

JIB League:

Free Skiing is Dead.
Long Live Free Skiing.

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February 12, 2023. Innsbruck, Vienna: A few hundred feet from the banks of Inn river, and beneath the icy gaze of the Austrian Alps, is the Montagu Bed & Beers Hostel. It's three stories high, sporting an off-white stucco façade and a set of bay windows stacked on the left side of the building. Thin strands of vines extend like outstretched arms up and over the main entrance. If you didn't know it was there, you could miss it without a second thought. Through the Montagu's lobby, which seconds as a bar for its thirsty inhabitants, and down a wide, spiraling staircase, is its basement. Or maybe "cellar" is the operative word; the cavernous interior, with its paint-chipped walls, dim ocher hue, and thick, wedged stone arches sloping across the vaulted ceiling, looks less like a dance floor and more like the meeting ground of a secret cabal. Which, in a way, it is, as this evening it's playing host to around twenty of the most elite freestyle skiers in the world. Three of them, Ferdinand "Ferdie" Dahl, James "Woodsy" Woods, and Øystein Bråten, are standing in the front of the crowd, on the small, elevated stage set up in the far-right corner of the room typically reserved for the DJ. They've just announced the rules of their new, iconoclastic freeski competition "The Jib League": a four-day event—the first of three such events over the course of the next two months. The winner, voted on anonymously by the competitors and the competitors alone, will take home €10,000 and the prestige of being the league's first victor.

Except, unfortunately, there's one minor issue. As they were talking through the rules, one of the skiers, Hugo Burvall, offered up a query to the room: what if instead of one vote, they each had three—so that there'd be no question that, by the end of the week, the most creative and uncompromising skier would be the one hoisting the trophy. While it may not seem like that radical of a suggestion, adding two extra votes per skier is a little more significant when it concerns the politics of how and to whom five figures' worth of cash is dispersed. More votes means more of a chance for your competition—or for you—to walk home a winner. A nervous and excited energy began spidering through the air. All forty pupils were focused directly on the three lanky interlocutors in the front of the room. Woods looked at Bråten. Bråten looked at Dahl. Dahl looked at the two.

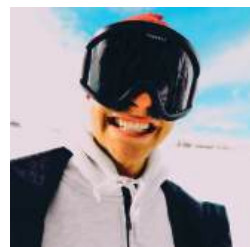
But before they even attempted to answer, everyone in the room already knew. The votes were added. The stakes were all that much higher.

The Jib League was on.

JAMES WOODS

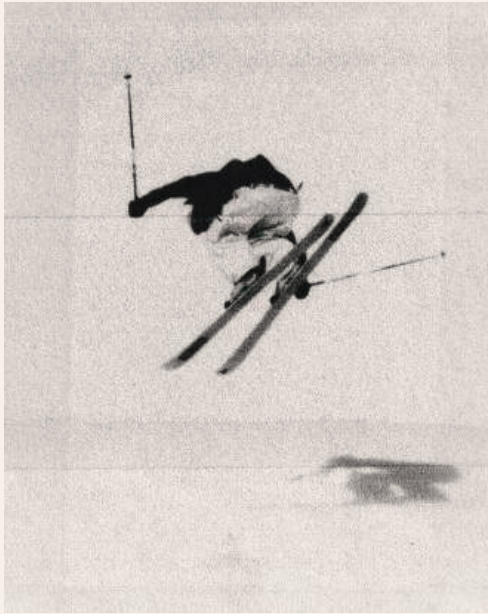


FERDINAND DAHL



ØYSTEIN BRÅTEN





There may be no sport with a greater cultural chasm than skiing. On one hand, there's its mainstream perception: We're talking private resorts and cable-knit sweaters. Old money aristocrats sipping hot cocoa in skis without as much of a nick or scratch on them. Skiing as the platonic ideal, the essential form, of haute elitism.

And, on the other hand, there's its lesser-known half: skiing as rebellion. The baggy clothed, long-haired, occasionally skunky smelling skiers who are young and brash and unapologetic; who ski to go fast, jump high, and look cool. Who we're really talking about are the freestyle skiers.

Freestyle is too big a term to describe on its own; it's easier to imagine it as a genus for the five different species of disciplines. There are the traditional ones—aerials and moguls (the former being where skiers launch off a 70° jump and spin and twist in the air, almost akin to a diver rising off a springboard and contorting as they approach the water), and the new-school disciplines—big air (like aerials, but 35° and even bigger and more nerve-racking to watch), half-pipe, and slopestyle, where skiers will descend down an obstacle course of a mountain with rails and jumps galore.

Historically, skiing's more subversive faction has been the one propelling freeskiing forward. It started in the late sixties, when a bunch of renegades in hot-pink and indigo onesies started filming each other "jibbing"—a term denoting when skis are anywhere but planted on the earth—around the mountain and took the nascent sport of freestyle skiing from the periphery of ski culture into the spotlight. It continued into the late nineties, when Mike Douglas, a mogul-coach based in Whistler, Canada, saw that freestyle was slowly becoming, in his words, "your parents' sport," while at the same time snowboarding was seizing the attention, hearts, and pockets of the youth. So, equipped with a coterie of like-minded ski-enthusiasts and a sketch on a napkin, he pitched a product to various ski companies that thrust freestyle out of antiquity, and landed it on level ground with snowboarding: twin-tip skis, affording skiers the ability to enter and exit tricks backwards. This same ethos persists into the present day, where freestyle skiing is a bonafide industry, containing the requisite cogs and gears that make up a bustling commercial enterprise like agents, sponsors, and all the other bureaucratic outfits that flood through modern organized sports—which, as a part of the yin-yang flow of culture, has triggered the birth of a number of small, indie competitions like Jib League, made by skiers aiming to rekindle the fading feeling of spontaneity and personal expression that was so

clearly visible in the freestyle films and skiers they grew up watching.

This renegade spirit is embedded in the three progenitors of the Jib League who, despite their differences in age and style, all share similar stories of how they entered the upper echelon of freestyle skiing's competitive circuit—and when they knew it was time to flip it all on its head.

First: they got in young.

Woods, the eldest of the three at thirty-two, started skiing on the dry slopes of the Sheffield Ski Village twenty-two years ago.

He was folded into the community quickly: Wednesday afternoons, he'd be laying down felt, building ramps with the older kids at the park. At night, they'd take him to parties. One time, an older skier found out he'd never seen a ski movie, and promptly ushered him to a room with a TV. He sat Woods down, took a VHS copy of *Happy Days* out of its sleeve, and inserted it into the console. Woods watched as Tanner Hall, Candide Thovex, and a seemingly endless procession of the world's best freeskiers sauntered out of a white stretch limo and onto the mountain.

