



Couch

duce these athletes to the benefit of strength and conditioning exercises. In fact, many athletes return to sport stronger than they were before their injury, and they remain committed to regular exercise throughout their career.”

In Russia, Tietjen’s role is to ensure that each freeski athlete is physically ready to give her best performance to reach her Olympic goal.

“I’ll be with them in the Olympic Village offering physical therapy support before and after training, qualifying, and final events. I also will be on the slope-style course during competition to provide last-minute mobilizations or stretches and to work closely with the on-hill medical staff to respond to any emergencies,” she says. “I communicate improvements in the musculoskeletal condition for each athlete achieved through physical therapy to the coaches, which may allow an athlete to increase the complexity of her performance. The goal is a position on the podium.”

## Figure Skating: Hands On

Melinda Couch, PT, who opened Peak Performance Physical Therapy in 2005 in Colorado Springs, has been a physical therapist for more than 20 years. She has served as Team USA’s physical therapist for figure skating the past 5 years and went to Russia with the Olympic team.

“Top-level skaters train all over the country, but I work with the athletes who train here in town to help them get ready for the Olympic Games,” she says. “I’ve probably worked with all the athletes who will make the team because, over the years, I have worked at different competitions and world championships.”

Couch performs substantial hands-on interventions for her skaters, whether it’s active release technique, joint mobilization, or trigger point dry needling, although she adds that the latter is rarely performed the day of competition.

“I do a lot of techniques for mobilizing the spine and joint alignment,” she says. “I’ll use some modalities as well. I’ll bring an infrared laser along and an ultrasound electrical stim combo.”

At the Olympics, Couch will go to all the practice events and work with anyone with small issues. “My role is to work with the athletes daily, warm-

*No technique, no summit.*

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ing them up and treating anything that might be going on,” she says. “With figure skaters, common injuries are ankle sprains, ankle tendinitis, lower back, hip flexor strains, groin strains, and occasional knee problems. For pair skaters, shoulders also can be a problem.”

### Bobsled and Skeleton: A Team Approach

Eugene Byrne, PT, MD, is the chief medical officer for the US Bobsled and Skeleton Federation. He explains that because the bobsled primarily focuses on power and speed, a team approach to health care has proven to be most effective.

“Repeatedly, the athletes are jostled back and forth during runs, resulting in excessive stress on the lower body,” he says.



From front to back, Steven Holcomb, Curt Tomasevicz, Steve Langton and Chris Fogg race during the United States four-man bobsled team trials in October 2013, in Park City, Utah. Holcomb and his crew came in first place. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer) — Image by © Rick Bowmer/AP/Corbis

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