



Stacey Cook finished last season ranked 10th in the world in downhill skiing.

How Olympians Train: *US Skiing and Snowboarding*

An exclusive interview with strength coach Ernie Rimer

BY LAANNA CARRASCO, MA

Erne Rimer is a strength and conditioning coach with the US Ski and Snowboard Association, located in Park City, Utah. Coach Rimer grew up playing baseball and was introduced to the BFS program when he was 14. Today he uses the BFS program to train some of the athletes he works with on the US Women's Alpine Ski Team. Coach Rimer provides training programs for about 25 athletes ranging in

age from 16 to 30.

Coach Rimer received his bachelor's in exercise science and a master's in education from Northern Arizona University. He's currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Utah. He's done internships with the NCAA, the NFL and the US Olympic Committee, and was an assistant strength and conditioning coach at Northern Arizona University.

Here's what Coach Rimer has to

say about getting strong and preparing his athletes for peak performance on the slopes.

LC: What is the nature of your job as a strength and conditioning coach for the women's ski team?

ER: I am responsible for managing the year-round strength and conditioning programs for the athletes on the US Women's Alpine Ski Team. The team is divided into four smaller teams:

Development, Europa Cup, World Cup Tech and World Cup Speed.

LC: Can you tell me how you design the athletes' training programs?

ER: The program I implement for the elite racers is unique to each athlete. The Development Team (16 to 19 years) follows a program that is heavily influenced by BFS. They use the same set and rep progression system and keep track of their personal records exactly the same way.

There isn't a dramatic difference in strength levels between our top 25 athletes and the rest of the team, but we do need to strengthen our young athletes in a way that gets them "strong enough" as soon as possible. By the end of one off-season, the BFS program helps me develop the first-year Development women in a way that their average maximum lifts in the power clean (60 kg), deadlift (110 kg) and squat (95 kg) match the maxes of the veterans.

The veterans have a greater range in max lifts, and some of the experienced athletes are a little stronger, but the averages are the same after just one off-season with the BFS program. I feel that BFS is an amazing program for teenage athletes – it was for me.

Some of our veterans use the BFS program too. Last summer, I placed Stacey Cook (born 1984) on the program. She did a great job and set personal career records by the end of the off-season, which is hard to do for a veteran her age.

Stacey just finished the season of her career, finishing 10th in the world in Downhill. I cannot say how much the BFS program contributed to her success this season, but I'd like to think that her overall physical development is a piece of the puzzle. Stacey will not use BFS this year, but we used BFS last summer to change the rhythm in

her training program – I felt the BFS program would be a good way to shock her body with something new.

LC: Do you train female skiers differently from male?

ER: If I also trained the men's team, I wouldn't do too much different. We train every modality: fundamental movement patterns, pelvic stabilization, proprioception, plyometrics, agility, resistance training, cardiovascular training, anaerobic endurance, and flexibility. Females have slightly different



Strength coach Ernie Rimer

needs, so I apply these modalities in different proportions than I would for a male skier. For example, female skiers typically demonstrate greater ground reaction force impacts during landing. I spend a lot more time teaching female racers how to decelerate their body safely (for example, landing mechanics, deceleration during cutting, etc.).

I feel that a coach who works well with females can also have success with males. However, a coach who is made for male athletes may not have as much success with females. That's because successful female coaches understand what I call the "X Factor."

Every year, I ask my female athletes to confidentially write a sentence that

describes what it takes for a coach to have success with females. Every year, 90 percent of them talk about the need of their coach to develop a caring relationship with them, to pay attention to their needs, and to reflect that in a program that is truly individualized. A coach who works with 25 women on a single team will have more success if he approaches the team as though it is actually 25 different teams, and he treats each girl with the passion and care he shows for his own daughter.

LC: Who should we watch for in Women's Alpine?

ER: Right now is an exciting time for Women's Alpine. We have eight athletes who are ranked top 25 in the world. With the Olympics less than two years away, any one of these girls can find her way to the Olympic podium.

Lindsey Vonn and Julia Mancuso are the top racers. Mikaela Shiffrin is the up-and-coming phenom. She is 17 years old and has already stood on the World Cup podium, receiving third place in the Slalom in Austria in 2011.

LC: How do you motivate your athletes to work hard and be inspired?

ER: Everything they do is based on breaking personal records. The BFS program is a powerful tool that develops strong minds, and I apply the approach to elite athletes.

LC: Do you use a team concept in your training or motivation of the athletes at all?