"I was like, I now know what I want to do with my life," Woods said. "There was no doubt in my mind, from that actual second, that I was going to be a professional. That I was going to win X Games."

Though Bråten, twenty-nine, and Dahl, twenty-six, grew up in separate parts of Norway, becoming a skier was an almost unconscious choice for both of them. Their parents were both skiers. Their brothers were skiers. They, therefore, were skiers.

"My older brother was really good at racing, so I was just following what he was doing. I always felt like an underdog," Dahl said. "And then, slowly, it became more interesting to not do the repetitive training and instead go into the back trails of the resorts."

But skiing through the forest is not conducive to the health and longevity of alpine skis, and so, to spare them from the damage beset by branches, rocks, and other natural hazardous elements, Dahl was gifted a pair of twin-tip skis. The rest is history.

Similarly, as a kid, Bråten would trek into the backyard with his brothers and assist them in building jumps and rails. But that was when he was still on alpine skis. At ten, he got his twin-tips. He started watching ski films. He started watching the older guys on the hill fling themselves off jumps and into tranquil oblivion.

"From that point," Bråten said, "it was game on."

Second: they got really good, really fast.

In 2007, at fifteen, Woods won

the British national championship in slopestyle. Then he won the next four in a row. Bråten podiumed his first big contest in Austria in 2011, finishing behind the likes of Olympic champion Gus Kenworthy. He was sixteen. Seven years later, he'd have two Olympic appearances and one gold medal of his own. By the time Dahl was twenty, he was ranked by the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS), arguably skiing's most prestigious league, as the second-best slopestyle skier in the world. Between the three of them, in FIS, X Games, and the Olympics, they're the recipients of twenty medals, not to mention their numerous other domestic accolades.

And third: they realized their status quo was no longer tenable.

Bråten hasn't competed in a FIS event since 2020. For Woods, it's been since 2022. Dahl is still active, but, like Woods, quit FIS in 2022 and only competes in the X Games once a year. There are various factors that might impede ski athletes from maintaining their competitive form. There's injury—and in slopestyle and big air, with huge jumps and hard landings, there's no shortage of them—and there's exhaustion from the nomadic lifestyle, constantly on the hunt for good snow, which can keep a rider drifting across the globe all year. But, for the three, one specific feeling kept bubbling to the surface: loss. There was the corporeal element—they'd all, in some way or the other, soured on the physical demands and realities of competition freeskiing—and the spiritual: None of them had immersed themselves in the sport for rank or celebrity. When they first learned to ski, they skied for themselves. For the joy of it. But now, as seasoned veterans, they felt compelled to interrogate their roles in and relationships to the sport that had become their entire gravitational pull.

"Even when you're at the height of your career, and everything's rocking, you're always questioning yourself. I never even particularly liked competitions. I was just totally addicted to it," Woods told me. "My dream has always been to make that section; that proper, good video part. But I was like, 'What should I do for me? What should I do for skiing? What's the right move?'"

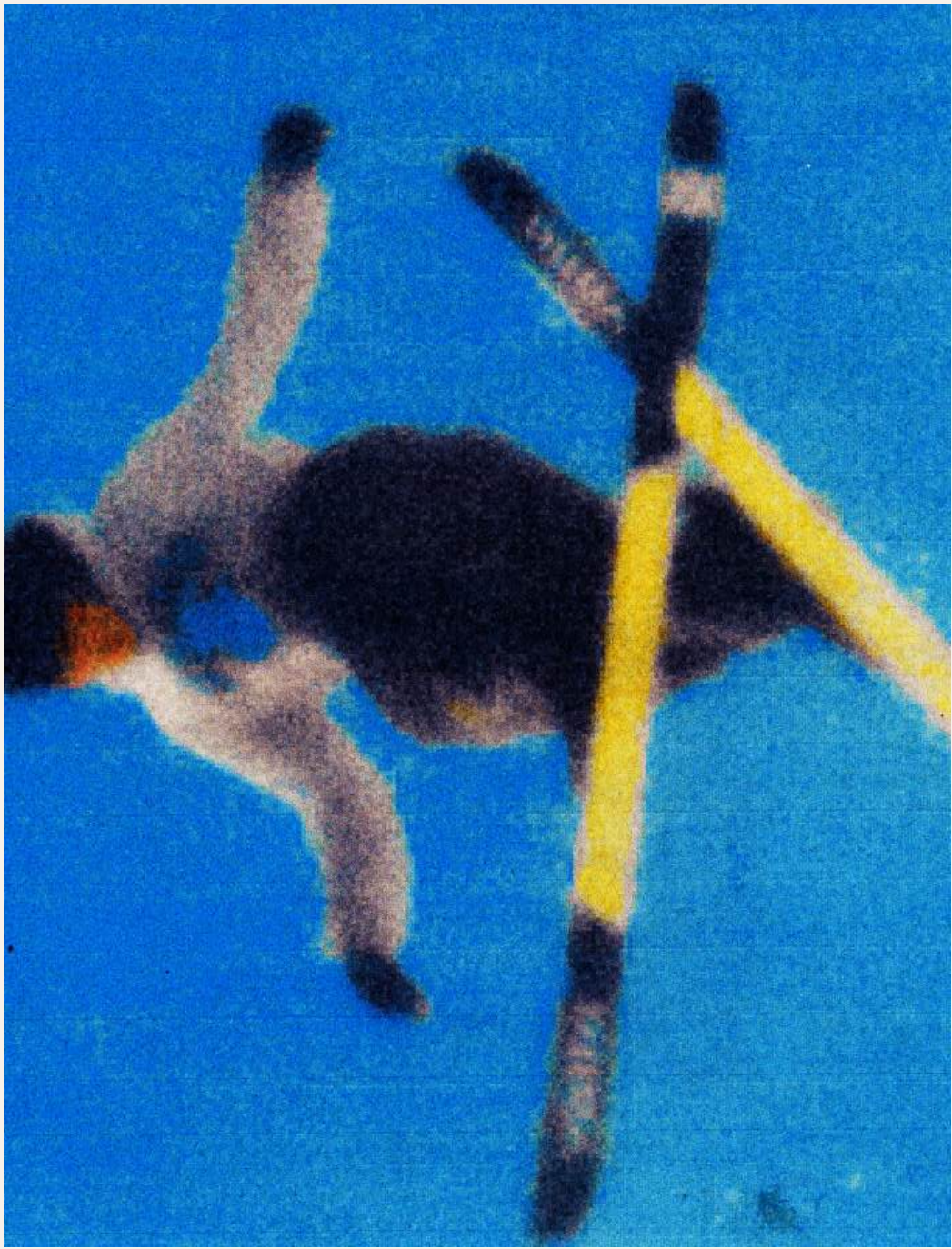
"I was at the point of throwing in the towel for good. Skiing has taken so much from me," he continued. "It's so hard not to be jaded by the work. You do the same thing your whole life, and it's gonna get old. I was right around this corner for probably the twentieth time ..."

