



USOC
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**Lindsey Vonn, Alpine Skiing
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Opening Statement

I was definitely pretty amped to get on snow. Normally when we fly to Chile, we take a day to get acclimated but I couldn't wait, so after lunch, I went on the hill for two runs and passed the first on-snow test, then was able to do five runs the next day. It was definitely a long wait for those first couple months but it was worth it.

Your coaches, your teammates, your support staff, your physical trainers, your physician Dr. Bill Sterett was on the snow with you. How were they able to share in that special moment of returning to snow?

It was just actually Jeff Fergus (*U.S. Ski Team coach*) and I who were on the hill that afternoon, the first time I was on snow. It was awesome. I mean I was definitely very excited for him to be able to be back coaching me again. The team in general was very supportive. Everyone was happy that I was back in action. It was good to be part of the group again.

How is the knee?

My knee is great, thanks. Chile obviously went really, really well. I had no pain, no swelling, no setbacks. I did a few days of freeskiing drills and the rest at the gate so I'm definitely quite a bit further along than I anticipated and pretty much everyone else anticipated. I'd say Chile was very successful and I'm looking forward to skiing again in a couple of weeks.

Now as an athlete who is known for your intense focus, your tenacity, your drive, how hard was it for you after your ACL surgery to just wait until you got back into the gym and do your normal eight hour days and really start pounding again? How difficult and frustrating was it to be sitting on the couch?

I think the first six weeks were the hardest because I couldn't really do anything. I was still doing rehab obviously but you know, just moving your kneecap and range of motion stuff, you're not really physically doing very much. Being on crutches, I couldn't go get a cup of coffee. I couldn't really do anything by myself and it was very frustrating. Thankfully, I had a lot of support. My sister lived with me for the first probably two months. She helped me a lot. Obviously my boyfriend was there helping me. My family was all there for the surgery so I had a lot of support, but I was definitely very excited to start to be able to train again. That definitely ... even when I just was able to not be on crutches. Doing a lot more upper body was a happy change. When I was able to actually do more physical stuff like weightlifting, that was a very happy day for me.

Before we turn over to questions from the media, I just wanted to have you give them a timeline from now until when you expect to be back on snow and not just training again on snow. When do you expect to kick out of the start gate for the first time? I know you have the AUDI FIS World Cup. You've got your race coming up in Vail / Beaver Creek which is a test for the 2015 World Championships so I imagine you've got that one laser locked. Give us your timeline from now until you return to competition.

As far as when I start racing again, I'm still a little bit up in the air. I'm going to Europe in a couple of weeks, the middle of October. We'll see if I can race Solden or Beaver Creek but for sure Beaver Creek is

gonna be the latest that I'll be racing. Things are definitely, like I said, further along than I anticipated but you know I'm not going to race until I'm absolutely 100 percent. That's more of a mental thing than a knee thing. My knee feels great. It's a matter of getting up to 100 percent. It's being able to push it as if I were racing and I haven't quite done that yet so I'm waiting for those last few steps before I take the plunge and do racing again.

First of all, real quickly, where actually are you right now? And also we don't have a really good audio connection here but it sounded like you're going to Europe in a couple weeks and you may race in Solden, is that correct?

It's a possibility. I had originally ruled Solden out completely. You know when I was looking at the plan and the timeline and everything, it didn't seem like it would be at all possible to do that. But after Chile and having things go so well, I feel that idea is definitely a possibility. At this point, I have to get over there and see how I feel. It's probably going to be a decision that I make only a few days before the race but there's still a chance that I'll be racing in Solden. I'm in Ohio.

The mind/body relationship is critical in any sport. You've mentioned in the past that your depression has caused you to feel like a zombie, understandably. You had some life stressors. To what extent have these had a bearing on your performances last year? You were ill with the flu and so forth in December, your injury later in 2013. What are the factors and how do they affect you and your performances based on those mental challenges you were facing?

I think last year was more of a physical issue. I got sick in November and I just had no strength which then you know, led to my skiing deteriorating. It definitely got me down. I felt like last year was more of a physical issue. I was definitely not as strong as I should have been because I was sick and lost all my strength. But you know there was definitely some tough days especially after my knee injury. I think in general, skiing has always been something that clears my head and makes me happy. I've never felt like my depression has really affected my performance on the mountain because that's where I feel happiest. It's mostly when I'm off the mountain that it starts to interfere.

You mentioned that physically you're in good shape but mentally your decision to get back racing will be the deciding factor. What are the biggest concerns mentally that you have right now?

Don't get me wrong, but I don't have any trust issues. I trust my knee 100 percent. It's just I haven't pushed my skiing to 100 percent. I haven't tried to simulate a race yet so you know, that's as much mental as anything else because I have to be in that racing mindset. It's not that I'm doubtful or don't trust my knee or my body. I feel like a lot of times from what I've experienced with other athletes is that they're afraid to test their knee. That's absolutely not the case with me. You know, my knee feels great. I don't have any pain. I don't have any swelling. It's just a matter of pushing it to that next level and being comfortable going that fast again. That's really the issue.

