

no excuses

a season with the united states disabled ski team



directed by matt martin

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feature length documentary

synopsis

No Excuses chronicles the United States Disabled Ski Team's historic 2002 season, culminating in their quest for gold at the first Winter Paralympic Games ever hosted in the United States.

Racing in Europe, Canada and the United States during their three-month World Cup season, the 22 American athletes on the team strive to win their fourth straight Nations Cup. Then, during nine days of competition at the Salt Lake Paralympics, these paralyzed, amputee and visually-impaired skiers race at speeds up to 70 mph on the Olympic race courses - seeking to capture both individual glory and the most medals of the 36 nations competing in the games.

More importantly, they hope to win further acceptance as world-class athletes and fierce competitors.

Sensing a singular opportunity to change the way disabled sport and disabled people are often viewed - as 'oddities' - the six athletes featured in **No Excuses** share extraordinarily exhilarating and intimate moments from their season and their lives.

No Excuses captures the individual struggle of athletic endeavor, a team fighting to remain the best in the world, and an honest acknowledgment of ongoing grief without the sentiment and pity all-too-common in media coverage of the disabled.

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featured athletes

Chris Waddell, 34 (Park City, Utah)

Winner of 15 Paralympic and World Championship medals over the past decade, Waddell is forced to rededicate himself for his final Paralympics after a new rival wins the previous season's individual World Cup title.

"Before my accident, I was part of the crowd. After my accident, I can say I've been the best in the world. And there aren't many people who can say that about anything."

Joe Tompkins, 33 (Juneau, Alaska)

After his roommate and fellow disabled skier dies in a skiing accident, Tompkins struggles to overcome his fears while preparing for his first Paralympic downhill.

"I hate to make excuses, period. But ever since [my roommate's death], I've been skiing scared."

Lee Joiner, 20 (Red Lodge, Montana)

Joiner and her mother finally confront the profound effects of Lee's congenital disability on both of their lives.

"I don't need to blame anyone, that's the main thing I'm working on right now. Accepting things, and not thinking how perfect my life would be if I was born a different way. Because it would just tear me up inside."

Jason Lalla, 30 (Bradford, New Hampshire)

Defending gold medalist and world champion, Lalla wins few friends by arguing that more difficult courses will raise the level of the sport _ and interest in it.

"If I walked into any bar and said, 'I'm a one-legged guy, I'm going to attempt to go a hundred miles per hour down this hill and there's a 90% chance I'm going to bust my ass into the woods,' you'd have a lot of people there."

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featured athletes

Lacey Heward, 20 (Boise, Idaho)

A rookie on the national team, Heward gets her first taste of the ups and downs at the highest level of competition.

“Okay, I’m in a wheelchair and other people walk. It’s not like I’m from a different planet or something. It’s just something that happened and you just get on with your life.”

Chris Devlin-Young, 40 (Campton, New Hampshire)

Emotionally isolated for fifteen years following the military plane crash that paralyzed him, Young returns to the U.S team with a new wife and new perspective.

“I’d like some kid in a hospital to see me on tv and say, “Okay, maybe my life’s not over. I know it’s not going to be great, it’s not going to be the same, but maybe it’s not over. And they won’t have to go through the shit that I went through. I wouldn’t wish that on anybody.”

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filmmakers

Matt Martin (Director, Producer, Editor)

No Excuses is Martin's feature directorial debut.

Martin is currently editing the feature length documentary *Straight Acting*. His previous editorial credits include: *Unprecedented: the 2000 Presidential Election in Florida*, *Lost Children: America's Child Welfare Systems*, the reality television pilot *WORKFORCE* (FX Network) and *Blood on the Land: the making of King Arthur*. Martin has worked as an assistant editor on projects including the feature length documentaries *Stevie* (Lions Gate Films 2003) and *Marlene: Her Own Song* (Turner Classic Movies 2001).

Martin received an M.F.A. in Film Production from the University of Southern California in 2001 and a B.A. in English Literature from Middlebury College in 1991. His USC thesis film *Lather.Rinse.Repeat.*, starring Troy Garity and Marshall Bell, won awards including a Silver Plaque at the Chicago International Film Festival and Best of Fest at the Seattle OneReel Film Festival.

Jason Weiss (Producer)

No Excuses is Jason Weiss' first feature film. Weiss previously worked in the computer industry for nine years, where he started as a consultant and eventually became General Manager of European Operations for Trilogy Software. His lifelong interest in the motion picture industry compelled him to change careers and he is now developing several feature films as a principal at Embark Productions.

