

Cross-Country Skier Jessie Diggins is Ready to Test Her Endurance at Olympic Winter Games

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For some people, endurance sports like cross-country skiing might not exactly sound like their idea of fun. But for Olympic champion [Jessie Diggins](#), being outside in the snow, competing for hours, is exactly how she wants to spend the day.

“It’s what we like to call ‘type two’ fun,” Diggins says. “Maybe it’s not fun in the moment, but afterwards you’re like, that was fun because it was so hard. Our sport has a lot of that delayed gratification, ‘type two’ fun element to it.”

Known for her positive attitude and for wearing glitter sparkles on her face during races, the cross-country skier relies on her mental toughness to get through challenging training days and long races. Depending on the snow, a 30-kilometer race (roughly 19 miles) can take up to an hour and a half, which, according to Diggins, is a long time to be inside your own head.

“It’s a lot of time to ask yourself, ‘Why am I doing this?’” she says. “But you really get to find out what you’re made of during those long races. You have to dig deep and decide that you really want it. All the time you spent practicing; this is the moment to put it to work.”

A two-time Olympian, Diggins has been on the U.S. Ski and Snowboard team since 2011 and made American history with Kikkan Randall when the two won the team sprint freestyle in PyeongChang, making it the first Olympic gold medal for the United States in cross-country skiing. The Team Toyota athlete was also the first American to win the FIS Tour de Ski, a 10-day cross-country skiing event that includes eight individual races. Heading into Beijing 2022, Diggins plans on competing in every event she can — a new endurance challenge, training for which will require a lot of “type two” fun.

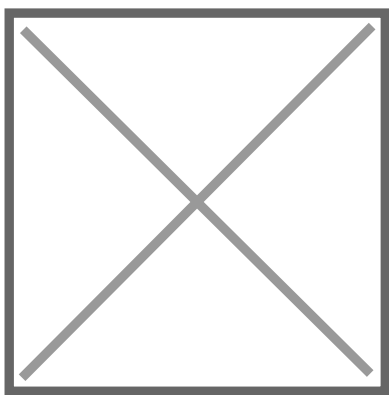
“It sounds cheesy, but you have to love the sport,” she says. “You have to love what you do because there’s no instant gratification. It’s a lot of work, but every single day is a chance to learn and improve. Win the race; lose the race. You gain so much from the process of trying.”

All Ships Rise

Born and raised in Afton, Minnesota, Diggins has been skiing since before she could walk. Her parents love being active and outside in nature and instilled their passion for cross-country skiing in her at a young age.

“I grew up in my dad’s backpack while he skied,” she says. “My family taught me how to ski and then they got me to every single start line, through a lot of crashes and wipeouts, tears, and frustration. They are the best support system.”

Eventually, Diggins joined the Minnesota Youth Ski League and skied with her friends. The sport was just fun and games at first, but it naturally developed into a love for racing. In the seventh grade, she was tapped to take the place of an older girl on her school team who got sick before a conference meet.



“The adrenaline of the moment and the idea that they needed me to fill the spot on the team — that was so empowering,” she says. “I was thinking I’m going to go out there and score some points to help the team, even if it’s as the youngest one.”

In ninth grade, Diggins started racing junior nationals, which quickly turned into senior nationals and racing internationally. While she’s had her fair share of injuries and other challenges, she has never considered quitting; she loves the sport and her fellow skiers too much. While some may think cross-country skiing is an individual competition, the Olympian says it’s all about the team.

“We kind of band together in support of one another’s goals,” she says. “When I have a great race, that reflects well on all of my training partners. It shows that they’ve pushed me, and they’ve pulled me up to get on that level. And I want the same thing for them because when one of us does well, all ships rise.”

Supporting Her Team

There are two styles in cross-country skiing, classic and freestyle. Most people are familiar with classic: Athletes take long strides and ski on a track. In freestyle, skiers skate in a way that looks more like roller blading, where competitors move their skis in a “V” shape. Skiathlon events include a combination of the two techniques. Because there are no lanes, races — especially those on shorter courses — require both technique and strategy.

“You need to be in a very confident headspace where you’re aware of where all the other bodies are around you,” Diggins says. “Sometimes you have one shot to squeeze through a gap to make your move in a sprint.”

Leading up to this year’s Olympic Winter Games, Diggins’ goal is to compete in all six cross-country events: 10-kilometer classic, 15-kilometer skiathlon, 30-kilometer freestyle, 50-kilometer freestyle, 4×10-kilometer relay, sprint freestyle and team sprint classic. While Diggins is training for all the events, she definitely has her favorites.

“It’s no secret that I live for the team events,” she says. “When you have the opportunity to race, not just for your own goals, but the goals of the people who feel like your family, it’s really special.”

This Olympic cycle, Diggins is one of the more experienced skiers on the team, so she’s excited to support the younger athletes on Team USA and Team Toyota as they navigate the spotlight. When it comes to dealing with the unique pressure of the Games, Diggins says that’s what the sparkles are for.

“It’s so easy to get wrapped up in the nerves,” she says. “I used to get so nervous that it was just energy wasted. The sparkles are a reminder that this should be fun. I get to be here; I get to do this. It’s also this promise to

myself that I'm just going to go out there and smile and do the absolute best I can do. It's a way of pulling it away from results and more toward the process and the joy that sport has always brought me."