I've talked to a lot of other Olympic athletes or Olympic gold medalists who've had injuries and went through the whole devastation of that and the recovery. They've commented that in retrospect the injury was actually, quote unquote, good that it happened because it gave them the break that they really needed. You are somebody who just thrived being out there skiing every day and competing but is it possible that the past six or seven months that you've had to take off have actually been beneficial in making you even more amped up for this Olympic season?

I'm definitely more excited to be back on snow than I normally am. You know before Chile I haven't obviously been on snow since February when I crashed. Definitely the excitement and the enthusiasm has increased since being injured. You know I'm someone that thrives on chaos. I need a lot going on. I need to be skiing. I need to be training. So I would have much rather been healthy, been training, being able to work out all summer under normal circumstances. It was nice in a way to be able to get a break and kind of have a normal life and be in the same place for more than a few days, kind of experience being in the United States for an extended period of time. That was definitely a welcome change. To be honest, under any circumstances, I would much rather be healthy and be training. I'll definitely take a break when I'm done racing.

You said you need to get to 100 percent. I'm curious where you're at now and what concerns you have going forward as you're getting to that speed?

I do feel physically 100 percent. It's just like I said earlier, it's a matter of breaking through the unknown. I haven't pushed my knee as far as 100 percent race mode. I haven't really gone that final stage of my skiing yet. That's the unknown that I'm really talking about. It's not that I don't trust my knee or I don't feel 100 percent physically up to par. It's that I haven't pushed it to that next level yet. But I'm confident that when I do, it's gonna be good, enough to where I bring the option of Solden back into the fold. You know whereas before Chile, I had absolutely zero intention of thinking about racing in Solden. It's because I'm feeling so strong and ready that I'm bringing that possibility back into the mix.

I think I read that you're gonna scratch slalom from your program. Is that correct? Does that mean that you're also not thinking of competing in the combined? Just to follow that, since Solden is a giant, it's a gated event, there is no fear of putting more stress on your knee in a gated event as opposed to a speed event?

To answer your first question, slalom, I'm definitely, well not definitely, not intending on racing in slalom this year. I've not tried to train it yet and there's still a possibility that when I get back into my slalom skis that I'll be fast. I don't really foresee that happening. I'm really focusing on speed events and the GS. I think it's actually easier on my knee in speed events than it is in GS. There's more torque, more forces that come up quicker in GS where super G and downhill, the pressure is ... over the course of the turn. GS is definitely more abrupt and kind of jarring on the knee. I wouldn't say that I'm considering racing in Solden because it's easier on my knee. It's probably the opposite.

You've been critical in the past about some of the conditions that the women have been forced to race in and that contributed to your injury. Are you confident coming into this season that the federation has the safety of the skiers at the top of their minds?

No. I was hopeful after my injury that would happen. At the World Cup finals when I was not there, they pretty much did exactly the same thing on both the women's and the men's side. On the men's side, there was a few serious injuries. No, I'm not confident that safety is at the forefront of their minds, but I'm continuously hopeful that it will eventually happen. I'm just still waiting.

Can you talk about your expectations in Sochi as compared to your first Olympics back in '02?

The 2002 Olympics, it was exciting just to be a part of the team. I was 17 and everything was very new. I was, you know, wide eyed and young and excited. I really had zero expectations of being on the podium. I was more there for the experience and I knew that, whereas the Olympics in Sochi are quite a bit different. You know, I'm going in as the defending champion in downhill. I'm coming back from a major knee injury. I still have a lot of expectations that I put on myself and also what everyone else puts on me. I'm in a lot different situation now. I'm happy to be in this situation in the sense that I've done well in the past. I know I can win now. Vancouver was the first time that I've gotten an Olympic medal so I feel like I have that monkey off my back. I'm obviously going to be very excited to be just competing because of my knee but at the same time, I'm definitely looking forward to trying to defend my title and hopefully improve upon what I did in Vancouver.

In a little bit, the room here will move over and have the opportunity to talk to some of your teammates – Stacey Cook, Laurenne Ross, Alice McKennis, Leanne Smith and Mikaela Shiffrin. What should they ask them?

Everyone had a really good camp down in Chile. It was a small team down there, just Julia for one week and then Stacey, Laurenne and Leanne. Alice I know has been working very, very hard on her return to snow, which hopefully will be in the next couple of weeks. She had a severe injury... We've been in touch all summer, kind of keeping tabs on one another and I know she's been working hard. I'm excited for her.

Our team is extremely strong. We have a great dynamic right now. Everyone's looking forward to getting a spot on the Sochi team.