ER: Even though I write individualized modifications for every athlete, they all use the same conditioning manual. They train as a group and at the same time. Even the rehabilitation athletes do their work in the same gym on the same schedule as their

teammates. This fosters a positive environment. They push and support each other. Outsiders looking into the fishbowl from the lobby have no idea they're doing anything different.

LC: Do you do ski-specific conditioning?

ER: I don't use "sport-specific" training. At the USSA we now use the term "characteristic training." Our collective staff is tired of seeing coaches and skiers performing circus acts with physio balls and unstable implements as they try to mimic a ski movement.

For example, our skiers love to stand in a tuck, the aerodynamic position of a downhill skier, on a wobble

board. I have a hard time with this because our downhill skiers must be able to balance while their skies slide 70 mph into a compression – when the slope goes from steep to flat. Standing on a balance ball may look "sport-specific," but it is not "characteristic." Hitting a compression at 70 mph requires an athlete to overcome tremendous amounts of eccentric force.

Characteristic training enables athletes to develop their muscles in a way that can be applied to their sporting environment. For example, if absolute jump height is a critical component in basketball, doesn't it make sense to use triple extension in training?

LC: How do you apply characteristic training when developing a training program for your athletes?

ER: If an alpine skier needs to overcome tremendous amounts of force during skiing, then we have them train exercises that expose their bodies to heavy forces, such as power cleans, clean pulls, front and back squats, deadlifts, etc.

Once our athletes can demonstrate significant strength levels with proper exercise technique, we will use supra-maximal eccentric training. Athletes are stronger with eccentric loads than they are with concentric loads, and significant strength gains can be made with eccentric training. We use training tools



The USSA's Center for Performance.

that allow our athletes to eccentrically lower weights that are greater than their max and allow them to concentrically lift a lighter weight.

We use bilateral and unilateral eccentrics to accomplish this because alpine skiing has a unilateral characteristic. For example, we have the athletes lower the weight with one leg, then lift the weight with two.

LC: Can you tell me about the training theory you use?

ER: Because the research lacks indisputable evidence for how one should train an alpine skier, I have developed a construct that suggests that performance and skill development

happens during practice and competition on the playing turf.

I adopt an approach that attempts to improve overall physical capacity. Increasing physical capacity merely improves the intensity at which one can practice, and the volume one can handle. Increasing physical capacity can also reduce the incidence of injury so that the athlete never has to suffer any setbacks or breaks from the thing that truly builds an Olympic champion: skiing. Increased physical capacity simply enables consistent skill rehearsal that brings greater volume and intensity.

LC: Tell me about the High Performance Department at the USSA.

How do you ensure that all the coaches and sports science professionals are communicating to support the athletes?

ER: I am the main liaison between our High Performance Department and the athletes and coaches of the women's team. Our High Performance Department is composed of full-time sport scientists and professionals in the areas of strength and conditioning, physiology, sport psychology, sports medicine, nutrition and technology. Of these professionals, I have the most interaction with the team throughout the year, and it is my responsibility to coordinate the group efforts of this performance enhancement team into one program. **ER**



Coaches Ernie Rimer and Per Lundstam working with Stacey Cook (cleaning 154 and jumping) and Lila Lapania (boxing).



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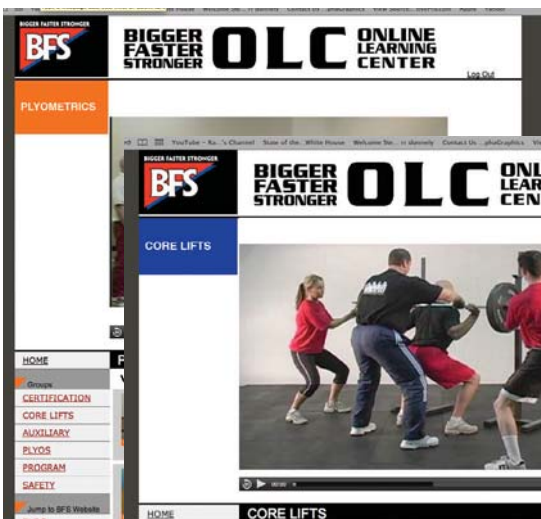
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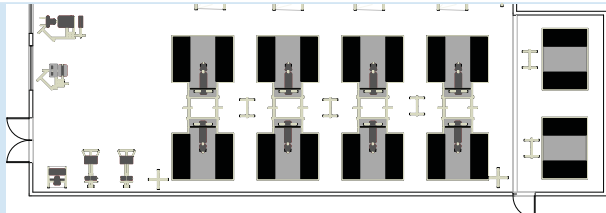
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