

Eden Serina

Fil-Am snowboarding pioneer

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL / AJPress

THE moment Fil-Am Eden Serina traded in her skies for a snowboard; she knew she was in love. It only took her one lesson to know that snowboarding was going to be more than just a hobby.



"I remember the instructor took one look at me and said, 'Are you sure you're just a beginner?' She recalls about her first experience snowboarding. "After that I just fell in love with it."

She loved to snowboard so much that she couldn't handle the daily three-hour bus ride to the mountain and work her job in Wall Street at the same time. So the New York University graduate quit her job as a Financial Analyst for Mergers and Acquisitions at the prestigious investment-banking firm Salomon Smith Barney in New York to pursue a venture in professional snowboarding. She was 24 years old when she

decided to give up her lucrative paying career to embark on a steep and crazy ride.

She packed all of her belongings and headed west to Vail, Colorado. She didn't know anything about becoming a professional snowboarder. She just had the will and fortitude to try something new and different.

The first few years into her new career was tough, she said.

But she networked with the right people, most notably members of the US professional national snowboard team, and they gave her advice and some equipment.

She also met Jondre Reyes Mina, one of the sole members of the Philippine Snowboard squad.

"It [my career] just sort of took off from there," she said. "Once I met Jondre Reyes Mina I started to snowboard for the Philippine team and we began to compete in different World Cup events."

Making the switch

The question remains, how does a person quit a very lucrative

job to pursue a career into a fairly new sport?

"There was just something about snowboarding that I fell in love with," said Serina to the *Asian Journal*. "It's so unconventional...it was very out of the ordinary for me to make this leap but I don't know, it was a calling, it was something I couldn't deny."

Serina was born in the US but lived in the Philippines for a few years while growing up.

When she was five years old her dream was to work in Wall Street, she said.

But after graduating from NYU, and accepting her dream position for a premiere investment-banking firm, she felt like there was something missing.

In 1997, while vacationing with her family, she was introduced to snowboarding. She had skied a few times before but it wasn't anything like the feeling you got from snowboarding, she said.

"For me, it's like a feeling of flying," she said. "It's like being free. Skiing, you have the poles and the skis [but] with snowboarding you have a minimal amount of equipment that it almost feels like you're a bird, whizzing by, and you're really interacting with the environment and it makes you really appreciate nature."

"You're in nature," she added. "And it's not just because you're outside. You're in this amazing, grand mountain and it really makes you feel like this tiny speck in the earth. It gives you an appreciation of how great the world is."

Over the years, her passion for snowboarding grew. She quit her corporate job and dedicated her life to snowboarding.

She said the hardest moment for her was telling her parents about the venture.

"At first I told my mom," said Serina. "She was skeptical. She



Photos courtesy of firstfilipina.com

had never seen me snowboarding. But my mom talked to me and she was kind of used to me having these crazy hair brain ideas."

"My dad was very supportive," added Serina. "He loves sports. He was very supportive of the idea. I think it's because he wanted a professional athlete in the family."

And the risk is paying off.

For the past nine years, Serina has been the team captain for the Philippine National Snowboard Team. She's competed in over 120 races, 24 World Cups, and 8 World Championships. In 2005, she had her best finish winning the Bronze Medal in a National Championship race in Finland.

Now, the 34-year-old has set her sights to something bigger.

With the 2010 Winter Olympics right around the corner, she's hoping to qualify and become the first female athlete in snowboarding to represent the Philippines at a Winter Olympic Game.

"It's sort of like the Jamaican bobsled team," said Serina. "You hear about these small countries that don't have the climate condition for the winter Olympics yet they were able to enter the people who qualify. There's just something about representing your culture and country."

However, her task to qualify for the Olympics is difficult. She receives no funding from the



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Philippine government and faces opponents who have been snowboarding since the time they could stand. Serina began snowboarding at the age of 20.

Serina said that doesn't bother her. She's mentally and emotionally prepared herself to handle the obstacles.

"It would mean a lot to me and my family if I were to represent the Philippines," she said. "I know my hard work will certainly pay off."

She advises those planning to pursue a career in snowboarding to "talk to someone like me or Jondre Reyes Mina. You have to talk to someone who has done it. Be prepared and really have the passion for it." ■



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