



When it comes to badass women, can anyone top Lindsey Vonn? This gold-medal ski racer has won four World Cup championships, she is one of only six women to win a World Cup race in all five alpine skiing disciplines, and her 77 World Cup race wins are an all-time women's record. In other words, she's the most successful American skier... ever.

She's also a pop culture icon with more than a million Instagram followers—and probably the only *SI Swimsuit* model to perform pullups on set wearing only bodypaint and heels (scroll down for that one-of-a-kind video).

While her accomplishments speak for themselves, Vonn has also overcome a number of injury setbacks along the way. Downhill skiing is high stakes stuff, with racers regularly topping 60 miles per hour. And Vonn knows about crashing all too well. Her latest casualty: A fractured humerus bone in her right arm, which caused nerve damage to her hand.

Recovery has been going well though, and she is stoked to ski in the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics this February. So we caught up with the 33-year-old Minnesota native at a TheraBand event to ask about her recovery, how her training has changed, and why she's petitioning to race against men next year...

“I would rather go one hundred percent and not finish a race than go eighty percent and get fifth. The Olympics is obviously the biggest stage in the world, and there's a lot of pressure, and there's no skiing safe. You just have to absolutely go as hard as you can.”

**You've had a lot of injuries. Does it ever make you nervous about getting back on the slopes?**

It's just kind of part of the job. Skiing is dangerous and, especially after my last injury where I had nerve damage to my hand, I definitely am more nervous about having some sort of permanent long-term disability from one of my crashes. But at the same time, you can't live your life worrying about what could happen. I'm as prepared as I can be and I love my sport and I want to continue doing it. If I crash, I'll just get right back up.

**What's it like to train after an injury? Are you more timid?**

It takes a while to trust yourself a hundred percent and so I don't get back on the slopes until I'm strong. There are timelines that you need to keep. Lindsey [my physical therapist] always keeps me in line, but I definitely push the limits. It's like at six weeks, we need to be doing single-leg squats—there are always progressions and every day you just try to get a little bit stronger. And you know when you're strong. You're back to your normal routine; you're squatting heavy; you can do basically whatever you want.

**How has your workout routine changed since your injury?**

Man, my warm-up is so much longer. Like every time I workout or I'm about to go on the hill, either for training or for racing, my warm-up went from like 15 to 20 minutes, to like 40 to 45 minutes. It's [stationary] biking, it's activation, it's glute walks, it's agility—it's making sure that everything is firing to support my knee. It's really important. And like I said, same thing in the gym. It's very monotonous.



**Well, we've heard you spend six hours in the gym. Is that true?**

Yeah.

**Wow! How often are you doing that?**

Like five to six days a week.

**So you're mostly training in the gym until you get back out to the slopes?**

Yeah, that's what we do most of the summer—the prep. You know I've skied so long I don't really need a ton of time on the hill anymore. It's mostly just making sure I'm as strong as possible and making sure my knee is supported.

**How's your knee feeling?**

Good! Really good.



**Great to hear. How is training for the Olympics different than training for other competitions?**

It's different for me, especially because this is probably my last Olympics. It's not necessarily that I'm working harder, but I'm just making sure that all the details are taken care of. I don't drink, and I go to bed super early. I'm not hanging out with my friends, even though I want to. I don't think it would necessarily be detrimental to my training. But it's just making sure I know when I'm standing in the starting gate that I've done everything I could.

**Do you do any kind of mental training? It seems like that would be pretty important in your sport, especially in the starting gate.**

When I'm in the starting gate, it's a little bit different. I try to be really aggressive and amped up, but I also try to be really calm at the same time and clear my head. It's difficult to get in that place though.

**Do you meditate at all?**

No, but I sleep a lot. Like 10 hours a day—an hour or hour and a half during the day and then nine to ten hours at night. It just helps me reset. When I can shut off completely, I feel so much better and so much more energized. When I don't get enough sleep, I really feel like my mind doesn't function at the same level. And also just being older, my body needs more time to recover.

**Women used to get the message that skinny was pretty, but lately there's been a shift toward "strong is the new skinny." How do you feel about that?**

I think just being healthy and confident in yourself, that's beautiful. Being strong has become more of the trend lately, and that should just be our standard. It shouldn't be that this is 'hot right now.' It should be that being healthy and strong and confident is beautiful. And that can come in many shapes and sizes, but as long as you take care of yourself—your body and your mind—it's going to show.

**You're petitioning to race against men in 2018. Why do you want to do that?**

It's just been a longtime goal of mine—it's something I want to do for myself. I started training with the Norwegian men's team in 2012, and I was right there with them—and they were the number one and two downhillers at the time. I remember just thinking, 'Wow, I can hold my own against these guys.' I didn't think that was possible. So I've been talking about and thinking about it for a long time.

**Do you think skiing with them forces you to ski better?**

I ski so much better when I'm training with them. It just elevates me to the next level. I'm a very visual learner as well. So when I see what they're doing, and I see how dynamic they are, how powerful they are, what their line is, I try to emulate that and it definitely shows in my performance and my speed on the slopes. So I just want to see what I'm capable of, you know?

**Do you have any advice for recreational skiers who want to improve?**

The most important thing is being physically ready to ski. You know [when it comes to] skiing, you can get stuck in a lot of challenging positions if you hit a bump or whatever. It's not a normal sport in that way—there are a lot of variables that come into play. So if you can be strong and be in a position to be agile in those different circumstances, you'll be a lot better off.

**What's your greatest hope and biggest fear for the 2018 Olympics?**

My greatest hope would be to win a gold medal—that would be amazing. My biggest fear would be to get nothing [because] I worked really hard. Or potentially getting hurt before the

Games. You know my biggest thing is to get there healthy. If I can do that, I'll definitely be in a good position to ski well. But I have to get there.

**Before skiing on the Olympic stage, the pressure has to be unmatched. How do steady your nerves or use them to your benefit?**

I just kind of look at it like if I get nervous, and I don't ski well, then I'm not going to do well anyway, so what's the point in worrying about it? I would rather go one hundred percent and not finish a race than go eighty percent and get fifth. So I just always put my best foot forward, I try as hard as I can, and if I fail, I fail. But at least I've given it my best shot. The Olympics is obviously the biggest stage in the world, and there's a lot of pressure, and there's no skiing safe or skiing for a medal. You just have to absolutely go as hard as you can.

**How do you calm the butterflies?**

I've been to three Olympics and I try to use the energy around me and instead of [getting] nervous, I use [the] adrenaline and channel it. I think I'm more aggressive and I enjoy those high-pressure situations.

**We have to ask, is retirement in the near future for you?**

I'm for sure going to ski next year and then the following season. After that, I don't know. But everything turns out differently than I expected it to. So I really couldn't tell you. I could be skiing for four more years!

*Photos: Getty Images/Mike Stobe/Stringer; Getty Images/Alexander Hassenstein/Staff; Andrew Domanski of Domanski Photography*