Weiss received both bachelors and masters degrees in Management Science and Engineering at Stanford University in 1993. He is a lifelong skier and is thrilled that he was able to combine his interests and vocation on *No Excuses*.

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Udy Epstein (Executive Producer)

Epstein runs Seventh Art Releasing, an independent production, distribution and foreign sales company noted for award-winning documentaries. Releases include six Academy Award® nominated films and the 1997 Oscar® winner *The Long Way Home* along with other notable films such as *American Pimp*, *Radiohead: Meeting People is Easy*, *Better Living Through Circuitry* and *Ben Harper: Pleasure and Pain*. Epstein executive produced *Creature* (with Sheila Nevins) and *Rudyland* for Cinemax/HBO.

Amy Sommer (Co-Executive Producer)

In 1995, Sommer co-founded SomFord Entertainment and their first feature documentary, *Waco: The Rules of Engagement*, was nominated for an Oscar® and earned an Emmy®. Her second documentary, the critically acclaimed *The Jaundiced Eye*, examines the case of wrongfully convicted child abuser and *Mama/M.A.M.A.*, Sommer's most recent documentary, questions the validity of Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. In addition, Sommer served as the co-executive producer of *Unprecedented: the 2000 Presidential Election* and is the executive producer, along with Andy Vajna, of *Freedom's Fury*, an exploration of the Hungarian Water Polo Team and the political backdrop against which they competed in the 1956 Olympics.

Sommer's Narrative films include *Blue Car* (Miramax) starring Agnes Nixon; *Teknolust* (Think Films) starring Tilda Swinton; *Food for the Heart*, (Creative Light Worldwide/Razor Digital) starring Jorja Fox and *Deadly Little Secrets*, (Think Films/Main Line Releasing) starring Craig Sheffer, Dylan Walsh, Dina Meyer, and Michele Hicks.

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director's statement

Chris Waddell and I have been close friends since we both attended Middlebury College over 15 years ago. We played soccer together and Chris was also on the ski team. During Christmas break in 1988, Chris was skiing at home and broke his back. The next winter, he began relearning to ski in a monoski and since then has become one of the most decorated disabled athletes in history.

After receiving an MFA from USC Film School in 2001, I began to consider shooting a documentary on the upcoming disabled ski season - in part because the 2002 Salt Lake Paralympics would be in the United States for the first time in history and in part because it would likely be Chris' final Winter Paralympics. In June 2001, I traveled to an off season camp of the U.S. Disabled Ski Team in Mt. Hood, Oregon to meet the coaching staff and explain my vague notion of a documentary following several athletes through the season. I wanted to shoot a verité film that focused more on athletic endeavor than typical media coverage of disabled sport. I was interested in an athlete facing retirement more than asking, "How did you get injured?"

These athletes train and compete at a higher level than nearly anyone realizes. As my cameraman and I began showing up at race after race, the team began to trust that we were not making an inspirational story of 'overcoming adversity'. From December 2001 through April 2002, the coaches and 22 athletes on the 2002 U.S. Disabled Alpine Ski Team graciously allowed us nearly unlimited access both on and off the mountain.

It was a season with remarkable triumphs and losses both in racing and in life. Joe Tompkins lost his father three months before the season began. His own teenage son saw him race for the first time in the Paralympic downhill. I wanted to include these types of facts in the film rather than using only a character's disability to explain him or her to the audience. I wanted the audience to know them as unique individuals.

It is my hope that at the end of the film, when the characters in **No Excuses** leave the starting gate at the Salt Lake Paralympics, the film repays their trust in this manner: the audience cares whether they win or lose.

disabled alpine skiing

- Disabled skiers race on standard mountain courses despite having to overcome any of a number of physical challenges - including paralyzation, amputated limbs, visual impairments, congenital disabilities and cerebral palsy.
- Disabled skiers compete in three classes: sitting, standing and visually impaired. Within these classes, racers are further categorized depending upon the specific severity of their disability. The sitting class has 4 sub-categories (3 for paraplegics and one for double leg amputees), the standing class has 8 sub-categories and the visually impaired class has 3.
- Within the sitting, standing and visually impaired classes, racers in different categories race based on a factored time. The factor is a percentage of a racer's actual time and is intended to create fair competition between athletes with different levels of mobility. The factor is constantly adjusted and is based on previous winning times in each category.
- In the downhill, super g and giant slalom events, arm amputees have the fastest times and race at 100% of their actual time. In slalom, above-the-knee amputees racing on one ski can actually ski a straighter line through the gates than athletes competing on two skis and thus record the fastest times.
- Disabled skiers compete annually in the Disabled World Cup under the Federation Internationale de Ski (FIS), the international governing body for able-bodied ski racing, and they compete in the same events as able-bodied racers: downhill, super g, giant slalom and slalom.

us disabled ski team - alpine

The United States Disabled Ski Team (USDST) has been part of the United States Ski Team since 1986. The USDST is also a member of the United States Ski & Snowboard Association (USSA), the national governing body for Olympic skiing and snowboarding.