Woods stopped and paused for a moment.

"But I don't know. It was crazy, man. Ferdi came into my life, and he







absolutely inspired me.”

Dahl, Woods, and Bråten crossed paths on slopes for the better part of a half-decade (Dahl and Bråten being teammates on the Norway national team), and, in the process, became close friends. The foundation of Jib League, however, began in earnest during the summer of 2022.

Every summer, Woods follows a similar routine: skiing and coaching at Whistler, and ending the season in New Zealand when the snow is right. This particular summer, Dahl tagged along. And, while the two were cooped up on the mountain, the sketches of an idea were starting to take shape.

“As you do with your friends, you chat. You chat about the world, the stars, competitions, what movie you want to film,” Woods said. “And competitions are amazing. We’ve built our careers and lives on the back of them. But we just kept coming around to this idea of competitions now not being quite *it*.”

As they continued to ideate, Dahl realized this conversation was a total echo of one he and Bråten had had many times before. On a whim, he gave Bråten a call. Like that, he was in. Their idea of creating their own competition, an event wholly unlike what modern skiers were accustomed to, was picking up momentum. The aperture tightened, and the rules and ethos became more concrete.

It was going to be as inclusive as possible, hosted at public parks. It would emphasize the curation of well-tailored lines over big jumps. There’d be three events in a season, spread across four days of competition. Each day the skier would be tasked with conquering a different feature—one afternoon, you might be whizzing off a steep jump, or slithering down a steel tube, or even both consecutively. The evening of each session, they would screen a rough cut of the day’s skiing and allow the riders to vote anonymously on the winners. Whoever had the most votes at the end of the event was the winner—and the most by the end of the season, the champion. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the competition would be in the format of a jam session—where you’d have ninety minutes to hit a trick over and over until you were pleased with your run—kicking off on the first day with an open jam qualifier. In which, no matter who you are or your level of success, if you could fit your feet into a pair of skis, you were invited.

“Freeski doesn’t fit the mold of traditional sports, which is what big air and slopestyle have turned into,” Dahl told me. “One of the greatest abilities you can have as a skier is to be able to try and fail.”

Dahl and Woods then flew down to New Zealand, and their individual roles

in the organizational process solidified as planning progressed. The venerable Woods, with intimate knowledge of how the sausage is made (and, more importantly, how to make it), took charge of logistics and planning. Dahl and Bråten operated as the creative engines behind the event, handling everything from poster to course design.

After weeks of massaging out the more granular details, the Jib League was real. Monster had agreed to sponsor the event, and, crucially, fund the prize pool. Three events were scheduled: the first in Nordkette Skyline Park in Innsbruck, Austria, in February 2023, and the final two events two months later in Crans-Montana, Switzerland, and Myrkdalen, Norway.

And then, as if time itself blinked, they were in Austria, sorting out all the kinks that arise when something big and conceptual becomes something tangible and complicated. They dealt with everything from the housing—when everyone eventually showed up, the overflow of skiers started crashing on Dahl and Woods’s apartment floor, to the point where there was practically no space to walk—to working out contingency plans if it all went sideways.

“I was feeling pretty insecure,” Dahl said. “But I was really just leaning on the fact that I knew that, at the very least, if we had a session with even just some of the guys, I could make an edit that looked fun.”

Luckily for Dahl and the rest of the crew, no fudging was necessary. Skiers arrived in droves. The snow was thick and warm in the sun. It was time to ski.

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Season One of Jib League went well. So well, in fact, that it left its founders a little dumbfounded.

“It wasn’t without its troubles and difficulties,” Woods said. “But it was so easy that I got this wave of affirmation, like, ‘God, I got this so good!’”

Participants, regardless of location or feature, fully embraced the philosophy of the league. It both felt like a group of friends who decided to hang out and go skiing for the day—gaggles of skiers sprawled out in the snow and under the shade of the Monster tent, listening to the speaker reverberate off the mountain’s ridges, going on lift rides and fraternizing with the regular folk—and a seriously competitive event; yes, they all might be pals, but they are also all professional athletes, wired differently than the rest of us. If you watch their temperament closely enough, for long enough, you’ll see that switch flip—in an instant, what was once jovial and relaxed on the sidelines becomes steely eyed as they descend down the mountain into their run.

But by far and away, the biggest success was the format, particularly the open jam.

While it is becoming easier and easier to become a “professional” skier (inasmuch as it is how you make your living, typically through some combination of social media and brand partnerships), it has become harder and harder to become a professional skier. Twenty years ago, all you had to do to get into one of the big events was sign up online. One click and you’re in the qualifiers.

Now, you need to start at the lowest tier of a competition series and work your way up the ladder. If you’re an American freeskiier, for example, you’ve got to spend a whole season on a regional tour and win it. Then you rank up to the next series and win that. And so on and so forth. Not to mention that now the competition pool is bigger. The skiers are better. And everything—from skis to coaches to camps to travel to resorts to airbag training—is wildly expensive.

“There are so many kids I know who are amazing skiers, and I’ve seen them battle with the NorAm [North American] tour. And because there are more kids in the U.S., they might get second in the overall tour, but their good buddy only beats them by one or two points. And their buddy gets in the World Cups the next year, and they don’t,” Joss Christensen, the founder of SLVSH, a competition where skiers face off in a freeskiing iteration of the game HORSE, told me. “And then these kids might have a bad season, or get injured, and then all of a sudden, they have to go back to NorAm.”

Christensen was the winner of the first slopestyle gold medal when it became an Olympic sport back in 2014. He’s experienced firsthand the modern eruption of freestyle skiing—and witnessed the fall of many competitors who’ve tried to blow up with it.

“My heart breaks for a lot of them,” he said. “I see how much work they put in. A lot of times, these guys aren’t able to spend time on other aspects of skiing or other passions because they’ve invested so much time and effort into the competition side. And that’s it for them until they decide to leave.”

In Jib League’s open jam, however, amateur freeskiiers are given an opportunity to show up and compete with the best of the best, for free. It’s hard to overstate just how absurd that is. It’d be like showing up to Wimbledon with your racket and hitting around with Roger Federer. Or going to Augusta with a set of clubs and being paired up with Tiger Woods.

Take Josh Bull, for example. Bull, a twenty-two-year-old

American, is not a professional skier. He's competed in Nationals once, at seventeen—the only time he could afford to go. He's worked since he was thirteen years old, trying to create a reality where he'd be able to pay for park fees and plane tickets and the rest of the accouterments that make up a life of even semi-regular freeskiing.

