



Birkie Smash Mode - Tad Elliott

Get some Purell because I hear a fever is spreading. I have a touch of it all the way out in Colorado. It's called Birkie fever. Just like any fever, Birkie fever can negatively affect a race. Overexcitement. Too much stimulation at the expo. Repeatedly clicking "refresh" on weather.com. Worrying about how cool I look in my new gear. These are all feelings I have experienced the last few days before the big race. So how do I use the excitement and nerves to my advantage to race the fastest on Saturday? I have a few secrets up my suit...

First, I make sure I am organized. Being organized means being prepared and having a plan. I have everything I need for any circumstance should it come up. My nutrition and feeds are ready. I know what I am doing Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday before the race. My skis are dialed in and ready to go. This is all done before I hit the tarmac on my way to Wisconsin. That way, from there on out, I am able to go into zombie mode and just follow my yellow brick road. I only worry about things I can control.

The second secret is rest. I know the hay is in the barn and that all I need to do for training in Hayward is to try to keep feeling good. The year I got second to the Italians, I took Thursday and Friday off from skiing. Thursday, I stayed in bed all day. Friday, I only went on a 45 min walk. Also, the year I got second and the year I won, I did not warm up for the race. Zero skiing before the start. I stayed warm in the car and was hydrating and eating. I had two Honey Stinger waffles, one an hour and half before the start, the other 45 minutes before go. At 30 minutes before the race, I went for a short walk and stretch. 10 minutes before, I stripped down and changed into race clothes. Then I went to the start pen, clicked my bindings down, and got ready to go. Now that I am older, I probably can't pull off this relaxation stint I had going. This year I will likely jog and stretch for a warm up, but I hope not to ski.

My third secret is wax techs. This year, I have Caldwell sport preparing some of my skis and shipping them to Hayward. I also have my twin brother, Evan, and Bill Pierce coming to test my skis. My brother is one of the best wax and ski techs I know. He tests thousands of skis a season and is better at his job than I could ever hope to be. I do not interfere with what he does. He doesn't tell me how to get ready to race and I don't tell him how to wax. I ask him to test my skis and make the final call. It's important to trust wax techs. The year I won, Zach Caldwell made the call on a pair of skis that I was nervous about. They felt squirrely compared to my other skis and I asked if I could still win on a different pair. He said, "Probably, but you will win on this pair, if you choose them." I went with Zach's pick. Moral of the story, wax techs are smarter than I am. So I let them do their job. For those of you who test our own wax, my first recommendation is get yourself a twin. If that's not possible, prepare your skis and test the morning before. That can be a lot of work and stress, but if you love that part of racing, go for it!

Next secret: I hydrate. I always bring a drink belt. This is a huge must. I bring the kind where I can swap out water bottles. If my bottle freezes in the race, I can just toss it and get a new one 4k later. I try to have calories in your bottle, too. I exclusively use Tailwind drink mix. Tailwind is all natural and made up of healthy calories, so I can avoid bonking – a huge advantage. It also has enough salt and calories so that all I need is the drink mix. I don't need to eat during the race.

My last secret is I try to remind myself that if I want to race smash mode, I have to live smash mode. I stay loose and relaxed. I try not to get too worked up. I rent fast cars. Most importantly, I try to treat the people around me well, especially the volunteers who are out there freezing all day. They do it for the love of the sport, just like the rest of us. I try to be kind and courteous, and remember that if I have a race I'm not stoked on, chances are, nobody is going to remember in two beer's time. I don't want to give anyone another reason to remember.

This event is awesome, rad, cool, and *fun*. Be sure to have some.