

# Kildow's comeback a lesson in playing with pain

## SAN SICARIO, Italy

Her back was aching, her skis were chattering, and the timing device tracking Lindsey Kildow as she breezed down the mountain was pushing 50 mph. Her mind was racing at least twice that fast.

Barely 48 hours after Kildow crashed, cartwheeled 15 feet up in the air and then came to a halt crumpled in a heap, she was closing in on the same stretch of the downhill course where her training run had ended in near disaster.

In less than two minutes Wednesday, 1:57.78 to be exact, the 21-year-old skier shamed all those big, bad, musclebound ballplayers who use the wrong brand of shampoo in a locker room shower as an



Jim Litke

excuse to go on the disabled list. Kildow didn't make it to the medals stand but settled instead for eighth in a race she came to San Sicario with a solid chance to win. Just showing up at the starting gate, though, made her golden to the ski world.

"It takes a lot to psych yourself up, because you know it's impor-

tant to get back to the course as soon as you can," said U.S. men's skier Steven Nyman, who was on hand to root for Julia Mancuso, his girlfriend and Kildow's teammate. "But believe me, it's always a little tougher coming back to the part of the hill that ate you up."

Injuries are an occupational hazard in every big-time sport, but so much so in skiing that Kildow wasn't the only athlete in Wednesday's race who came back from a horrific crash in Monday's training session to compete. She wasn't even the only athlete taken off the slope in a helicopter for emergency medical treatment who healed fast enough to take another shot.

Kildow's performance, though, may have been the toughest.

In Monday's training run, she was going so fast that her momentum first splayed her skis and then launched her tumbling through the air. By the time she landed, looking backward, and banged to a stop, everybody on the hill feared the worst.

Incredibly, for all the pain caused by so much rolling and tumbling, a bruised hip was Kildow's most severe injury. And just about the time she got in touch with all the other battered parts of her body in a hospital in Turin, Olympic champion Picabo Street was at her bedside.

They talked, then cried, then settled down and began plotting a return to the slopes.

Tuesday morning, while the

hospital staff worked on her discharge papers, Kildow slipped on her clothes, gathered her bags and made a break for it.

"They left me alone for an hour and a half, and I was in a hurry to get back and train," she said. "I barely made it out of the room when someone ran up, yelled, 'No, no, you must wait here!' and put me back in the room," Kildow said. "Bummer."

But she didn't have to wait much longer: A day of rest in Sestriere persuaded her to make one final pre-race training run Wednesday morning.

"Pain was something I was gonna take no matter what," Kildow said. "It was just a matter of if my body could physically

withstand the forces of the speed."

A year ago, Kildow was one of a handful of top skiers who told officials the San Sicario course was too boring for the Olympics. Thus challenged, those officials bulldozed the course to make bigger jumps, slicker plateaus and steeper landing zones.

Suddenly, Kildow realized, all those hazards lurked before her. "I came over those rolls," she recalled, "and then I was like, 'OK, just be careful. Just get out of your tuck and finish.'"

"And," she said, at last brightening at the memory, "I did."

Jim Litke is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Send comments to jlitke@ap.org.

# Only Canada, U.S. truly competitive in women's hockey

## TURIN, Italy

So far they haven't learned much about skating, stick handling or scoring. But the rest of the world may take one lesson away from the women's Olympic hockey, er, tournament.

There's no apologizing in women's hockey.

Not when it really matters. Not even when it's somewhat deserved.

Blame the Canadians for that, if you must. They're the ones going around Turin acting a lot like the '27 Yankees.

Three games. Thirty six goals scored. One goal allowed. And not one "I'm sorry."



Tim Dahlberg

"This is the Olympics, and it matters," offered Canadian forward Hayley Wickenheiser.

Yes it is, and yes it does.

Unfortunately, it only matters to Canada and the United States.

They will play in the gold medal

game Monday because they always play in the gold medal game. They beat each other, but no one ever beats them.

That's ever, as in it has never, ever, happened in 16 years of women's hockey in the world championships or the Olympics.

Which begs the question: What are the other countries doing here?

Don't ask anyone on the Italian team, which was put together two weeks before the Olympics because Italy is the host country, and it seemed like a nice gesture to fill out the field. It didn't seem so nice when the Italian women were beaten 16-0 by Canada and 11-0 by Sweden only to rebound

and score a goal in their final 5-1 loss to Russia.

That's OK because Switzerland scored only one goal, too, and Germany managed only two.

The fastest game on ice can seem awfully slow when anyone other than the world's two powerhouses are playing. Even when they are, the contests sometimes disintegrate into special team specials when overeager referees blow the whistle for illegal body checking anytime two players get near one another.

The domination by the American and Canadian teams since women's hockey was admitted to the Olympics eight years ago in

Nagano isn't all that surprising. Both have feeder systems and colleges with established programs to send players through.

Other countries have been reluctant to fully embrace the idea of women playing hockey, though there are some signs that is finally changing.

But those that are accepting it don't seem to be catching up. While other countries are fielding better teams than the ragtag outfits that skated in Nagano, the Canadians and Americans are getting better at a faster pace.

Olympic officials canned softball from the games for much the same reason, largely the

American dominance. That isn't likely to happen to women's hockey because it fills 160 spots and helps level the gender imbalance in the Winter Games.

It looks good to have more women in the Olympics, but what really is the point if they can't compete? Does a 16-0 hockey blowout really add to the Olympic experience?

These are supposed to be the best athletes in the world. Some of them look like they're not even the best on their block.

Tim Dahlberg is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Send comments to tdahlberg@ap.org.

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