



News Release

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Olympic Gold Medalist Ted Ligety Admits, “The Tai Chi helped some”

At the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy, Ted Ligety shocked the world when he finished first place in the Alpine combined event to win the gold medal. This year, Ligety is on fire, smashing the competition in the giant slalom by margins not seen in 30 years. But only two years prior to Ligety’s Olympic gold medal performance, he was added to the U.S. Ski Team’s 2004 Developmental Team—the inglorious, wait-and-see collection of young, self-sponsored athletes. Ligety’s baffling ascent to athletic stardom caused many to wonder how he accomplished it in a sport so few Americans ever claim notoriety.

Ligety admitted in an e-mail to Tommy Kirchhoff, “I’d say the Tai Chi helped some.”

In May 2004, (then) U.S. Ski Team athletic trainer Sasha Rearick asked Tommy Kirchhoff to teach Tai Chi to the men’s alpine team. Ted Ligety, Erick Schlopy, Bryon Friedman, T.J. Lanning, Jeremy Transue, Adam Cole and Sasha Rearick all began intensive classes two or three times each week at Kirchhoff’s studio in Park City, Utah.

Kirchhoff explains, “I knew these guys would like the training because our Tai Chi style is extremely martial. In addition to teaching Tai Chi forms, I taught the guys plenty of techniques & applications like joint locks, escapes, throws, etc. Ted Ligety was the most dedicated in the group, and I could tell he practiced the form much more than the others. Six months later, when Ted started finishing competitively in World Cup races, Sasha told me Ted was still practicing his Tai Chi form.” Kirchhoff continues, “Tai Chi body skills are very different than strength or cardio training. Posture, breathing, and relaxation facilitate the primary movement--waist turning--which is much like the Chubby Checker Twist. The whole body has to follow the waist, so coordination becomes optimized along the kinetic chain. Like me, Ted Ligety finds these kinds of body skills directly employable in alpine skiing.”

Kirchhoff’s abstract, “A Study On How To Apply Tai Chi to Alpine Skiing” was published by the International Congress on Science & Skiing in December 2010.