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## Abbott comes back to settle unfinished business

Skater puts Olympic letdown behind him, eyes first career world medal

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*Jeremy Abbott debuted his new short program to "Lay Me Down" by Sam Smith at "An Evening with Champions." -Sarah S. Brannen*

[Jeremy Abbott](#) is ready to give competitive skating another go.

Abbott, who had thought last season would be his final one, could have walked away from the rigors of training and the difficulty of dealing with reporters, many of whom questioned his ability to compete on the big stage after falling in both the team event and the men's short program at the 2014 Olympic Winter Games.

As a four-time U.S. champion, two-time Olympian and five-time world competitor, the 29-year-old Abbott has accomplished quite a bit in his career. But he has decided he has some unfinished business -- primarily, a world medal -- and that is the main reason for his return this season.

"I knew last year when the season started that it was going to be grueling and long, and I had to put 100 percent into the Olympics," Abbott said when he sat down with icenetwork for an interview in Colorado Springs. "After the Olympics, I was just done. I was exhausted, and I wasn't enjoying competition anymore."

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, he said he got a burst of energy and "renewed enthusiasm." He went to the world championships in one of his favorite places -- Japan -- and finished fifth.

More important than that, though -- he left with a new mindset.

"After that, I told myself, 'Wow, I love this,'" Abbott said. "I learned so much from last season and how to compete. From NHK [Trophy] to worlds, I had my most consistent season.

"I had some epic moments," Abbott added with a laugh, referring to his falls at the Olympics, "But I also found joy from competing."

Abbott can chuckle a bit at his own expense now, nearly eight months after enduring his problems in Sochi. But there is no doubt that having redemptive performances at worlds helped soothe the pain of the Olympics and encouraged him to continue.

He knows the road back will not be any easier than it was before. When he makes his season debut at Skate America next week, he will have to contend with Olympic teammate and U.S. silver medalist Jason Brown, who, at just 19, is one of America's most promising talents -- not to mention a native of the Chicago area, where the event is being held.

But Abbott has proven that when he skates well, he can compete with anyone.

"I'm realistic," Abbott said. "I look at the kids around me and know the talent level is ridiculous. More than likely, I won't be a world champion, but I'd like to land on the world podium; that's really the one last piece of the puzzle that is missing for me, and I want to give it my best effort. It's going to take a lot. I'm going to have to be solid and consistent.

"I know that nothing is tying me down to this. I could walk away right now. The only thing that is forcing me to stay in it is myself."

Abbott has a little bit of an understanding of what life without competitive skating might be like, having spent about a month off the ice this past offseason. He went mountain biking and paddle boarding with his sister in Idaho. He caught up on sleep. He did some soul-searching.

Yuka Sato, who has coached Abbott with Jason Dungjen since 2009, said she was not surprised that Abbott decided to return. She was in Japan while he was performing in *Stars on Ice*, and the two did not

talk much in that time. Abbott called Sato a few days before the tour stopped in Detroit in late April, and the skater and coach discussed his potential return during breaks in the show.

"I was not surprised because after what happened at the Olympics and how he got himself ready for worlds, I thought I was really witnessing progress," Sato said. "I told myself, 'I wouldn't be surprised if maybe he comes back,' but I was not completely sure.

"I have been around the sport long enough that skaters instinctively know when they are done," said Sato, who retired from competitive skating after winning the 1994 world title. "For me, it was really clear. ... But this is a very personal decision for every skater."

Sato said she played a bit of "devil's advocate" when she and Abbott discussed his skating future, peppering him with questions about how he would handle various outcomes this season.

"I know he wants a world medal, and a medal is wonderful, but that's just an outcome of everything else," Sato said. "I think the key for him was that he was telling me he was just starting to feel like he knew how to perform. And I think that's a good reason to continue, and I admire his courage."

Sato said she watched footage of Abbott's Olympic programs leading up to worlds, but since then she has not watched them again. She was rinkside when Abbott went crashing face-first into the boards during the short program in Sochi and still has vivid memories of the wild scene.

When a reporter mentioned how stunning it was that Abbott managed to pick himself up and finish the program, she responded quickly, saying, "Imagine what that was like for me!"

But now, with the competitive season getting into full gear, Abbott said he is back in game shape. He plans to include quad toes in both his short program and free skate this season, and could have a second quad in the free later in the year.

"I have to stay competitive with these young guns," he said.

Along with Sato, he recently choreographed his short program to "Lay Me Down" by Sam Smith. He unveiled the routine in September at the 44th "An Evening with Champions" benefit show in Boston. Abbott's free skate is to Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings," a piece he worked on with Sandra Bezic.

Typically, Sato said, skaters like to unveil new styles or characters each season, but this time around Sato described Abbott's theme as "vintage skating."

"I love his programs this season," Sato said. "Every single edge in these programs is connected; [they] are all based on classic figure skating, and that is not easy if you are not a good figure skater. He has so much speed in these programs, too. We feel the wind when he skates."

Now, he is set for Skate America. Oddly, he has only competed at his home Grand Prix once in his career. That was in 2012, when he finished fifth.

"I'm excited for this season," he said. "It's a very different feeling because it's really just for me."



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