

Faith on the Ice and Snow

KELLY CLARK (USA) SNOWBOARDING

Kelly Clark refers to it as “the fall heard around the world.”

Entering the 2006 Winter Olympics, Clark was the odds-on favorite to repeat as gold medalist in the snowboarding halfpipe event. But even though a nasty spill erased that dream, a decision to accept Christ two years earlier provided a much softer landing. “If I hadn’t had that shift in my life, I think my world would have come crumbling down,” Clark says.

Prior to 2004, Clark’s life was consumed by snowboarding. Her world-class journey started as a 7-year-old at Vermont’s Mount Snow ski resort and has resulted in a globetrotting career chock-full of jaw-dropping medal performances.

“I thought that being successful and achieving my goals would go hand-in-hand with being happy,” Clark says. “But by the time I was 18 years old, I had achieved everything that was in my heart to do and at the same time I wasn’t finding fulfillment.”

On the verge of quitting her dream job, Clark randomly approached a Christian woman who was staying in the same hotel. After overhearing the phrase, “God still loves you,” she couldn’t ignore an undeniable “stirring” within her spirit. And now,

Clark taps into the kind of creativity that only comes from the Creator Himself.

“There’s no place where you can get freedom apart from Him,” Clark says. “I’ve brought that freedom into my snowboarding.

It really does set me apart from a lot of the athletes. I get to do

what I love with the One that I love. There’s no better way to do it

than with that kind of freedom.”

CHAD HEDRICK (USA) SPEED SKATING

When you watch the Winter Olympics this year, you might see someone who resembles mega speed skating star Chad Hedrick.

You know, the brash American who won gold in his first Olympic race

(5,000 meter) then went on to claim silver in the 10,000-meter and

bronze in the 1,500-meter races?

Perhaps you remember Hedrick as the wild party animal who boldly predicted he would match Eric Heiden’s record five gold

medals from 1984. Maybe it was the public feud with fellow American

Shani Davis, whom Hedrick called out for not competing in a team event.

Yes, you might see a guy who looks a lot like Chad Hedrick, but it’s

not him. Well, at least not anymore.

“I was this major, fierce competitor that hated to lose,” Hedrick recalls. “I used to want to throw my skates

when I lost.

I was trying to show everybody that I was the best in the world. If

there was a guy competing against me, I wanted him to be scared of me.

I wanted to intimidate him.”

For Hedrick, that formula was, quite honestly, pretty successful. He set three American records and half a dozen world

records. But it was his marriage to wife Lynsey and her Christian

influence that helped him realize he was missing an important piece of

the equation.

“I’d never really acknowledged the

Lord and never appreciated what He’s given me,” Hedrick says.

“But He

continued to bless me on a daily basis. Even though I didn’t show Him

any love at all, He gave me something special. Now I want to bring

glory to His name. I want to be a positive role model and hopefully

open people’s eyes to the good life.”

Follow Chad Hedrick’s journey to the 2010 Winter Olympics at .

JAROME IGINLA (CANADA) ICE HOCKEY

It was eight years ago in Salt Lake City when Jarome

Iginla caught his first glimpse of Olympic glory. Feeling like a kid in

a candy store, the budding NHL star was too busy gawking at the jerseys

hanging around the locker room to notice he didn’t have a locker of his

own.

"I got a chance to play with [Hall of Famers] Mario Lemieux and Steve Yzerman," Iginla recalls. "It was a big adjustment. I was one of the younger guys, and I had a makeshift area, but it was a huge thrill."

As a member of the Canadian national team, Iginla helped his country win its first gold medal in 50 years. The championship match took place against the host American squad in arguably one of the most electric hockey games in Olympic history.

Now in his 12th full season with the Calgary Flames, the five-time NHL All-Star has come a long way from his improbable upbringing as a biracial kid reared in Alberta, where by divorced parents—a Christian father from Nigeria and a Buddhist mother from Oregon—and his grandparents.

While playing junior hockey as a teenager, Iginla began exploring his father's faith. That journey has led him to a continually growing relationship with Jesus. "I'm extremely blessed in so many ways," Iginla says. "I want to serve Christ, and in doing that I want to give back in as many different ways as I can. By serving my family and friends and others, I'm trying to say thank you to God every day."

BROCK KREITZBURG (USA) BOBSLED

When Brock Kreitzburg was a kid, he used to stand in front of a mirror and practice giving interviews as an NFL star. Turns out, Kreitzburg's preparation has been quite useful-just not in the way he once imagined.

The former all-conference football player at the University of Toledo now answers probing questions about bobsledding-a sport he admits he learned about through the iconic movie *Cool Runnings*.

Just six years into the sport, Kreitzburg was representing the USA in the four-man event at the 2006 Winter Olympics. While his highly touted team finished a disappointing sixth, Kreitzburg has managed to enjoy a successful career with six gold medals and seven silver medals in World Cup competition. "It's really by God's grace that I've been successful in my athletic endeavors," he says.

Kreitzburg, who accepted Christ during college, has relied heavily on his faith in the last two years. During a time when he admits to taking some of his focus away from God, he discovered a nagging hip injury that would require radical reconstructive surgery.

"This year was like I was a rookie again," Kreitzburg says. "Because I had the hip replacement, I've had to go out there and

prove myself again. There have been several times that I've literally cried out to Him, but He's been faithful. My plans all crash and burn.

So I trust that His plan is what's best for me."

To learn more about Brock Kreitzburg's testimony and his Olympic quest, visit [brock](#) .

ERIN PAC (USA) BOBSLED

After six years on the competitive bobsled circuit, Erin Pac was still searching for that elusive first medal performance in the two-woman event. As she lined up on a brisk November day at the track in Whistler, British Columbia, something peculiar took place.

Pac decided to have fun and let loose. More importantly, she chose to surrender the moment to God. "It was a very weird feeling because I'm so competitive and I don't like to lose or do poorly," Pac says. "It worked out that time because I won the bronze, but at the Olympics, I might not win a medal. My goal isn't always to win that medal, but to be happy and know that I did the best I could do on that day because He was with me."

Originally a track athlete at Springfield College in Missouri, Pac, a four-time international bobsled medalist, grew up attending church. But it was the influence of pastor Derek Strain, her

team chaplain in Lake Placid, New York, that has helped her fully embrace the concept of divine purpose.

“God gives me the strength to do what I can do,” Pac says. “I know He’s put me here for a reason. I don’t know what that reason is. That reason could be to win an Olympic medal. That reason could be to just show my light to everyone else or to be a good witness. It’s taken me a long time to get that point of trust, but now I realize that it’s not always about winning a medal.”

To view videos of these and other Christian Olympic athletes competing or sharing their testimonies, visit *faithfulathletes* ..