

PHIL MCNICHOL (Park City, Utah)

Phil McNichol led the men's U.S. Alpine Ski Team during its most successful period in history, helping boost athletes like Bode Miller, Daron Rahlves, Ted Ligety and others to success at the World Cup, World Championships and Olympics. In his tenure from 2002-08, seven different athletes gained podium finishes, with the men's team twice finishing second in the Nations' Cup standings. His athletes amassed 98 World Cup podiums with nine Olympic and World Championship medals.

As part of a non-skiing family growing up in Connecticut, McNichol was an unlikely candidate to rise to a level of success within international ski racing. As a kid, he tagged along with buddies to resorts. His first pair of skis were hand-me-downs from a friend's brother. Sadly, his parents passed before they ever saw him ski.

He never had any intent to make a career in skiing. But a chance trip out west changed his pathway. On a stopover in Flagstaff, Ariz., it snowed. So he borrowed skis and went to Arizona Snowbowl for his first powder experience. He decided to stay, attending Northern Arizona University and coaching the college ski team on the side. Ultimately, he made his way north to coach the Park City Ski Team from 1993-97, where he caught the eye of U.S. Ski Team coaches.

McNichol joined the U.S. Ski Team staff in 1997, first as a development coach then advancing to the Europa Cup team. After the 2002 Olympics, alpine director Jesse Hunt tabbed him to head the men's team after the retirement of Bill Egan. That set in motion one of the most successful periods in men's U.S. Alpine Ski Team history.

In five years as a development coach, he produced international results at every level. But in his six years at the helm of the men's national alpine team, he assembled a team of coaches who led the U.S. men to their greatest sustained period in history. That stretch saw 42 World Cup victories amongst 98 podium finishes, six World Cup titles including two overall, four World Championship titles and the first Olympic gold medal in a dozen years.

Coming into McNichols' first season, both Daron Rahlves and Bode Miller brought proven success. But in 2002-03 they took it to a new level with 13 World Cup podiums and four wins between them. One of those victories, Rahlves' win in the fabled Hahnenkamm, dramatically elevated the entire program. At the World Championships in St. Moritz, Switzerland, Miller won three medals including two gold, with Erik Schlopy medaling, as well. The team finished third in the Nations' Cup – its best finish ever to date.

During that time, McNichols was craftily building a culture based on team success. While it may have been Rahlves and Miller carrying the heavy freight, McNichols found ways to carry that spirit down the entire team roster. Every athlete and coach would don flame-design shirts to celebrate any podium finish. It was contagious.

Miller, meanwhile, was igniting U.S. Ski Team fans around the world. In 2005, he went into the powerful Bormio, Italy speed run and swept downhill and super G gold at World Championships, partnering with Rahlves for a one-two downhill finish. Rahlves also took bronze in giant slalom.

A year later, young Ted Ligety – who McNichol had coached on the Park City Ski Team – broke through with an unexpected Olympic gold in alpine combined. Soon athletes like Scott Macartney, Steven Nyman and Marco Sullivan were cracking the World Cup downhill podium.

One of the underlying accomplishments that spoke volumes about the depth of the team was finishing a best-ever second in the overall Nations' Cup standings in 2005 and 2006.

A good part of McNichol's success as a coach was his skill as an enterprising business leader. He forged business partnerships with companies designed to specifically support his athletes, including a relationship with the Trentino region which sponsored an on-snow training center in northern Italy for the team.

After leaving the team in 2008 to plot his next adventure, McNichol created the most notable alpine racing event in Europe outside the World Cup with his Alpine Rockfest. During its heyday, Alpine Rockfest was the biggest payday for racers with an innovative new format that was a hit with fans, television and sponsors.