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For the love of the sport: Farris announces return

Finally healthy, former U.S. bronze medalist intends to compete again

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Joshua Farris said he's coming back "for the love of the sport, not for the results." -Getty Images

This is a story about perseverance, heart, drive and -- above all else -- a love for skating. Its star: Joshua Farris.

Farris, who suffered successive concussions in the summer of 2015, stepped away from the sport for good in June 2016, citing a fear of further injury. But now, fully healthy and with his medical team's blessing, the former world junior champion and U.S. bronze medalist is back on the ice with the intent to compete.

And it's like he never left.

"I want to skate for me," Farris told icenetwork in an exclusive phone interview earlier this week. "I'm skating for the love of the sport, not for the results. I want to skate to skate."

The short-term goals are just that: to be on the ice, to be healthy, to be skating. The long-term goals have yet to be carved out, but for now, Farris is back at Broadmoor World Arena in Colorado Springs with coaches Christy Krall and Damon Allen. He's also already doing triple axels.

A change of heart

When we last heard from Farris, it was at the end of what was easily the worst year of his life. After finishing third at the 2015 U.S. Championships and making his debut at the world championships (where he was 11th), Farris was attempting a quad toe in practice when he fell and hit his head on the ice. He suffered two subsequent concussions soon thereafter.

"It's been a long and rough year," [he told icenetwork last June](#). "I have officially decided it's too much of a risk, and I want to live my life without fear of the repercussions."

But that decision began to feel like the wrong one in the months after his announcement. Farris was coaching at World Arena, and feeling better and better as time went on. He consulted his doctors, who had told him initially that -- once he was fully healed -- he would not be in danger of permanent brain damage.

"I was sort of still in a depression when I decided to step away from the sport," he admitted. "My perception has changed since then."

He also became a big fan of pro hockey during his time away, and realized the sacrifices that went into such a high-octane contact sport. Watching those warriors on the ice made him want to become one himself -- without the gloves-off-let's-fight-this-out mentality.

"What I went through was a fluke situation," said Farris, 22. "As long as I work with the doctors that have helped my healing process, they have assured me that it's going to be OK as long as I don't go pro in hockey."

The decision

It took his stepping away from figure skating to make Farris realize just what joy he found in the sport. He didn't give his retirement decision much thought until September or October, but when he got back to skating full force in early November, he felt like he knew what the next step was.

"It went much better than I was hoping for," he admitted. "Right after Thanksgiving, I was like, 'OK, I'm doing triple axels. ... It's totally worth coming back and competing again.'"

The fact that Farris took that much time off and barely missed a beat served as a reminder -- to both him and those with whom he shares the ice -- that he's one of the best raw talents in the current generation of men's skaters.

"When I first started skating again, a couple of people at the rink were like, 'Uh, have you been skating this whole time? It looks like you took a long weekend off,'" Farris explained, laughing again. "I have figured out that I'm very blessed with a lot of talent as a figure skater."

When he made a trip to Dallas to see his dad, Rod, for Thanksgiving, the decision was clear to him.

"My dad is my go-to guy for figuring things out -- he helps me a lot," Farris said. "Talking it out with him, I just felt like, 'OK, I'm ready. It's time.'"

Having used Krall and Allen as sounding boards throughout his career, it was time for Farris to tell his coaches how he felt and what he had decided.

"I came up to Damon and just said, 'I can't end it the way that I did. I need to come back and compete,'" Farris said of an early-December conversation with Allen. "He was like, 'OK.' I think he and Christy knew that I wasn't done. I think a lot of people close to me knew that I wasn't ready to hang up my skates. In the back of my mind, I thought they were wrong; I thought they were just hopeful. But they were right."

Long road back

Having started to skate in early November, Farris is now jumping on a daily basis and says his edges are better and deeper than they ever have been. He's working hard on his off-ice strength and conditioning, but he still feels like he some catching up to do in those areas.

For his initial comeback, he is eyeing a series of events in the early-to-mid summer. Having lost all of his qualifying points because of his two-year absence, he would have to petition for a Grand Prix assignment from U.S. Figure Skating.

The organization said in a statement that Farris could be considered a "Return Skater" under its rules, having finished inside the top 12 at worlds in 2015. That makes him eligible for a senior B assignment or - after competing in a nonqualifying event this summer -- a Grand Prix, most likely Skate America.

Farris said that while his comeback attempt coincides with the Olympic year, his focus is not on PyeongChang.

"Would it be nice to make it to the Olympics? Yes. Could it be within my reach? Yes. Is it my main priority? No," he said. "I want to come back for me."

"Every person that I have told has been so excited for me. I think everyone that knew me knew that I wasn't done. I think everyone was happy that I was able to work through the 'trauma' that I went through."

Joshua anew

Farris can talk through that trauma now, but for months and months of his life, it was a dark reality. He had trouble in brightly lit rooms due to the concussions, spending hours if not days at a time in quiet and silence. He turned to music and his guitar, and also to his parents and sports psychologist, Caroline Silby.

The time away gave him a chance to grow into a person he says he is proud to be, one who is eager to meet the challenges that are to come. He saw Max Aaron regularly at World Arena, and said that Jason Brown was constantly checking in on him and his progress.

He's still living with his mother and will continue to coach at World Arena. He also thinks that Krall and Allen can push him to be even better than he was before.

Always a smooth, transformative skater, Farris struggled throughout his career, for one reason or another, to bring out his best in competition. He believes he's found a sense of calm during his time away, and has changed his mentality so he doesn't fall into old patterns.

This new mindset was evident when Farris was asked about quads.

"I'm definitely going to try quads...no, no, I'm not going to say 'try.' I'm going to *do* quads," he said, self-editing. "The time away, I want it to have gotten rid all of my bad habits. I can retrain and really just calm myself down. I was trying too hard (before). [The quad is] not an easy task. I have to treat it like another jump."

Sure as ice

When Farris thinks back to the last two years, he doesn't know exactly what to make of it -- but he's confident in who he is right now, which he says is most important.

"I don't know if there was a 'darkest moment,'" he explained. "We all go through some dark times in our lives, and this was part of me figuring out who I am as a person outside of skating. You can't fully appreciate something until it's gone. It's the biggest lesson and biggest takeaway I can have from this. Now we have a roadmap. Right now, it's about the short-term goals."

For Farris, it's the familial setup that has made it all worth it, and that he believes will make him successful as he navigates the uncharted road that lies ahead.

He said, "I have surrounded myself with an excellent and sturdy team. They have to remind me, 'Hey, this is why you're doing this. You're skating to skate.' That's why I'm coming back. I have a lot of faith in my support team. They can bring me back to that."



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