Before Jib League became public information, Bull had saved up and booked a trip that winter to go ski in Innsbruck. And after seeing the league's announcement on Instagram, and that they were offering an open jam, there was no question he was going to compete.

Bull skied well by his own standards. But the competition level was high, and he didn't make the cut. Nevertheless, the atmosphere and proximity to the skiers he grew up idolizing invigorated him, and before the end of the competition, he'd already booked a ticket to test his luck in Myrkdalen.

As an American, you can travel in Europe for up to ninety days at a time. The Myrkdalen open jam was on April 22. Bull's visa expired on May 1. This was his last week of skiing abroad. It was the bookend to, and very likely the determining factor in, how he'd remember his trip.

Bull went in cautiously confident. He'd absorbed what had gone wrong the first time—“I got stuck on trying hard tricks, trying to spin as much as I could”—but didn't fully expect to make it; he'd even preemptively mapped out a peripatetic itinerary sightseeing around Norway's glacial regions before returning home.

He focused on just hitting layups at first. Getting into a rhythm, lacing everything together. Adding flair. Adding some style. And then, before he knew it, the hour was up, and there he was, standing among twenty other anxious skiers on the top of the mountain, waiting in chilled, excited silence for Woods, Bråten, and Dahl to announce the winners.

Bull's name was among the first called as a qualifier. He was there to stay. So long, Fjords.

“That Europe trip was so heavy for me. It made me want to continue to just try to get better and better,” Bull said. “It was so fun. Like, I don't know. I just love skiing so much.”

In 1952, art critic Harold Rosenberg wrote the seminal essay on Abstract Expressionism, titled “The American Action Painter.” In it, Rosenberg coined the neologism “action painting” to explain the work of artists like Willem de Kooning and

Jackson Pollock, who, instead of being concerned with the final product, defined their practice by the process of creating—it was their animated, jerky movements and the pure physicality in the making of art that was the art itself. To Rosenberg, these action painters used the canvas as “an arena in which to act,” and the final product, the painting itself, “was not a picture, but an event.”

In many ways, this philosophy can be applied to the practice of freeskiing. Each trick mimics the same intimate, kinetic dialogue apparent in the dynamic between artist and artwork—the skier gesticulating as they are suspended in the air, the slope awaiting their return with bated breath.

And, of course, skiers don't go into their runs blindly or without intent—they've got ideas of what tricks they want to hit, and how they want to hit them—but the sport's artfulness extends even beyond the individual: watching a freeskiier squeeze and unfurl their body, and twist at speeds that blur and flicker to the eye, each micro-movement in each individual trick becomes this infinitely compounding series of miracles, creating an event so astronomically improbable that you are almost compelled to believe it is something that has transcended math and science and physics, and exists in a totally separate plane: a plane of pure artistic expression.

“The whole is the art, the whole thing is the beauty. You have to incorporate every single little piece of the pie,” Woods said. “The mountain's there, and it'll destroy you. You are this tiny little ant, and you've got to go with the grain. Sure, you have to be aggressive, and you have to hold your own. But that doesn't mean that you're fighting the elements. You're working with them, always.”

However, freeskiing ultimately does not exist in this artistic vacuum, and some skiers—including the three founders of Jib League—feel that, in many ways, the rigid set of rules and regulations found in big competitions like FIS has begun to erase the “free” in “freeskiing.”

For starters, there's trick fatigue. While FIS's rules on scoring vary between disciplines, the skiers are typically judged on some combination of: execution, difficulty, amplitude, variety, and progression. Over time, as skiers have gotten better, the meta has optimized, resulting in skiers hitting bigger tricks with more rotations—that, while objectively impressive, can be lacking in spontaneity and style.

“Judges are sort of stuck in this realm where they have full control over where the sport of freeskiing goes. Whatever they decide is winning at the time is what these up-and-coming

kids are going to try and do. And that's why we see kids doing . . . whatever, I can't count past 1440,” Jackson Wells, a former Olympic freeskiier for New Zealand and regular Jib League contestant, told me. “They have to reward that because, obviously, it was the hardest and gnarliest thing done. But you can't even watch slopestyle events because you can't count the spins. They're just hucking themselves until they hit the ground.”

There's also the sentiment that not only are tricks getting bigger, but an expectation of constant perfection is inhibiting riders from showcasing their entire arsenal of moves.

“If you have a slow, flat course, with six different features or elements, and you bobble in between one of the features, that will take down the whole score. Ultimately, people are holding back so they can stay clean the whole run,” Dahl said. “There were definitely a lot of times where I've been frustrated with myself because every time I do a small error, it's like, ‘Ah, that was it for me.’”

