



# Reaching the **SUMMIT**

By Aline A. Newman

**Olympic champion Diann Roffe-Steinrotter knows that winning isn't everything.**

**D**iann Roffe-Steinrotter zooms down the icy mountainside at seventy miles per hour, her skis vibrating against the frozen snow like chattering teeth. The trees, the gates, the cheering fans—everything whizzes past her in a foggy blur. There is no time left to decide whether to speed up, slow down, or even be careful. Diann made all those decisions hours before when she was “reading the hill.” Now she races by memory and instinct. Her eyes focus straight ahead, searching for only one thing—the fastest way down the mountain.

In Lillehammer, Norway, at the 1994 Winter Olympics, Diann found the fastest way down. She flew from the top of the mountain to the bottom in one minute and twenty-two seconds, winning the gold medal in the Super Giant Slalom for the United States and stunning the world.

Perhaps no one was more stunned than Diann herself. After trying for the silver medal in the 1992 Olympics, Diann had fallen

into a slump. At twenty-six, she was older than her teammates, and many people thought her abilities were starting to decline. When tryouts started for the 1994 U.S. Olympic team, one coach even hinted that Diann might not qualify. After so many years of practice, it appeared that her dream of winning a gold medal might never be fulfilled.



**Diann Roffe-Steinrotter has struggled at times. But those struggles have made her a champion.**

Diann had spent most of her life with skis attached to her feet. Both of her parents were ski instructors. “When I was three years old, they kind of plopped my brother and me out on the hill,” Diann says.

When she was five, she joined the ski team at Brantling Ski Area near Rochester, New York, about fifteen minutes from home. From then on, skiing dominated her life.

“We’d come home from school, do homework, and Mom would pack up a basket for dinner,” Diann says. “Then we’d go out and ski until it was time to come home and go to bed. It was fun.”

Diann also enjoyed school, but training and ski meets required a lot of traveling. Because she missed so many classes, Diann and her parents decided that she should attend a private school that permitted a flexible schedule.

In 1985, Diann became the first American and the youngest woman ever to win a world championship in her event. She

was only seventeen years old.

Then the fun stopped.

Nagging injuries and the pressure to be the best began to wear Diann down. She slammed into a slalom pole and tore a tendon in her knee, missing most of one season. Then she fell in an important race. Her world ranking dropped from second place to sixtieth. Finally, she lost her spot on the U.S. Ski Team. In just a few years, Diann had gone from being the best skier in the world to the back of the pack.

Her luck didn't improve soon. In fact, she didn't win another international championship for nine years! She thought about quitting, but she never did.

"Something in the back of my mind kept saying, 'you're too good,'" Diann says. "If I had just walked away from skiing, I would have thought about it for the rest of my life."

So instead of quitting, Diann vowed to put the past behind her and start again.

"What's done is done," she told herself. "Nobody can change what they did five minutes ago. They can only change what they're going to do in the next five minutes."

So Diann moved back home



with her parents and began to train harder than ever. Her skiing continued to improve until the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville, France. There, she won the silver medal.

"I was really happy," Diann says. "But my life didn't stop right there. I thought about what was going on, and I kept trying to make a difference every day."

Two years later—despite knee operations, her string of losing seasons, and all the people who thought she couldn't do it—Diann won the gold medal at the 1994 Olympic Games in Norway.

Was it worth the struggle? Diann definitely thinks so. Her career so far has taught her not just about winning but also about losing.

"I've traveled all over the world," she says. "I've learned how to handle frustration and how to congratulate my friends graciously. I've learned how to be a good loser.

"And that's important," says Diann with a smile, "because you lose a lot more than you win."

Even if you're a champion.



You could say that Diann grew up on the slopes. Here she is at 2½ (left, in orange), 7 (above), and 10 (right).

## Tips from a Champion

Here are some skiing tips from Diann Roffe-Steinrotter.

### Have Fun

As a kid, Diann skied with her older brother and his friends. "There was a whole group of us. We played Follow the Leader all the time, and we always looked for jumps."

### Take Lessons

"Listen to your instructor," Diann says. It's the fastest way to learn. Many school districts offer programs that include transportation, lift tickets, and instruction. They're a good place to start.

### Go Out for the Team

The soccer team, that is! Diann is married to a soccer coach. She says soccer keeps you thinking about your feet, and it requires plenty of side-to-side movement—just like skiing.

### Focus on Your Own Performance

Don't compare yourself to skiers who might be better than you. Just keep practicing and working at improving. "If you worked hard and did the best you could, then it was a good day for you. Be happy."

