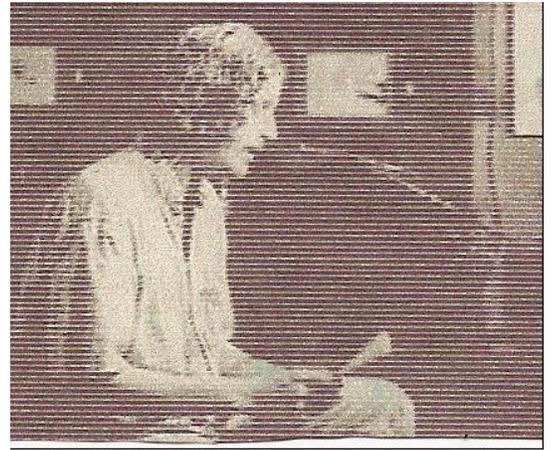


“Youth vs. Time”



I will start by saying what an unabashed fan of the Olympic Games I have always been.

The Olympics are such a realization of dreams that began for these extraordinary athletes at a very young age. A lifetime's worth of dedication and devotion to something you fell in love with in your youth. This thing that is a constant in your life, on your mind perpetually, virtually impossible to distract from in any situation. It's always there.

Sort of like kids who fall in love with rock n' roll music.

I was moved on many levels by Lindsey Vonn's essential retirement from Olympic downhill skiing. She has enjoyed success beyond anyone's wildest dreams, becoming on the world stage the most successful American downhill racer in history. Yet, even with those achievements, you'll never want to turn away from something you love with such intensity.

“Sometimes my will is stronger than my body,” Vonn said in one interview. In another she tearfully admitted, “I wish I could keep going. I have so much fun and I love what I do.”

She competed in her first Olympic Games at the tender age of seventeen in Salt Lake City. While she was chasing the clock down a steep hill many kids that age were seeing the first live musical performances, and falling just as hard for their own passionate pursuits of a source of joy. And why wouldn't you?

Seventeen is a beautiful age, Stevie Nicks sang of being on the edge of it. It's all in front of you: you're going to see this band forever with everyone you're with that first time. They're never gonna break up and none of those friendships will fade. No one is ever gonna die, onstage or off.

You're never going to get hurt as an athlete of 17. You're never going to have to come back from that and learn to trust your body is once again strong enough to do all the things you have imprinted in your brain. You're never going to have to wonder and question and then prove to yourself that you can.

“You and I are gonna live forever....”

But then people do die and beloved teammates fade out of the current rhythm of your life. Bands break up. Relationships break up. Hearts get broken.

It's then you develop a new connection and communication with this thing you have loved since you were a kid. In the midst of arduous, troubling, frightening times you may have occasionally neglected this love, even considered abandoning it. At others you wholeheartedly re-embraced it with a renewed passion. It might be favorite old record or discovering a new band, making a new friend at a show. It might be reconnecting with a former opponent, nailing that time that seemed unobtainable during those countless sessions rehabbing that nagging injury, or being a friendly mentor to a new teammate.

In my own way, I feel like I got pretty close to an Olympian level in my love of music. In 1998 I saw 457 bands play at least three songs live - a prerequisite that my then Spin.com colleague, a continuing life-long pal, Dan O'Connor (a person as responsible for my start in rock criticism as Steve Morse, my dear friend and editor/mentor at the Boston Globe)

established as a rule and that we both maintained throughout that wonderful year.

Back then that might have meant hearing three songs from three different acts in nine different venues on a New Year's Eve that began with "First Night" festivities on Boston's legendary Common and concluded jumping between the Middle East's three rooms and T.T the Bear's in Cambridge's Central Square, with all those glorious stops in between.

"Glory days, they'll pass you by in the wink of a young girl's eye. Glory days..."

I hope Lindsey Vonn embraced these games. I hope that they brought back memories of her career that she may have forgotten. I hope she realized and absolutely embraced the things she has done, the people she has met, the places she has been and the things she has seen. All because of something wonderful she fell in love with as a youngster. That has been the incredible gift that music - and writing about it - has given me.

"Truth hits everybody. Truth hits everyone..."

And, I hope she knows it will be there forever. It won't be as high profile as what she has already accomplished, but it's still a lifelong love. And, now she can share that love with friends for the pure joy of it. The way she did when she first fell in love. The same way I did every single time I made a mix for someone, or reviewed some music that somebody later told me they loved and that they had been introduced to by me.

So, if it's alpine skiing or writing about rock music, it's been a gift, something that likely arrived so fast and so strong at such a young age that it stuck with you forever. Maybe that defines passion.

So, share it with people you love, whatever it is that you have loved all your life.

That's what I hope that I just did.

-Tom Kielty