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Bill Johnson Update

[« Back to Daily News](#)**May 26, 2005**

Portland, Ore. (Ski Press)-This update was sent to Ski Press regarding US gold medal winning downhill skier Bill Johnson's ongoing recovery efforts from a serious head injury. Feel free to post comments in the box below:

“Bill Johnson was never one to find the easiest way down the mountain. He was fast and took great pride in his technical abilities on the most difficult mountains. He also gained as much notoriety for his brash and outrageous actions and personality as he did for being the first skier from the United States to win a gold medal in downhill skiing in the 1984 Sarajevo Olympic Games. The United States had never won the gold and 1984 was a time when the United States continued to hold little hope for winning. Along came the bad boy of skiing Bill Johnson. He was brash, he was even arrogant. Bill Johnson claimed he would win the Gold.

Johnson delivered on his promise and made us proud. There were movies (Going For The Gold with Anthony Edwards) book deals and endorsements. Post Gold Medal life however was challenging and he suffered tremendous trauma as one of his children drowned in an accident and his marriage failed. Bill Johnson found resolve by becoming competitive again and set out to win another gold medal. The harsh lessons of Bill Johnson continued as he suffered among the most horrific and tragic accidents in sports. During Bill’s attempted Olympic comeback at the U.S. Alpine Championships in Whitefish, Montana in 2001, Bill suffered a traumatic brain injury while traveling 70 MPH. He was in a coma for three weeks and lost six years of memories. Bill has experienced many negative challenges as a result of his injuries. He has suffered immense pain, lost most of his memory for a six year period. The surgery on his severed tongue has affected his speech. Bill gets frustrated and angry from time to time. These challenges even included public embarrassment as he was pulled over and suspected for drunk driving. Bill became frustrated and was arrested and jailed for assault. The police thought he was drunk because of his brain injury, speech and behavior. Bill Johnson alcohol level test results were “00.0”.

The story of the arrest and Bill’s actions were grossly misreported and caused damage to Bill and his family according to a spokesperson for the Johnson family.

Bill Johnson returned today from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and The Center for Sports Medicine. The doctors in Pittsburgh feel there may be more options to increase the health and quality of life Bill should be experiencing. They are reviewing results of a comprehensive evaluation that took place last week.

The medical team in Pittsburgh is being headed up by Dr. Joseph Maroon, Vice Chairman and Professor of the Department of Neurological Surgery and Dr. Mark Lovell, a nationally renowned sports concussion researcher, Dr. Lovell oversees the neuropsychological testing programs for the National Football League (NFL) and the National Hockey League (NHL) and directs the concussion testing for Championship Auto Racing Teams and the Indianapolis Racing League. He is chairman of the NHL’s Neuropsychology Advisory Board. Dr. Maroon has been the team neurosurgeon for the Pittsburgh Steelers Football Club for the past 20 years and has developed innovated programs for the management of athletes with cerebral concussions. ImPACT© (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing) was developed by Doctor Maroon and his colleague, neuropsychologist Mark Lovell, Ph.D. It is the first computerized evaluation system used that may help determine concussion severity. Dr. Maroon’s research into brain tumors and diseases of the spine have lead to many innovative techniques for diagnosing and treating these disorders. He has operated on over 1,000 pituitary tumors and now uses an endoscopic/microscopic approach. In 2002, he was nominated a Health Care Hero Lifetime Achievement Award finalist by the Pittsburgh Business Times and has been listed, for 8 consecutive years, as one of “America’s Best Neurosurgeons” in the publication of America’s Best Doctors.

Dr. Lovell’s work involves researching the neurocognitive effects of sports concussion and developing better methods of post-concussion evaluation to determine when it is safe for an athlete to return to sports following a concussion. In addition to working with professional and collegiate athletes, Dr. Lovell and the UPMC team, over the last several years, have made a sophisticated and standardized concussion evaluation program available to high school and younger athletes nationwide.

The purpose of the visit was to have Bill Johnson undergo extensive comprehensive evaluations and testing. The goal of working with the Pittsburgh medical team is to overcome some difficulties Bill has experienced and improve his quality of life. “There will be an extended strategy and care plan developed. Bill, his family and the medical team are all hopeful that improvements are possible and will be realized. This is the next logical step in the long and extended process of recovery of traumatic brain injury. While Bill has been able to work, travel and attend events around the world as a spokesperson for traumatic brain injury and other groups and organizations, there is still more work to do for Bill to improve his life.” according to a spokesperson working with the Johnson family. Bill Johnson, his family and the Bill Johnson Foundation wish to thank the community for the generous outpouring of support that has been shown during these difficult times.”