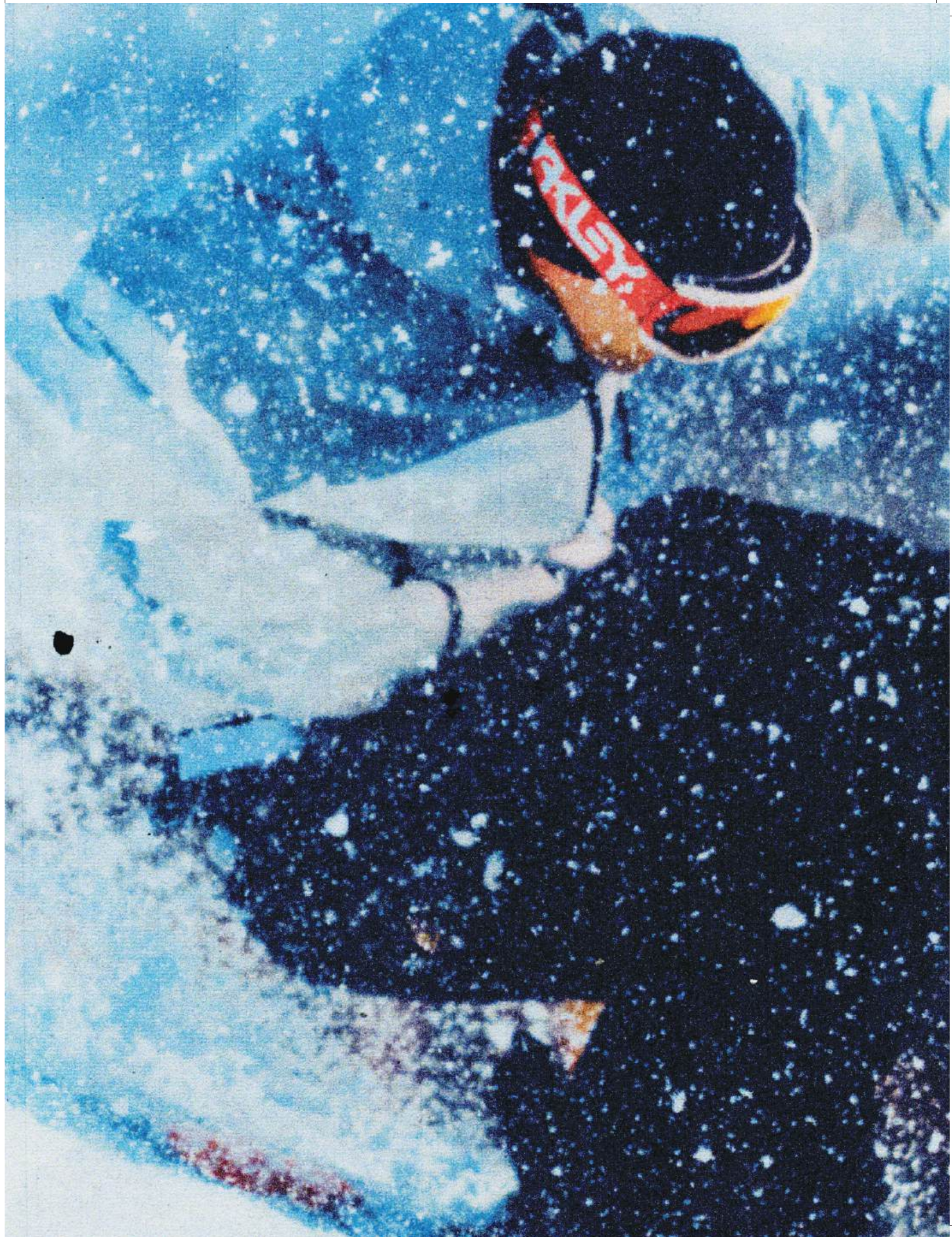
Among other irritations—like feeling detached from the judges (“You have a jury that is not doing exactly what the professionals are doing today. They can relate, they're specialized in it, but they can't fully understand it,” says Dahl)—it all culminates into one broader, philosophical question: What is the future of freeskiing? You can only go so big and so high. What happens when we reach the inflection point? Will skiers start attempting tricks with a degree of difficulty so intense that they cannot be regularly replicated?

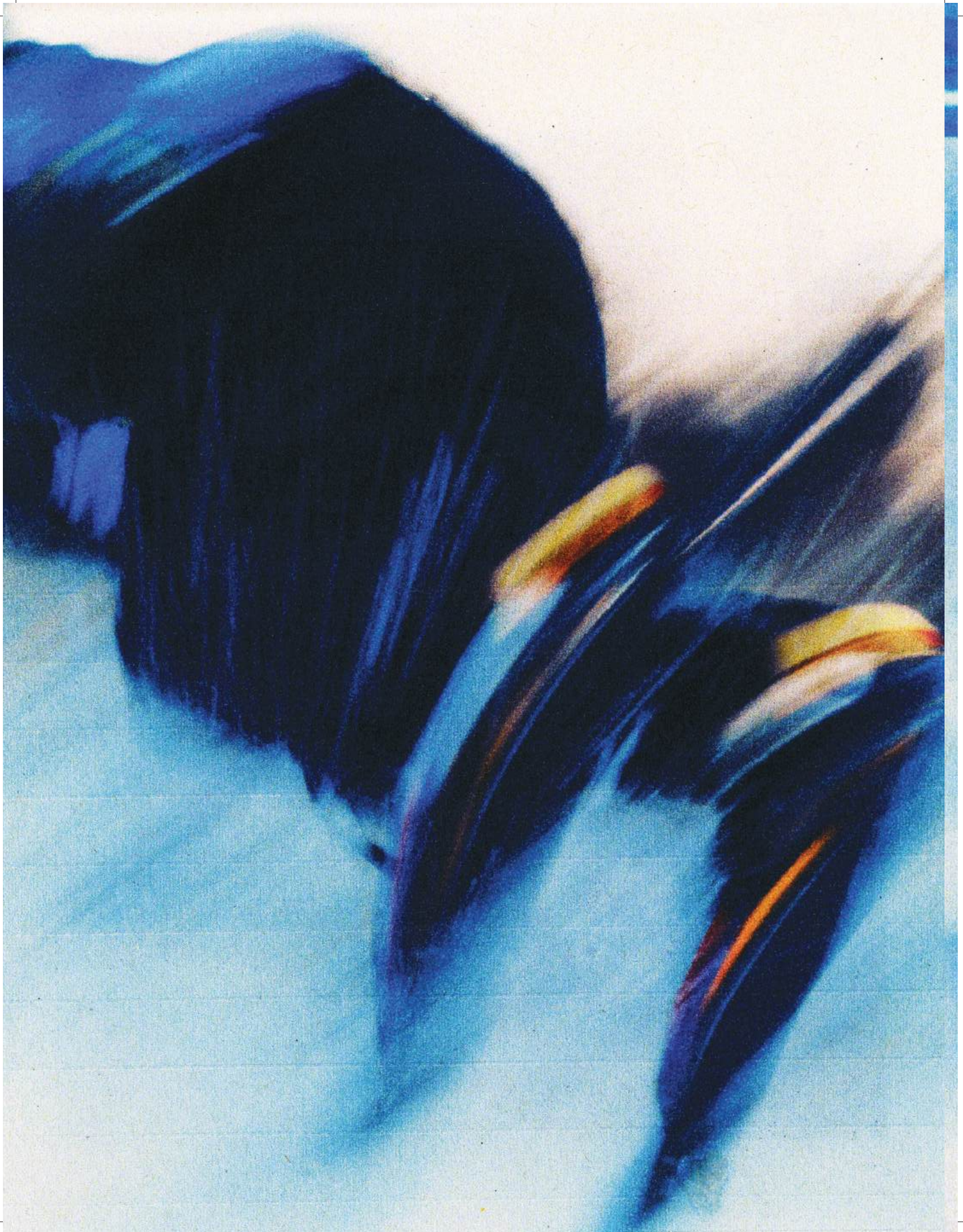
“I believe we're getting pretty damn close to that,” Christensen told me. “The jumps can only get so big. People can only flip so much before consistency drops and the risk factor gets too high. I already think right now, with how some of the events are going, it's getting pretty insane.”

