

A Day in the Life of an Olympic Strength Coach

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Courtesy of Tschana Schiller

Watching an [Olympic athlete](#) compete is simply awe-inspiring. Their skill, strength, and stamina seems almost superhuman. Of course, lots of elite athletes are born with natural athletic abilities, but to compete on the world stage, they also have to put in hours every day—and over many years—of smart, [effective training](#).

Behind every athlete and team is a group of coaches and trainers dedicated to helping them succeed. SELF recently had a chance through ski team sponsor [Blue Diamond](#) to get a glimpse into what it's like to be one of those squad members: I spent a day with Tschana Schiller, strength and conditioning coordinator for the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Team, at the [Center of Excellence](#) training facility in Park City, Utah.

“Overall, I’m here to develop and help build a well-rounded athlete,” Schiller told me. “It might be a skier, or boarder, or an alpine skier—which are all very different sports—but my job is to help them become the most robust, durable, well-rounded athlete.”

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Tschana and her team of five trainers help the athletes build the strength they need to compete in their specific sport. They work on everything, from aerobic conditioning to power and strength.

The coaches also have to develop relationships with the athletes. “They’re not required to train with us,” explains Schiller. “They may have other coaches or sponsorships who provide coaches, and a lot don’t live here. So we have to build relationships so they trust us and want to work with us.” Each of the five strength coaches works with a different team, and then some of the athletes on the teams work with the coaches individually based on their needs. “Out of 200 or so athletes, only about 100 train here,” explains Schiller. “The ones who don’t, we give them remote programs and check in via phone and email.”

To learn more about what Schiller does, we asked her for a rundown on what a typical day looks like. Here’s what she shared.

Schiller wakes up between 6:30 and 7 A.M., drinks coffee, and eats a substantial breakfast.

Coffee is a must for Schiller. For breakfast, she always has eggs and avocado toast or turkey. “Protein gives me sustainable energy for the day ahead,” says Schiller. “I haven’t had tons of success with cereal or oatmeal, but if I do end up having oatmeal, I make sure I eat it with peanut butter or nuts.”

She gets to work bright and early during training season.

In the summertime, when most athletes are coming to the training center, Schiller is at the facility by 8 A.M. at the latest. During the winter months, when most of the athletes are on the road competing and the center is pretty empty, she gets in closer to 9. “I have to get my kid to school first, too,” she says. “Once I get in, I check in with my coaching staff to make sure all is good.”

Then, she spends most of the morning with the athletes in the weight room.

Depending on the day, Schiller works with a different team. They’ll start the day with about 2 hours in the weight room. “They go through a warm-up and workout together as a team, and I’m there to observe and make sure their workouts look good—that no one looks fatigued or is struggling,” says Schiller. “I don’t really need to motivate them because they’re already so motivated and surrounded by the best. I’m there to develop relationships with each of them and to help understand what each athletes needs.”

Athletes keep a training diary so that Schiller can spot any issues and address them quickly.

Each athlete fills out a diary every day and emails it to Schiller. It prompts them to rank multiple categories on how they're feeling and performing from one to 10. If they mark anything close to one, it shows up red—literally a red flag for Schiller that lets her know she should check in.

“Reading between the lines is important, too, because not all of these athletes will open up about issues they're having,” says Schiller. “Noticing if they're struggling or fatigued is part of the job.” For athletes who are training elsewhere, Schiller will email them or call if she notices something concerning in their diaries.

Her schedule is so packed that sometimes she has to eat lunch as she trains.

During the summer months, Schiller eats lunch whenever she can fit it in between athlete training sessions. Sometimes, her schedule is so non-stop that she has to eat as she trains an athlete. In the winter, she usually eats around noon. “If I get lucky and there's enough, I'll get to have some of whatever the team chefs are making for the athletes,” says Schiller. “But otherwise, I'll usually have leftovers from the night before. That can be a burrito bowl or chili or a winter salad with beans and lentils.”

Then, it's time for meetings and office work.

After lunch, Schiller either heads to her office to do work or attends staff meetings. “Yesterday, we had an impromptu meeting for an hour, but we also have scheduled meetings,” she says—like right before the Olympics, where the staff had a few logistics meetings to finish tying up loose ends. She also meets one-on-one with athletes frequently to talk about their upcoming competitions and plan their training schedules.

Schiller usually spends the rest of the afternoon training athletes one-on-one, or working out herself.

The ski and snowboard athletes usually spend the afternoon doing workouts outside. A lot of the athletes will road bike, mountain bike, or run; sometimes the snowboarding team will go indoor wakeboarding, or the aerial team will go to the water park to practice jumps off the water ramps.

The afternoon is also when Schiller does individual training with athletes to address their specific needs. If Schiller isn't working individually with an athlete, she'll oversee one of the training sessions with a team.

When it's slow in the winter, Schiller often uses this time to fit in her own workout, either training in the gym or going for a run or bike ride.

Even way the workday is over, Schiller is always on call and constantly communicating with the athletes.

Schiller wraps things up and heads home for the evening around 5 P.M. But she's always on

call and spends time on the weekends answering texts and emails from athletes. “I’m texting pretty often with the athletes who are here in town—usually every other night,” she says. “It can be about anything from changes with programming to one of them saying, ‘I’m so ridiculously sore from the workout yesterday and I hate you,’” she jokes.

The work never ends, but Schiller and the rest of the staff at the center love what they do. “We can’t promise podiums or anything,” Schiller says, “but it’s our job to create resilient, robust athletes who have the structure and body to handle competing for a long time.” Judging by the likes of Mikaela Shiffrin, Chloe Kim, and Shaun White, it’s clear that they’re doing something right.