Since the mid-1980's, the USDST has been one of the most dominant teams in the history of sport:

- 1986** USDST alpine skiers led all nations at the World Championships in Saalen, Sweden with 59 medals, almost twice as many as runner-up West Germany.
- 1990** The 1990 World Championships were held in Winter Park, CO. U.S. skiers earned 89 medals; newly renamed Germany came in second with 37.
- 1992** USDST alpine skiers dominated the Paralympics; they took home 42 medals, including 19 gold. Germany is second again, capturing 22.
- 1994** U.S. disabled alpine skiers collect 39 medals (24 gold) to 32 for Germany. The Europeans, copying Americans' year-round training methods, began closing the gap in alpine.
- 1996** USDST alpiners won 11 gold medals at the World Championships in Lech, Austria, while Austria tied the U.S. team for the most medals won (29).
- 1998** American alpine skiers collected 32 Paralympics medals, including 14 gold.
- 2000** Again, the USA claimed the most medals at the World Championships with 31, 11 of them gold. Germany is second with 30 medals total.
- 2002** Competing on home ground, the disabled U.S. alpine skiers led the Paralympics medals count with 37.
- 2004** At the 2004 World Championships, the U.S. regained the Nations Cup, earning 24 medals (including a nations-leading nine golds), and USDST athletes collected seven season-long World Cup trophies including first, second and third overall in the women's sitski category.

history of the paralympic games

- The name “Paralympics” is not derived from “paralyzed” but rather the Greek preposition “para” (“beside” or “alongside”) and the goal of being the parallel Games to the Olympics.
- The Paralympics are often confused with the Special Olympics, an entirely separate event for mentally disabled participants.
- Paralympic athletes are physically disabled and competition rather than participation defines their endeavor.
- In 1948, the English neurosurgeon Sir Ludwig Guttman organized the Stoke Mandeville Games for English WWII veterans with spinal chord injuries.
- In 1952, ex-servicemen from Holland joined and the competition became international.
- The first Paralympic Summer Games were held in Rome in 1960 and the first Paralympic Winter Games in Örnsköldsvik, Sweden in 1976.

Paralympic Summer Games

Year	Location	Nations	Athletes
1960	Rome, Italy	23	130
1964	Tokyo, Japan	22	400
1968	Tel Aviv, Israel	29	750
1972	Heidelberg, Germany	44	1000
1976	Toronto, Canada	42	1600
1980	Arnhem, Netherlands	42	2500
1984	Stoke Mandevill, UK & New York, USA	42	4080
1988	Seoul, Korea	61	3053
1992	Barcelona, Spain	82	3020
1996	Atlanta, USA	103	3195
2000	Sydney, Australia	123	3843

Source: International Paralympic Committee
www.paralympic.org

history of the paralympic games

Paralympic Winter Games

Year	Location	Nations	Athletes
1976	Örnsköldsvik, Sweden	14	250
1980	Geilo, Norway	18	350+
1984	Innsbruck, Austria	22	350+
1988	Innsbruck, Austria	22	397
1992	Tignes-Albertville, France	24	475
1996	Lillehammer, Norway	31	1000+
2000	Nagano, Japan	32	571
2002	Salt Lake City, USA	36	416

Source: International Paralympic Committee
www.paralympic.org

- Since Seoul in 1988 the Olympics and Paralympics have taken place in the same city and at the same sporting venues and facilities as the Olympics, but Olympic host cities were not obligated to host the Paralympics.
- The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) was founded in Dusseldorf, Germany in 1989.
- The Winter Paralympics in Lillehammer, Norway in 1994 were the first organized by the IPC.
- In October 2000 the IPC and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) formalized many years of close co-operation with the Agreement on Co-operation.
- The Agreement on Co-operation led to a further Agreement in June 2001 establishing the practice of 'one bid, one city'. This meant that cities bidding for the Olympic Games the Paralympics are automatically included.
- The 'one bid, one city' Agreement takes effect with the 2008 Beijing Summer Games and 2010 Vancouver Winter Games, but the organizing committees of Salt Lake 2002, Athens 2004 and Torino 2006 have chosen to incorporate the Paralympics.