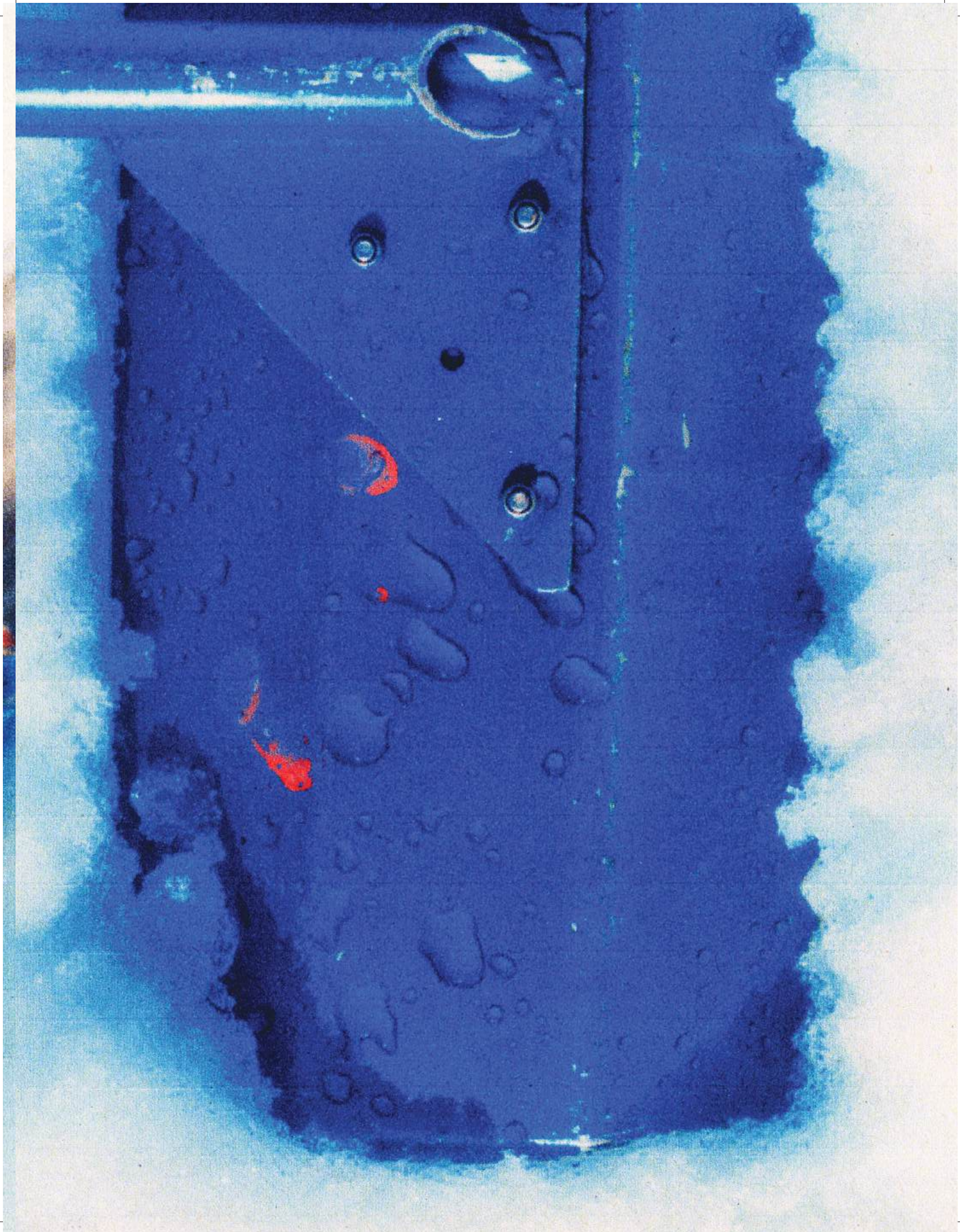
The combination of these factors leaves skiers not only feeling sapped of their personality, but also without control or autonomy over the direction of the sport to which they've dedicated their lives. They feel overlooked, undervalued, and, ultimately, replaceable.

That was how Dahl felt before starting Jib League. He's of the modern generation of athletes who recognize themselves not just as competitors in a given discipline, but rather as the product—the main attraction—itsself. And among these athletes, there are the adept few, like Dahl, who further understand that the greatest commodity in sports is not just this strong sense of self, but the necessary suave to market it properly.

As such, after spending his entire adult life as a competitive freeskiier and







quite literally growing up with the sport, he's become a fierce advocate for rider ownership. For example: Dahl used to be sponsored by the clothing brand Spyder. He'd always had dreams of starting up his own clothing line but lacked the technical design skills and knowledge of the manufacturing process to make it happen. Spyder showed him what software to use, and over time, he honed his craft. By the time Jib League started, Dahl, with the help of a couple of friends, had left Spyder and launched his own brand, "capeesh fashion house." Now, alongside the actual clothing he puts out, he's signed a roster of some of the best freeskiers in the world to ski under the capeesh label.

It's also why so many elements of the Jib League feel like a rejection of this perceived sterility of competition. There is obviously the voting system—enabling riders to determine themselves, in the most democratic fashion, what constitutes a trick or a run of value. Then there are the tricks and features: the former regularly sacrificing height and speed for unorthodox progressions and tricks that emphasize atypical grabs and require intricate technical consideration, while the latter are more slight and unconventional—the final feature in Nordkette for Season One was a "bonk": a single PVC tube sliced in half. Probably not something you're going to see in a big tournament.

"Part of the philosophy around Jib League is that we've tried to minimize the opportunities for specializing," Dahl said. "We want to know: What is the most unorthodox feature that could be seshed at and still have it be a valid, world-class competition?"

But by far, the most progressive and creative aspect of Jib League is how it's captured and edited. Videography is crucial in extreme sports—skiing is equal parts dangerous and ephemeral, and if no one is there to film you, your not-so-easily-replicable work will simply be lost to time. The question was, however: How do you document an event that is like no other event? How do you align the historical dichotomy of ski movies (highly stylized montages, intimately captured, with a distinct absence of chronology) with the filming of ski competitions (often long, practically formatted, and detached from the individual)?

After filming the first season, Dahl and Bråten were confronted with this question. In what they called "stu sessions"—an homage to the workflow of their favorite musicians, who spend innumerable hours in the studio recording, producing, and perfecting songs—the two worked twelve-hour days for ten days straight: the first four spent switching back and forth from Dahl's computer logging and sorting

clips, the next six spent finding music and stitching the clips together into a cohesive video.

The answer, like almost everything in Jib League, was just to do it their own way.

"I find it pretty boring, actually, to just watch skiing. Like skiing, skiing, no breaks," Dahl said. "That might be controversial for some people, but I really love the feeling of getting to know the person who is skiing. To humanize him more."

