

## Fleck's versatility as a broadcaster on full display in British Columbia, Scotland

Steve Fleck glides punctually into our appointment at a local Tim Hortons after meeting with Jim Lang ? former Sportsnet anchor and currently The Morning Show host of 105.9 The Region ? and before two demanding broadcasting gigs: this weekend in Langley, BC, and next weekend in Glasgow, Scotland.

To say that Fleck is a busy broadcaster is an understatement.

The Aurora resident is preparing simultaneously for his on-site announcing at the 2023 UCI World Cycling Championships in Glasgow in early-August and getting ready to provide remote commentary from his home studio in Aurora for the Canadian Track and Field championships north of Vancouver at the end of July.

Fleck says he is excited about covering the international cycling championships in Glasgow for a number of reasons, most notably ?because the UCI has created an event that brings all the cycling disciplines together as it is done at the Olympics?BMX Racing, Mountain Biking, Road Cycling, and Track Cycling.?

He's also looking forward to broadcasting from ?The Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome in Glasgow?a great indoor venue with 43-degree banking.?

?Hoy is a Scottish sports hero and was the best sprint racer of all time. The modern bike was invented in Scotland, too, so Glasgow is a great setting to host an international cycling championship.?

There's also a key personal element to the trans-Atlantic trip.

?My wife Paolina [Allan] is competing, too. Glasgow is hosting the top international amateur and Masters Division cycling championships. Paolina is a three-time Masters Champion and will be racing in Perth.?

Allan, who was the 2009 Female Canadian Triathlete of the Year and a recent inductee into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, is one of the favorites to win her event. In addition to the familial connections at the World Championships and the prospect of visiting relatives during this working vacation in Scotland, Fleck is also looking forward to announcing the performances of two Canadian cyclists who could figure prominently on the Glaswegian race courses.

?29-year-old Kelsey Mitchell, a soccer player whose biking abilities were discovered almost by accident at an RBC event, has become a global icon in the sport of cycling. In five short years, Mitchell has become the defending Olympic champ in the sprint and is one of the favorites in Scotland. Another Canadian that will be a top contender is Derek Gee?he'll be racing in both the indoor track events and in road racing.?

Fleck is coming off an exciting Endurance Sports broadcasting gig this past weekend when he did play-by-play and provided expert commentary for the Toronto Triathlon which included 1,400 participants.

?The triathletes swam in 20.5-degree water in Lake Ontario, cycled down the Gardiner Expressway, and ran on the Martin Goodman Trail. It was great to see Andrew DeChamplain of Aurora do so well. He placed second in the 30-34-year-old grouping and 8th overall.?

The veteran broadcaster acknowledged he had ?a busy weekend??one of 30+ weekends he works per year on the Endurance Sports circuit.

?Every weekend from April to late-October, I cover some kind of endurance sport either on-site or remotely from my home studio here in Aurora.?

Fleck explained the particularly complex production logistics for his remote coverage of this weekend's Canadian Track and Field Championships on the west coast: "The three of us are spread out east to west in two countries. My producer will be in Portland, Oregon; the meet is in Langley, BC; my co-anchor will be in a studio in Toronto; and I will be in Aurora in my home studio."

Fleck's home studio was a necessity created by the restrictions of COVID.

"My broadcasting career morphed into a full-time job with 30+ weekends of work per year, but COVID changed the nature of so much of that. I built a home studio as a pivot so I could do remote broadcasting."

This strategy has yielded a variety of sports broadcasting opportunities for the former endurance athlete:

"I do a range of events from local charity events to International meets."

When asked which sport he enjoys announcing the most, Fleck's enthusiasm for track cycling becomes very evident: "Covering track cycling at the Milton Mattamy Centre can be a mind-blowing experience as a broadcaster and spectator. Racers are going as fast as 80 kilometers an hour and races are decided by a thousandth of a second. One recent race I covered involved all the racers in a photo finish. You could have thrown a blanket across all the competitors at the finish line. As a broadcaster, you need to call the finish, but at the same time wait for the official results to be posted by the race officials who have to examine the replay. Filling that time makes it very suspenseful work."

The work is also very challenging and Fleck discussed his recent and upcoming travel schedule: "The travel can be challenging. I'll have four down days in August. Another challenge in the broadcasting business is that there is work in finding the work. Persistence and endurance are critical factors to success in the business of covering endurance sports. Hunting down and negotiating work is a significant part of the business."

Despite these various occupational pressures, it's evident that Fleck loves what he does and that broadcasting connects him deeply to sports in which he competed at an elite level: "I find doing the coverage very motivating. I'm a huge fan of these sports. Cycling, running, track and field, triathlon? I competed at high levels in each of these endurance sports. I have this lifelong love of the events and I've never got tired of it."

As challenging as the travel can be, Fleck acknowledges the upside of his broadcast-related road trips: "I love travelling around North America and see places from the points of view of an athlete. Next year, I'm going to Omaha, Nebraska to cover the World Triathlon championships. Omaha is a great Midwest sports town."

As a former Ironman and triathlete, Fleck sees these on-course experiences as significant advantages in the broadcast booth: "It helps both from an announcing point of view and from an expert commentator point of view. Having lived the experience gives me an insider's view?the nerves, the successes and failures, the training. That's what I bring to the table and that's what I want to convey to my audience."

Conveying those experiences in a clear manner can be challenging when it comes to covering track and field meets. Fleck's broadcast partners have to be very versatile as they move seamlessly from track to field events in what the veteran announcer jokingly refers to as "a three-ring circus" with so many events occurring simultaneously at stadiums.

Although Fleck has hundreds of big events in his collective memory as a broadcaster, he isolated two performances as the most memorable to cover.

"The one that would rank first had a great impact on me emotionally: I was covering the Paracycling World Championships in 2020 and a Spanish cyclist was competing with a range of physical challenges. He was a multiple-amputee, both arms were affected?one was a stump at the wrist and the other amputated at his elbow. He was strapped to his bike and he had the extra challenge of one of

his legs having been amputated. To see him compete with such courage?moving a bike with only parts of limbs was the greatest feat of athleticism that I have witnessed. A second was calling the 100-metre sprint at the Canadian Track and Field Championships. Remarkably, Andre De Grasse finished third in the event?upset by two young athletes who ran personal bests to edge the Olympic gold medalist in a photo finish. All seven competitors seemed to cross the finish line simultaneously and it took five minutes to resolve the photo finish. De Grasse was such a great sportsman in defeat and I realized that De Grasse didn't need to be in peak form for the Canadian championships?he needed to be in peak form for the 100 Meter and 200 Meter races at the World Championships a few weeks later which he won. The greatness of De Grasse was never in doubt.?

Steve Fleck makes an athletic exit from Tim Hortons which is as graceful as his entrance into the coffee shop. The engaging Aurora broadcaster, part-time emcee, and former endurance athlete moved seamlessly from our newspaper interview to his next public appearance?fueled by a medium coffee and boundless enthusiasm for the career he's chosen and sports he loves.

**By Jim Stewart**