

The guy you want to watch the game with.

PHOTO: JOEY WALLIS



## Extreme Michigan

### A Bohemian's quest to bring untamed skiing to Middle America

BY KADE KRICHKO

**LONIE GLIEBERMAN HAS NEVER MUCH CARED FOR THE RULES.** It's part of the reason that, before age 30, he'd left the Canadian Football League as one of the most controversial presidents in sports (he dated a cheerleader and threw an X-rated home game Mardi Gras celebration). It's also why he got into skiing—an industry he considered less confining—just to be nearly laughed out of business for proposing an entirely ungroomed, gladed ski area on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Sixteen years later, the 47-year-old has grown Mount Bohemia into the destination for challenging skiing in the Midwest—a 900-vertical-foot ski area on the southern shores of Lake Superior that skipped condos in favor of a few base yurts and a hostel, while boasting nearly 300 inches of annual snowfall. Never one to sit still, the Detroit native will introduce the first U.S. cat skiing operation east of the Rockies, called Voodoo Mountain, just a few miles down the road. Taking the turn less traveled, Glieberman is selling extreme skiing without selling out, helping America's Heartland get rad right in its own backyard.

**KADE:** I need to know, how does a CFL owner end up in skiing?

**LONIE:** After I left the CFL, I went to Vail for a week and met a guy on a chairlift who used to live in Michigan. He asked if they'd ever built that big ski area in Michigan. So I go back, look it up, and find this place in Copper Harbor that people have been studying for years. I worked out a deal with the local timber company in '98, and by December 2000, we were up and running.

**You don't believe in grooming or beginner terrain at Bohemia. Why's that?**

Ferrari doesn't build minivans, but it makes great sports cars. If you try and be everything for everybody, you'll end up being mediocre. We built a ski area that is about advanced skiing and riding—that's who we're devoted to.

**And people responded to that?**

At the beginning, many of our competitors told us we'd last two years. Our feedback was, "You're suicidal; this is a train wreck; what the hell are you doing?" Maybe I'm just stubborn, but I wanted to succeed or fail with this model and thought that's

where skiing was going. A lot of those same competitors that were making fun of us are now promoting the same thing.

**Bohemia used to be popular backcountry. Did you get flack for turning it into a functioning ski area?**

There were a few angry backcountry skiers, but they realized that we didn't commercialize it or tear it apart. We even had some locals help us cut glades. If it's going to go private, at least we stayed true to the roots. They were worried about the condos, but the condos never came.

**You have triple black diamonds on the trail map. What's the difference between those and the double variety?**

Every ski area in the Midwest had double black diamonds, but they're actually blues. How do we get across that this is really good, challenging stuff? We had to make sure that the customer knew that once they were through the gate, they were committed to steep terrain. We thought the triple black would really explain that it's not a normal Midwest black diamond.

**Your cat-skiing operation, Voodoo Mountain, opens this December. Doesn't that seem a little luxurious for the Bohemia brand?**

It's not going to be posh—elitism is not what we're going for. If we do it the right way, we can change that mentality.

**So, no champagne in the snowcat?**

We'll give them lunch, but it's going to be turkey sandwiches, not chicken cordon bleu.

**Why are you sticking with this skiing thing?**

Things sometimes go differently than planned, but I really enjoy it, and in a weird way, I think this may have been the better way to go. I'm able to be creative. We broke most of the rules in the ski industry and that's allowed us to repaint the canvas.

**TJ Burke, the most famous Midwest skier of all time, moved to Colorado to ski. Do you think Mount Bohemia would have changed that?**

Yeah... I think we could have kept him around.