Inspired by skate video auteur William Strobeck, the videos are handheld, shaky, and dense with personality. Spliced between the skiing are brief vignettes, ranging from the goofy (there's one self-referential shot in particular that stands out, where you see a cameraman capturing a skier on a rail, the filmer's pants down around his ankles) to the sentimental, like in the waning moments of the final episode of Jib League Season One when Woods declares Joon Kangas the season's winner and all the skiers grouped up in front of the podium—a picnic table on the top of the mountain—erupt in raucous applause.

"I was once at the Jib League and was helping film. And one of the other filmers was like, 'I'm filming at 4K.' And Ferdi shouts out, 'No! No video at 4K. Everything's got to be at 720p,'" Cole Richardson, a twenty-one-year-old professional freeskiier, told me. "It's because Ferdi wants the aesthetic of Jib League to relate to the culture. To the kids that don't have the best of the best cameras. He wants Jib League to be something that people can touch, that people can relate to, and that people can see themselves in."

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The first time you do anything, it is, effectively, a proof of concept. You're afforded the luxury of working through major challenges in real time, of seeing if it actually works. But the second time you do something, it's a thing. It now has history. And expectations.

"I definitely felt it coming into this last season," Dahl said. "That this was the time when we would see if it was just the hype of something new, or if it was actually something that would stand the test of time."

The concept of a sophomore slump was among the major themes of the inaugural Jib League summit, which took place on the beach in Leon, Nicaragua (another place Woods frequents over the summer, where he teaches surfboarding), a couple of months after the end of Season One. The three founders conducted interviews with some skiers who competed and others who didn't, to get a gauge on

where and how to improve. And, apart from some minor tweaks—namely in rehauling the invitation process, as a few skier's invites got lost in the depths of their Instagram DMs—they figured that sometimes, the best change is not much change at all.

The rules stayed the same. The format stayed the same. The voting stayed the same. What was not the same, for starters, was the sheer amount of skiers who showed up.

Following the success of the Jib League YouTube series, which racked up tens of thousands of views, what were once fifteen to twenty skiers showing up for the open jams had ballooned into the triple digits. The difference was palpable: In the first competition in Innsbruck, the announcement and subsequent celebration of the winner had been animated, if not fairly tame. But this time, there were so many bodies packed shoulder-to-shoulder in the Montagu basement, dancing and chatting, that they couldn't even locate the winners in the crowd.

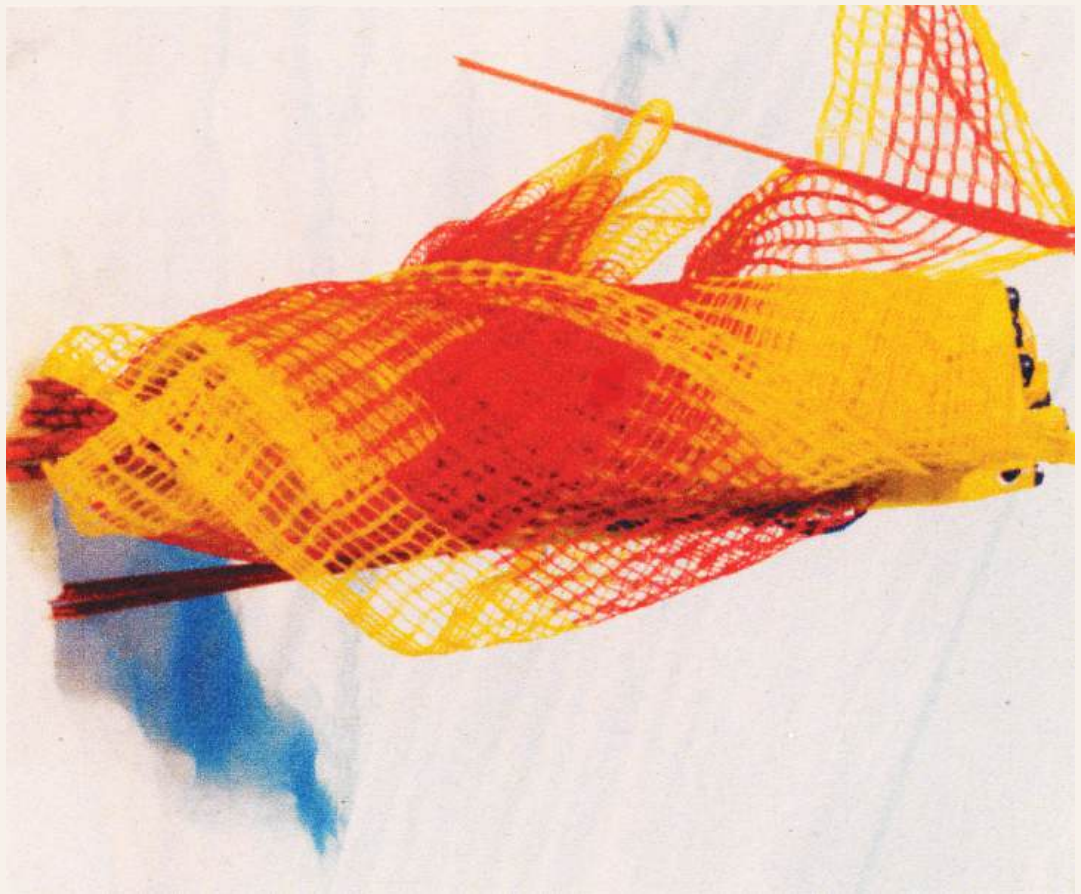
But by far and away, the biggest change was to location. Instead of a trip to Crans-Montana, they'd replaced the second leg of the competition with a trip to Sugar Bowl Resort in California. It was the League's first trip to the United States. A whole new ballgame.

