

A DREAM REALIZED

Nordic skiers love our blogs and websites where too often we dwell on the negative. Sometimes our discussions degenerate to the point of whining and always present is the claim that Nordic doesn't get its fair share of support. A number of times it has been suggested that the US Cross Country Team and US Nordic Combined Team should break away from USSA and form a separate National Governing Body. Elite athletes and coaches look on those blogs with equal parts embarrassment and amazement. Those in the know are well aware of the benefits that come from all disciplines working together as one very strong team.

A perfect example of one of those benefits is the new Center of Excellence in Park City, UT. Unlike the Olympic Training Centers in other parts of the country, the Center of Excellence is strictly for the USSA. Skiers and Snowboarders do not need to share facilities or schedule time blocks with athletes from other sports.



THE NEW CENTER OF EXCELLENCE (photo courtesy of USSA)

The USSA began a legacy fund in 1999 to build the facility. No money was being taken from athletic programs for its construction. The 85,000 square ft. center includes a broad array of strength training areas, ski and snowboarding ramps with trampolines, a special rollerskiing treadmill, nutrition center and segregated facilities for recovery and rehabilitation. One of the most interesting things about the center is its “Instructional Kitchen.” A la Martha Stewart, they have built a combination class room and kitchen to teach athletes how to cook nutritional recipes. There is also a regular kitchen at the Center and every food supplement is sent to WADA for approval and testing.

We caught up with Team Atomic athletes Billy Demong (Nordic) and Alice McKennis (Alpine) for a tour of the new facility.



BILLY DEMONG IN JUMP TESTING. OTHER ATHLETES LOOKED ON IN AMAZEMENT.

RH: *As US Ski Team members, how do you feel about the facility:*

BILLY DEMONG: I see it as a dream realized. As we were watching it come together it had an impact on my motivation. We have a great interface between all the disciplines, it is technical as well as motivational watching and learning from the alpine racers and snowboarders.

ALICE MCKENNIS: This place is amazing! Athletes from different disciplines here at the same time working out together. We learn so much and it really makes you want to train hard.



ALICE MCKENNIS ON HER FAVORITE PIECE OF EQUIPMENT.

RH: What do you feel is the most important facility within the Center?

ALICE MCKENNIS: The Recovery Center. A proper supervised recovery is so key. The Recovery Center has pools, ice bath, hot tub. It's the greatest benefit as opposed to training alone.

BILLY DEMONG: Definitely the Recovery Center. I like to put on the compression tights and put my legs up. But the most important part is having a trained supervisor as part of the recovery.



STRENGTH TRAINING COACH ALEX MOORE. THE TRAINERS MORE THAN THE EQUIPMENT IS WHAT MAKES THE CENTER A SUCCESS.

RH: What is your favorite piece of equipment for training?

BILLY DEMONG: The treadmill for rollerskiing. You get so much out of it. They can wire you and you're fully monitored.

ALICE MCKENNIS: I like the foam pit and the squat racks.



BILLY DEMONG DOING A FLIP INTO THE FOAM PIT. DESIGNED FOR THE SNOWBOARDERS, IT HAS BECOME A BIG HIT WITH ALL DISCIPLINES.

BILLY DEMONG: Another thing I would like to say is that the entire USSA staff has their offices here. All the employees can step out to the balcony and observe the athletes working out. There used to be a disconnect between the athletes and the staff. Now that we are all together, there is a strong feeling that we are a team. It means a lot that I can take a break and walk into Luke Bodensteiner's office.

ALICE MCKENNIS: I agree.



ALICE AND BILLY WARMING DOWN.

In Summary. Walk into the Center of Excellence and you will feel a level of energy and esprit de corps that US Ski and Snowboarding has never exhibited before. Big muscular downhill racers shout out encouragement to short slender Nordic racers during aerobic testing. Cross Country skiers watch in awe as the athletes from speed events crunch more than what their rusty little Subaru's weigh. It's tough for young people to say good-bye to friends and family and relocate to Park City. It is only natural that a little homesickness or loneliness could set in. It is hard to say if this was an original intent of the Center, but it is making the athletes genuinely thrilled that they have made the move to Utah. Not only are they getting unequalled supervised training, but the Center is leading to bonds and friendships that will last all their lives. The US Ski and Snowboard Team will be going into the next Olympics with an unequalled level of strength and commitment.