



The Wi Way

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obstacles
stood in
David Wise's
way, but
with God he
overcame
them all

It was easy to write off David Wise as a contender for a second gold medal.

To fans, his qualifying runs for the men's freeski halfpipe competition at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics were underwhelming at the least.

Wise crashed in the first of the two runs, and was forced to put down an easy run with safer tricks just to make it to the final round of competition. A gold medalist in the first freeski halfpipe event at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, his score of 79.6 put him in eighth place out of the 12 skiers heading to the finals.

Two days later, calamity struck again. Wise thought his first of the three finals runs was set up to be the best of his life: He landed his first two tricks, a double cork 1080 and double cork 1260 — maneuvers with two off-axis rotations — but crashed during the transition after. One of his skis had come off when the binding malfunctioned.

"Well, that wasn't how it's supposed to go," he said with a laugh, addressing the cameras at the bottom of the halfpipe.

For his second run, Wise switched to a different pair of skis and tightened the bindings. Yet he wrecked again — another binding failure.

"Trust me, I'm just as surprised as you guys were," Wise said in an Instagram live video. "I definitely had to take a minute and calm my anger down, because I was just frustrated. Every halfpipe skier is going to walk out of a binding from time to time ... but having that happen twice within two runs was really abnormal, and on two different pairs of skis, no less."

With only one run to go in the finals, many viewers thought Wise's quest for a second Olympic gold medal was over.

But this wasn't the first time he'd dealt with hardship during a competition. His two years leading up to the Games were rife with personal and athletic setbacks. If anything, the failed runs stoked the fire of his determination.

"The problem," Wise wrote in his blog, "is the haters forgot who I am. Or, perhaps, more accurately they never bothered to figure out who I was in the first place."

se

to Gold

This is who David Wise is: The athlete who completed the most impressive and technically-difficult run ever performed in halfpipe skiing, and won his second consecutive Olympic gold — glorifying God all the way through.

A Wise Upbringing

From his earliest memories (and Wise estimates they start around age 3), he was skiing. A native of Reno, Nev., Wise was one of three competitive daredevil siblings who lived for the nearby slopes of the Sky Tavern ski resort.

Four years younger than his twin sisters Jessica and Christy, Wise followed them in ski racing until age 11, when he was intrigued by the jumps and tricks he saw other skiers perform at the terrain park — the discipline known as freestyle skiing, or freeskiing.

Though Wise is the first to admit he wasn't initially a standout, his family's work ethic made him one.

"I'll be honest, I wasn't the most talented kid growing up. Things didn't come super naturally to me," Wise said on Instagram. "But my sisters and my dad and mom taught me how to work hard, and I just never took 'no' for an answer. I said that I wanted to be the absolute best skier that I could possibly be, and I wasn't going to give up until I accomplished what I accomplished."

Over the next several years, Wise trained with renowned Tahoe ski coach Clay Beck and competed in as many freeski events as he could: moguls, aerials, big air, halfpipe and slopestyle. Eventually halfpipe — "by far the most dangerous and most exciting," according to Wise's blog — became his specialty.

In the halfpipe, skiers whiz up and down 22-foot-high walls slick with icy snow, performing tricks when they're propelled into the air. Judges award a score based on a combination of trick difficulty, height from the top of the wall, technique, progression in the run, and variety of tricks.

While he honed his skills in the halfpipe, Wise worked on his faith as well. Raised in a Christian home, Wise always felt drawn to having a relationship with God.

"[God] spoke to my heart as a child and I was never able to get Him out of my head," Wise said in an interview with Sports Spectrum. "Even when I tried to walk away He was always able to pull me back."

The "walking away" occurred in high school, when Wise's parents split up and the sisters he looked up to left for college.

"All of the sudden I had this massive structure of support missing from my life. That's when I really walked away and did my own thing. I went through a journey of discovering whether my faith in God really was my own or just something I believed because I was told of it from a young age on," he said.

Wise read the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and the Apocrypha, questioning the validity of his beliefs until he found the faith he'd been searching for.

"Jesus' message is so unique compared to any other message in the world," Wise said. "Now when people ask me why I have the faith that I have, it's an easy answer. I know because I took the time to discover why I believe it."

It was also during high school that Wise's training began to pay off; he won his first U.S. national championship title in halfpipe at age 15, and went pro at 18. Dozens of competitions and wins followed in the next few years, including three X Games freeski halfpipe gold medals.

