

Character – Jeremy Wotherspoon  
Outdoor Canada  
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Olympic silver medallist Jeremy Wotherspoon, 27, grew up in Red Deer, Alberta, but has called Calgary home since 1994. There, he combines his passions for speed skating and fly-fishing.

### **ON HIS EARLY FISHING EXPERIENCES**

The first place I ever fished was Turtle Lake, Saskatchewan, about an hour and a half northeast of Lloydminster. My grandparents have a cabin there. My grandpa would take me fishing, mainly for pike, starting when I was five or six. I just tried to do what my grandpa told me to do, and try to catch fish, never having much luck. I remember more outings not catching fish than catching fish. One morning I finally caught a fish with my dad. I couldn't see over the edge of the boat that well and I kept reeling until the leader went into the end of the rod and the fish fell off. My dad was, like, *What are you doing?* It was a pike. I was probably seven or eight.

### **ON HIS INTRODUCTION TO FLY-FISHING AND HIS FIRST “REAL FISH” ON A FLY ROD**

I started fly-fishing after high school when I moved to Calgary to go to university and train at the Olympic Oval in August 1994. I saw people fly-fishing on the Bow River and it just seemed like something I'd want to do. It just seemed more natural, more involved. There are more intricacies than what I was used to doing by casting lures. My parents gave me fly-fishing stuff the next Christmas. I caught some small trout in the Bow River and a 32-inch hatchery brood stock rainbow at a small lake near Nordegg. In June 1997 I talked two teammates – Christina Groves and Nathaniel Mills – into driving me to Policeman's Flats on the Bow River. They didn't even fish, but I didn't have a car. It was raining. I saw two guys who were catching a few trout and I asked what they were using. They said put on two nymphs, a dark one and a light one, so I did. Right away I hooked a fish and it snapped my line. I thought that was promising. Then I hooked another and it took off into the middle of the river. I finally got it in and it was an 18-inch brown, the first brown trout I'd ever caught on a fly rod, my first legitimate fish, I would say.

## **ON THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN FLY-FISHING AND SPEED SKATING**

Both are very technical. You're always trying to refine your blades or technique in speed skating, and in fly-fishing you're trying to cast a bit further and be more accurate or try to figure out how to get a fly to work. It's all those little details that take a lot of patience and problem solving to figure out. Nobody wants to do anything that isn't challenging. With both activities, there are no guarantees. You don't win all the time. You've got to figure it out. If could just dip a net in the water and catch a bunch of trout, it wouldn't be very satisfying. Trying to catch one with a fly is satisfying. Same thing with racing. You don't win every race. You have to train hard and figure out what needs to be done. When I'm training I think about fishing quite a bit. When I'm fishing I think about everything, but not necessarily speed skating.

## **ON COMBINING FLY-FISHING WITH WORLD CUP COMPETITION**

I've gone fishing a couple of times within a week before world championships. Before those competitions you get so focused on skating and being the best you can on the ice that you sometimes get too focused. You mentally fatigue yourself just thinking about it too much. It's nice to do something that's not just distracting, but that's actually enjoyable. In 1999, the World Sprint Championships were in Calgary and I went fishing in the Bow River a few days before the race. I caught a few trout. That weekend, I won a gold medal and set a 500-metre world record. I often take my fly rod with me on World Cup trips, just hoping to try to find someplace to fish. A few years ago, I was in Inzell, Germany. There are creeks everywhere and you can see trout in them. There's a little lake behind a small mountain near the town and I went there with my fly rod, a four-piece five-weight that I travel with. I cast a tiny fly, a size 20 or something, and caught an eight-inch brown trout. In Japan, there's a nice river that flows right by our hotel in Nagano. We were there in January and fish were rising everywhere. Some kind of trout. I didn't have a rod. We're going back for a World Cup in December and I'll have a rod with me then.

## **ON THE FISHING TRIP HE WOULD TAKE IF HE COULD ONLY CHOOSE ONE**

I've fished a lot in Alberta, on the Bow River, the Red Deer River and tons of smaller rivers in southern Alberta, and in lakes and rivers in B.C. and in Montana. I've fished the Miramichi River in New Brunswick when I was there for a Speed Skating Canada meeting. I've fished in Mexico, Florida and Cuba. In Cuba, I caught some bonefish on the flats on the Bay of Pigs. They don't get much fishing pressure. There were a lot of good fish and they were pretty easy to catch. We saw a lot of permit and barracuda. My guide barely spoke English and he could see fish I wouldn't see. He's say "cast" and I'd see a school of bonefish coming toward me. I only had one day to fish there. I'd really like to go back to Cuba.

## **ON FLY-FISHING AND COMPETITION**

I like competition. I think sometimes it would be nice to add a little competition to fly-fishing. One year my fishing buddies and I had what we called our World Cup of Fly Fishing. We had points for size and species of fish caught. There were negative points if you caught a sucker. It was fun. The day we started it we went to the Oldman River. One guy caught four or five fish, the other guy caught nothing and I caught, like, 13 fish. It was just a lucky day. They would drift a nymph through a spot 20 times and catch nothing and I would drift it through once and catch a fish. It was pretty funny. For me. We quit because it got unfair. I was fishing more than they were. It would be interesting to start a fly-fishing tournament for a charity or some good non-profit cause. They do it with golf all the time. I know a lot of athletes and high-profile personalities who fly fish. A company could sponsor a boat and each boat would have a guide and celebrity fly fisher. People would pay to fish in that boat for the day. It would be catch-and-release only. That would be a good way to raise some money for a celebrity (he laughs), I mean for a charity. I think it would be a lot of fun.