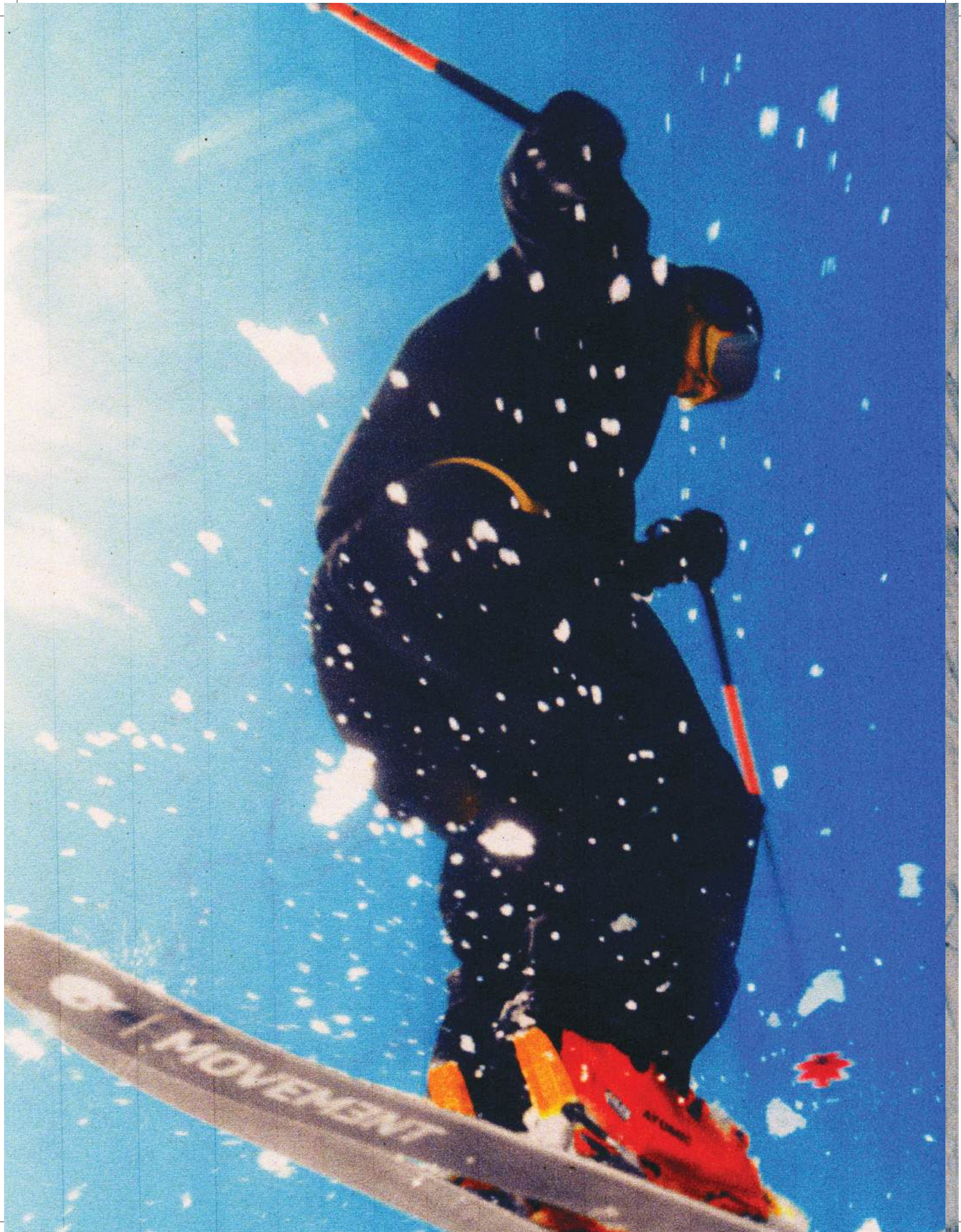
"I'm well aware that lots of Americans watched Season One. I was worried they might think, 'Oh, this is just some European thing,'" Woods said. "Maybe they won't believe in it. Maybe we're in the middle of nowhere, and no one really knows this place."

But the response was overwhelming. Skiers drove in from surrounding parts of California and the west coast. Others roadtripped from Canada. Some even flew in from Europe—either upset they hadn't gotten to compete in Innsbruck, or hoping to improve upon their previous performances.

There was no time, however, to relish in the turnout. There was a lot to get done, and it needed to be done quickly. At around ten o'clock the night before the open jam, Dahl, Bråten, Woods, a couple of other friends, and the Sugar Bowl park crew were out on the mountain, riding around in a Sno-Cat grooming machine and setting up the rails. Less than twelve hours later, a flock of more than 100 young and hungry skiers was perched atop the mountain, champing at the bit to get the go-ahead from Woods to start their engines and begin shredding.

You can ask anyone, and they'll tell you the open jam at Sugar Bowl was the best event in Jib League history. It's the kind of moment in time that now lives in rarified air. That changes people's faces and tone when they talk







Each trick mimics the same intimate, kinetic dialogue apparent in the dynamic between artist and artwork—the skier gesticulating as they are suspended in the air, the slope awaiting their return with bated breath.

about it. Goosebumps, butterflies. That kind of shit. The atmosphere was so electric, the competition level so high, and the skiing so mind-blowingly, jaw-droppingly, mouth-gapingly good, that Dahl, Woods, and Bråten—three of the best and most accomplished freeskiers in the sport’s history, people who’ve seen more high-level freeskiing than almost anyone else on the planet—felt obliged to recruit some of the other pros to come watch and help them decide on the eight best qualifiers.

“If it wasn’t so intense, I probably would have just started crying out of happiness,” Woods said. “Because it was the dream. When I dreamed of Jib League, I dreamed of that.”

Throughout my conversations with the three creators of Jib League, we kept ending up back at “dreams.”

For people like Bråten, Woods, and Dahl, things like apathy and complacency don’t really exist. You don’t become the best of the best at what you do by doing it half-heartedly. That goes for skiing. And that goes for making a ski league. You have to give your all to it—and imagine it at the grandest scale that it can be imagined.

That’s where the “Dream League”—as they call it—comes in. There are multiple practical changes that would make Jib League the Dream League. They want to add a women’s division. They want the top prize to be \$100,000—another thing about professional freeskiing is that brands and sponsorships do the heavy lifting, financially. Right now, post-tax, you’ll get about as much from winning Jib League as you will from winning a FIS event. They want concerts. And parties. And for it to be, full-stop, the best live skiing

event in the world.

But dreams, by their very nature, are greater than material change. They are the connective tissue binding our grasp on reality with the belief that we can influence the future. Sports are cyclical; athletes rise to the top, they maintain, a new generation emerges, they fall. It’s as natural, as tragic, and as beautiful as evolution itself. But always, when the dust settles, there’s still their memory and cultural impact, and the people who these athletes have motivated to become the next them. But none of that is possible if that sport that you fell in love with stops being the sport you fell in love with. If the beauty and creativity and passion are stripped from it, and all you’re left with is a husk of a thing that looks like something you used to know. Sports, to me and maybe you, are everything. But sports are never a given. And so, the biggest dream for the three founders of the Jib League is inspiration. And inspiration is eternal.

In my last conversation with Woods, we spoke as he was lounging on the beach in Nicaragua, planning out the third season of Jib League. At the beginning of our chat, I asked him something that’d been on my mind since the last time we talked: What would it mean to him if a kid, out there on a mountain somewhere, was sat down by an older skier and had the Jib League put on in front of them? If that was the video that made them want to go pro?

As he mulled over his answer, maybe it was my imagination, but in the background, I could have sworn I heard the waves lapping up on the shore. It sounded just like snow falling.

“When people follow their passions and open themselves up to be inspired by something,” he said, “to be in a small part responsible for that, I just think it’s beautiful.”

