

Sullivan helping future American downhillers

By Megan Harrod, USSA

Not only does Squaw Valley's Marco Sullivan have the most inviting smile and demeanor on and off the mountain, he's a four-time Olympian who has stood on top of the Audi FIS Ski World Cup podium in Chamonix, France.

He also holds the record among American downhillers for the most downhill World Cup starts, with 105—Bode Miller (Franconia, N.H.) has 104—locked in during the Kvitfjell, Norway World Cup in 2016 and he is the mastermind behind the American downhiller concept. He also might have the biggest and most dedicated official fan club there is. Because he's just that darn likable. Seriously. He has a heart so big and a spirit so warm he could melt the snow off the mountain.

Like many other hard-charging U.S. Ski Team athletes, Sullivan grew up in Squaw Valley, crushing Lake Tahoe and skiing for the Squaw Valley Ski Team. In fact, one of his earliest memories was crushing it down a snow-covered gravel hill in his backyard at the age of 3. That's where his passion for the mountain all started, and it carried him through a 15-year career with the U.S. Ski Team.



Marco Sullivan celebrates with teammates and fiancée Anna Goodman following the final run of his career at U.S. Alpine Championships in Sun Valley, Idaho, in 2016. Photo/USSA

While he was on the team, Sullivan created his personal website, americandownhill.com. Little did he know that website would grow into something much bigger than himself, including a series of webisodes created by Ski Racing and POC, a line of clothing and accessories by POC, a Spyder speed suit for the American downhillers men, and now, a business—with the introduction of the American Downhill Speed Skills Camp at Mammoth Mountain this spring.

The American Downhillers crew's mission? To empower young ski racers to approach their career with champion-grade passion, genuine curiosity and formidable tenacity. Sullivan and teammates came together in this endeavor in an effort to pay it forward to the next generation of American Downhillers.

"My ex-teammates and I have spent the majority of our adult

lives learning how to ski fast and practicing those skills over and over,” said Sullivan. “We are part of a small group who have lived that journey and we feel the need to pass along what we have learned to the next generation of kids who want to represent their country as downhill ski racers.”

Those “ex-teammates” Sullivan speaks of? None other than the legendary Daron Rahlves (Sugar Bowl), Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah), Alice McKennis (New Castle, Colo.), Leanne Smith (North Conway, N.H.), Bryce Bennett (Squaw Valley) and former U.S. Ski Team World Cup downhill coaches Johnno McBride and Chris Brigham. Talk about an all-star staff.

Their vision for the camp stems from the fact that competing at the World Cup level is extremely difficult, and lessons learned by athletes and staff en route to becoming the best in the world are invaluable. As Sullivan noted, “The whole American Downhiller crew is very enthusiastic about passing those lessons on to the next generation of racers. Ultimately, I want American Downhiller to be the link between current World Cup racers and the kids who are chasing that dream of becoming the best.”

Sullivan is looking forward to creating that bridge and staying connected to the sport that has helped him grow into the special soul he is. After one year of retirement, Sullivan has reflected on just how special it is to live the life athletes experience, traveling the world and seeing places most would only dream of. What does he miss most about traveling the “white circus”?

“It was always cool rolling into town and being part of the show,” Sullivan reflected. “Nice hotels, all the best amenities, racers on the World Cup are definitely spoiled and that was always fun. I skied a ton this winter, mostly with powder skis and mostly when nobody was watching so that was fulfilling in a different kind of way.”

Indeed it was a good year in California, with record snowfall and a ton of opportunity to get some good skiing in with former Alpine Canada World Cup athlete Anna Goodman—also his future wife.

Sullivan ended his career with the U.S. Ski Team in style, donning lederhosen and that signature Marco Sullivan grin in Sun Valley in 2016. Plus, you can also find him as a NASTAR pacesetter – inspiring kids to ski as fast as he can. We asked Sullivan our three questions on what he believes makes a champion.

U.S. Ski Team: *In your words, what makes a champion?*

Marco Sullivan: A champion to me is someone who fulfills their dream. We all have something that we want, but to go after that and make it a reality takes courage, confidence and hard work. Champions have the ability to find their own path, amid all of life's distractions, and achieve their dreams.

U.S. Ski Team: *Do you remember the first time you felt like a champion?*

MS: At the 2002 Olympics, after a great result in the downhill, I was standing in the finish area with my parents, family and friends. We were all so happy, and I understood then that it was not about me, it was about the moment and the journey that everybody had taken to get there. Champions have the ability to make everybody around them a better person and that moment inspired me through the rest of my career.

U.S. Ski Team: *What is the biggest piece of advice you have for U.S. Ski Team athletes who want to be sitting where you are today?*

MS: Set your goals high and surround yourself with people who will inspire you and help you along your path. Whatever you truly want in your heart you can achieve it. Don't get distracted, but also don't take yourself too seriously, and

have a lot of fun along the way.