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PyeongChang 2018



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FREESKI HALFPIPE

HOW DO HALFPIPE SKIERS COMPETE?

Skiers plunge up and down the 22-foot-high walls of the halfpipe, performing tricks when they're launched into the air above the walls. The most difficult tricks earn more points, as does a clean run with no falls.

HOW ARE HALFPIPE SKIERS JUDGED?

A team of five judges evaluates the athletes on their overall impression of the run. They evaluate based on the amplitude or height reached above the walls, difficulty of tricks, variety, execution, and progression. Each judge awards a score between 1-100, and the scores are averaged together to create the final score.

COMMONS TRICKS:

Alley Oop: A spin going against the direction of travel

Cork: An off-axis rotation. In halfpipe, inverting or flipping once is a single cork. Flip twice for a double.

Switch: Skiing backwards

Wise also found time to start a family. In 2011 at age 21, he married his wife, Alexandra, whom he credits as the “superstar” of his family. Their daughter, Nayeli, was born later that year.

He qualified for the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, and competed in the first ever freeskiing halfpipe event at the Games. In spite of poor pipe construction and an adverse weather combo of sleet and heavy snow, Wise landed his run and won the gold medal.

Post-Olympics, the Wise family's upward trajectory continued: Alexandra became pregnant with their second child, the couple led the youth group at their church in Reno, and enjoyed watching their family grow. Life was good.

Reigniting the Furnace

Following his triumph in Sochi, though, a slew of troubles plagued Wise and his family for the next few years, hindering his athletic abilities and testing his resolve.

Alexandra suffered from severe postpartum depression after giving birth to their son, Malachi. Baby Malachi experienced a febrile seizure while Wise was traveling, Alexandra's father died, and both she and Wise each lost a grandmother. Furthermore, Wise was devastated when one of the students in his youth group committed suicide, and when his sister Christy, now an Air Force pilot, lost one of her legs in a paddleboarding accident.

In skiing, Wise struggled to heal from debilitating shoulder and back injuries, and sustained three concussions. His performances suffered — he didn't make the podium in any elite competition in 2016 — and several sponsors dropped him.

“On paper, those were the worst two years of my competitive career, but in my spirit and heart, what my wife and I have been saying is that those were some of the best years of our lives,” Wise said, “because we were able to use these adversities to find the true meaning of joy. True joy doesn't come from everything going right; true joy comes from being content knowing God is good and He has a plan that's better than yours.”

Though it appeared Wise's career was over, he credits his trust in God and distrust in the naysayers for the resurgence he eventually experienced.

“I am thankful for the sponsors that dropped me and the short-sighted people that counted me out,” Wise wrote in his blog. “You guys are responsible in a major way for reigniting the furnace in my heart, and I have never felt as passionate and excited about skiing and competing as I do right now.”

After a banner season in the winter of 2017, Wise qualified for his second Olympic Games in January of 2018, and won his fourth gold in the X Games. Then he headed to Pyeongchang.

Third Time's a Charm

It all came down to Wise's third and last run in the finals. After the two bindings malfunctions in his previous runs, he made the decision to tighten them as high as they would go, which is considered exceptionally dangerous. To him it was worth the risk.

“If I was to have a bad crash with those bindings torqued all the way up, I could potentially break my tibia or fibula, or blow my knee, or whatever,” Wise said on Instagram. “But it was the Olympics, and I was going to land a run, and not have my skis come flying off [as] the reason that I couldn't land a run.”

Before he slid down the start to the halfpipe, Wise reminded himself why he was competing.

“For me it comes from knowing that I'm here to glorify God, whether I get the glory or not,” Wise said. “I was able to just scale back, and I thought, ‘If God doesn't want me to land a run today, then I'm not going to land a run today. But if I can go out there and use skiing as my act of worship, and land a run, then I'm going to do it.’”

The run he put down was one for the record books: he repeated his winning X Games run, in which he landed four double corks spinning in four different directions. He is the first athlete to do so in a single run, and his flawless technique earned him the highest score (97.2) — and the gold medal. It was the best run of his life, and the most difficult halfpipe skiing run ever completed.

“I can honestly tell you, I didn't think that God's plan was going to be me wearing this gold medal,” Wise said, indicating the medal around his neck. “It wasn't my strength out there that enabled me to do that; I was fully dependent on Him.” [S](#)