly won his division's national championship. He placed second overall and won a gold medal in tricks.

PUSHING EACH OTHER

Barefoot water skiers are pulled behind a motorboat on their feet instead of skis. The Jameson brothers go as fast as 47 miles per hour.

Both boys learned to water ski from their dad. Brandon started at age 5. Eager to keep up with his older brother, Ryan was barefoot skiing at 7.

"I spent more than a week trying and

doing face plants," Ryan says. "The first time I stayed up for 14 seconds felt like forever."

Both boys love training and competing. They take turns driving the boat.

"It's fun to train with Ryan and see him progress," says Brandon, now a college freshman.

"We push each other," Ryan says.

BRRRR - COLD-WATER TRAINING

Last year's training was particularly intense. Ryan was determined to win a medal at the world championships performing mostly new tricks.

He was on the 37-degree water as soon as the ice melted in April. Wearing a dry suit to stay warm, Ryan would ski up and down the lake three to four hours a day. At one point, he trained 37 days in a row.

"Other kids who live in warm places can train almost year-round. I only get about six months in Minnesota," says Ryan.

It might be cold, but Ryan says training on Minnesota lakes has one advantage: rough water. "When it's choppy at competitions, I do better and can put up a big score."

TRICKS AND CHALLENGES

Ryan's best trick is a "back toe-up." He starts on his rear end being pulled out of the

water by his right foot. He then flips over onto his stomach at 37 miles per hour and gets up backward, riding on just his left foot. (See this trick step by step on next page.)

His hardest trick is skiing on one foot while putting his other foot in the handle and swiveling forward to back without using his hands.

The brothers' biggest competition challenge? Nerves. Both guys admit it's tough standing on the dock waiting to ski or watching other competitors.

FLYIN' RYAN

So is having your events not go as planned. At the 2012 Worlds, Ryan's first event was slalom, in which a skier has two runs of 15 seconds to cross the boat wake as many times as possible. It's Ryan's best event, but he fell.

"That threw me off, though I did make it to the next round," he says. When bad weather postponed the event, Ryan had two sleepless nights.

Back on the water for the jumping event, his first attempt was 47 feet, a personal best. No way he could top that? His second jump was a whopping 52.8 feet. Jump three? Ryan was airborne for 58 feet, flying so high that the tow handle ripped out of his hand and he fell. So what? Only the best jump counted. Ryan was back in the zone, on his way to that overall bronze medal.

This year, Ryan plans to move into the Open Men's Division, knowing he'll "be at the bottom of the food chain." He hopes to qualify for a world team.

"That would be an accomplishment," he says. "I love it when the shoreline is crowded. It would be awesome to compete in front of so many people." ✦



BACK TOE-UP

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



Ryan demonstrates a front toe-hold long line.

Left: The back toe-up, step by step: 1. Ryan takes a deep breath before telling the boat driver to "hit it." 2. As the boat accelerates, he hangs on by only one foot. 3. Ryan starts to sit up. 4. Now he is doing a "butt glide." 5. He starts to turn on his stomach in preparation to come up backward on one foot. 6. Ryan has flipped onto his front as the boat accelerates to 40 mph, and he starts to plant his free foot on the water so he can stand up. 7. He's on his way up on one foot going backward. 8. And he's up!

Below: Ryan rides on the boom as he places a foot in the water. Then he swings out on a 5-foot rope. The boys practice tricks from the boom before trying them with the long line.



Get Barefooting

Ryan and Brandon might fly across the water on their bare feet, but barefooting is one sport that's more about technique and balance than strength. The brothers have some tips for getting up and staying up on your feet:

- Don't expect to get it on the first try. Barefoot water skiing takes a lot of balance.
- Start by hanging onto a boom, a long pole that extends off the side of a boat. (See photos above.) Wear "shoe skis." They glide across water and make it easier to learn to ski at slower speeds. Once you get comfortable, switch to bare feet.
- Exaggerate your body. Roll your shoulders back. Stick your chest out. Clamp your knees together and sit low.



Watch video of the back toe-up and other tricks at bogslife.org/barefoot