



ONES TO WATCH

2. THE SLOPE SUPERSTAR

Sure, ski-racing prodigy **Mikaela Shiffrin** talks a big game. But given she's almost certain to take gold in Korea, can you really blame her?

MIKAELA SHIFFRIN WAS EXHAUSTED. It was 3 a.m., toward the end of a drawn-out press conference during the 2014 Sochi Games. Hours before, the 18-year-old skier from Vail, Colorado, had secured her first Olympic gold, becoming the youngest slalom champion in the history of the Games. So when a reporter asked, "Where do you go from here?" Shiffrin didn't hesitate. "I'm dreaming of the next Olympics," she said, and "winning five gold medals." She conceded a nervous smile. "Sorry I just admitted that to you all," she said. But there was no taking it back.

The comment made headlines, little surprise. No skier had ever taken home more than three golds from a single Winter Olympics. At first, Shiffrin regretted her brashness. But now, on the eve of her second Olympics, she's done apologizing. "I realized people were taken aback by that kind of ambition," she says. "But I was serious."

Shiffrin has every right to be confident. By all objective standards, she's the world's best female ski racer. She has won three overall World Cup slalom titles, and last winter, she picked up her first overall World Cup title, collecting 1,643 points while second place scored 1,325. She competes in more than 30 races a season and skis in back-to-back World Cups across her sport's four disciplines. Many of her peers, meanwhile, focus on just one discipline and race in a third as many events. "Her work capacity exceeds that of every other athlete I've worked with," Shiffrin's coach, Jeff Lackie, says. "She's like a mental savant for training." Shiffrin admits that trying for another chance at gold is an all-consuming task. "I have to constantly keep pushing myself," she says.

In the run-up to Pyeongchang, Shiffrin has become a media darling. *The New York Times* and NBC Sports closely covered her pre-Olympics races this fall. The attention is likely to get more intense. In Pyeongchang, Shiffrin is a favorite in slalom and stands to become the first skier to win back-to-back golds in the event. She's also expected to be a top contender in giant slalom and super combined. So three golds should be within reach. As for the fourth and fifth? She's recently improved in super G and scored her first World Cup downhill win in November, though those races typically haven't been her strength. Yet Shiffrin remains as ambitious as ever. "If you don't think it's possible to win five

golds," she says, "go talk to Michael Phelps."

And should Shiffrin medal in Pyeongchang, don't expect her to endure another 3 a.m. press conference. "One thing I've learned from winning an Olympic medal is that it's really exhausting," she says. This time around, she says, she'll celebrate a win by going to sleep as soon as possible. —Megan Michelson

BY THE

2,900

ATHLETES

102

EVENTS

ELEVEN

FEMALE COMPETITORS IN 1924

1,160

FEMALE COMPETITORS EXPECTED IN 2018

50 MILES

10 |

20 |



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