

# Katie Uhlaender

## Olympian

Four years ago, Breckenridge's Katie Uhlaender took sixth in the Olympic skeleton race; shortly after, she added back-to-back World Cup titles to her resumé. In the past year, the 25-year-old has overcome serious injuries and the death of her father, former major league outfielder Ted Uhlaender, to qualify for this month's Winter Games in Vancouver. Here, she talks about speed, perseverance, and dad's lessons.

**When I was growing up,** my dream was to be a baseball player like my dad. I wanted to be the first woman to play in the major leagues. I made the varsity baseball team in high school, but then I realized the boys were much bigger and stronger.

**My first skeleton run** ever was in Lake Placid. The first run was a half-mile, and I thought it was completely cheesy—it definitely wasn't fast enough. But then we moved up to the top, and it was the real deal. It's rough, you can't remember what happened, and everything is like tunnel vision.

**Eight weeks later,** I was national champion. It wasn't much of a choice from there: It was either go to college or go to the Olympics, and I chose to go to the Olympics.

**Less than a year after** I got into the sport, I was training in Lillehammer, Norway, and really struggling. I was black and blue from my chin to my pinkie toe from the training. I bit a hole through my tongue. I could barely walk or hold my sled. I thought maybe I should just give back my national championship and quit. But I stuck with it, and then I won a ton of races in a row.

**I broke my kneecap** into more than five pieces while I was snowmobiling last April. The doctors said it was going to be tough to make it back in



time for the season, but there was no doubt I was going to be back for the Olympics. Then I broke it again dancing in Las Vegas in August.

**Having a twice-shattered kneecap** and only having eight weeks to train before the Olympics is not the way I

wanted to go into Vancouver, but I'm going to do the best I can. It kind of makes me want to keep going for another four years, because I want to walk into an Olympic year as a legend. I don't want to go in saying, "Oh, well, she used to be great, but now she screwed it all up."

**There's nothing that can** prepare you for the Olympics. I'm really glad I've experienced it once because my nerves will be a bit calmer. My goal this time wasn't just to go to the games—my goal is to medal.

**The top speed** I've reached is 86 miles per hour.

**Speed is a commodity.** The faster you go, the safer you are—at all times in life.

**I do a lot of sports:** skiing, snowmobiling, bouldering, skydiving, paragliding, kiteboarding. Honestly, skeleton is the safest sport I do. It's not that dangerous.

**My dad was my biggest fan,** and I was his biggest fan. I miss him. He gave me my work ethic, my drive, and that attitude that never quits.

**The best lesson** he ever taught me? If you're going to do something, do it right or don't do it at all. He also taught me perseverance. If you know you can do something, don't quit until you do it right.

**Colorado is home.** Every time I go home, my whole body feels calm and I feel safe, and I know that I'm in one of the best places in the world.

**The only thing to fear** is failure, so I try not to think about it and just have fun. It's sledding—and sledding fast.  
—INTERVIEW BY DEVON O'NEIL