Related Articles

- [Bill Johnson Emerges From Coma](#) (April 21, 2001)
- [Bill Johnson Says He'll Ski Again](#) (May 29, 2001)
- [Bill Johnson Ready to Return Home](#) (August 31, 2001)
- [Johnson Flown to Portland, Remains in Coma](#) (April 13, 2001)

Comments (9)

May 26, 2005 | Tim Kohl:

This a long overdue explanation of Bill's long and short term difficulties. Many in the real ski community have only the highest regard for Bill and hope that his difficult recovery accelerates and he leads a happy and healthy life. Bill was never very Normal so to expect him to be Normal again is probably not possible. best tk

May 28, 2005 | bruce mcdonald:

Hi Bill,
just want to say kick this thing in the butt.we're pulling for you at Wachusett Mountain in Mass.
You're the greatest at downhill,
now this is an uphill battle and you can do it if anyone can.
Bruce

May 28, 2005 | Jan Johnson:

Hey Bill -
Good luck making a full recovery. I've been a huge fan of yours since I saw you race the Lauberhorn in '84-'85. Truly amazing to watch. I bought a postcard with your photo on it in Wengen and still have it. Someday, I hope to get your autograph! lots of love,
Jan

May 28, 2005 | Neal Jones:

Bill,
We first met at the US Championships at Copper in the early 80s. I was at the local radio station reporting (mostly about local speed skier CJ Mueller being a forerunner), and you were working for position on the team.
One of my most-treasured pieces of art is an Andy Warhol speed skater, a piece donated to benefit the '84 team. I worked hard to drive the funds to the team then, especially since I met all those racers that really broke through for the US.
Marolt may have a vision now, but the real team, the team that set the US on pace had Mahre, McKinney, and Johnson on it's roster. They raced near a place that was nearly wiped out by war. They broke through an invisible barrier of Austrian dominance that people believed in even after Moe.
You, Phil and Steve, Tamara, Kristin and others set an attitude and dedication that carried to Park Smalley and the newfound FIS freestylers. It was the '84 team and you in particular that said, the US can...and will win.
The real skiers know you set the standard. Before you there were hard workers that got lucky, back to Andy Mill and even Billy Kidd and Jimmy Heuga. After you, there was a string of US successes.
Take care buddy, I hope to hear back.
Celebrate The Moment, Neal

May 28, 2005 | Steve Lutz:

Our prayers are with you, Bill. You may not remember some things from the past, but we will ALWAYS remember your amazing Gold Medal run. Team USA is now kicking some Austrian butt, and we have you to thank for showing us we could do it!

May 29, 2005 | Terry Davies:

Before Moe.
Before Bode.

There was Wild Bill - the prototype for the slightly (or more) deranged American speed skier.

All of them were accused of being selfish, but being cocky is a requirement in your sport. The team can't help you once you are in the starting gate.

We haven't forgotten you Bill or the way you stared down the Austrians. "Looks like it's snowing again....."

Bode should look you up - not that he owes you anything - just that you two would have much in common.

Now get out there and have fun.

Namaste -

May 30, 2005 | Charlie Webb:

Billy,

You are still my hero!! You helped push our sport into the main steam and its now been 24 years buddy since we shared a bottle of Dom after you won the Nationals at Copper on your Red Sleds and it has been nearly that long for another American to be as great a skier has you are!! I still have a pair of unmounted 210s Red Sleds you signed hanging on the wall!! Take care and get well soon!! We ALL miss you!!

Charlie Webb Atomic Ski

May 31, 2005 | Evelyn Murphy:

Dear Bill, My sincerest wishes for your complete recovery. Having worked as a nurse in brain injury rehab, I know your battles. Thank you for your courage and skill in the downhill for the USA.

Evelyn, Wachusett Mountain

May 31, 2005 | Billy Kidd:

Hi Bill, from Billy Kidd and Hollis Brooks in Steamboat:

Just a note to wish you well, and tell you we think of you often. Hope you'll join me at Steamboat to test the powder some time.

Meanwhile, keep up the good work and enjoy the summer!

-Billy Kidd

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Email Address: (required)

Email addresses are never displayed.

Comment: (required)

Notes

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