Slalom E-Book
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Section VI - Case Study : Introduction

This section contains 6 case studies of the best slalomists in the word today. I have simply told their stories in a chronological way in the case studies themselves, saving the interpretation and comparison for here, in this introduction.

As you compare these boaters, it seems to me the following themes jump out:

* All 6 of them started paddling before age 10 and most by age 6. They also had good support systems when they were young -- places to train, other kids to train with, coaching, and role models who had won World and even Olympic medals. They also all had warm weather training during the northern winters when they were seniors.

* They all also seem to have good parental support. The parents always seem to have been available to help make things work, like getting junior to training sessions before he could drive and so forth. But something else comes out: in no case did the parents overdo it, act like "Little League parents," as we say in the United States, that is, push too much, and brow-beat the kids into training too hard or taking the early competitions too seriously.

* The case studies give you a good sense of the long period of training and racing that finally leads up to a World or Olympic medal. We onlookers tend to concentrate only on what happened a few months before the medal. But in reality, it takes many years of other activities first. Those other activities are actually the main story and the big victories are only a small part, coming right at the end.

I think people often make the mistake of trying to copy the way a champion trains now, rather than trying to copy the way he trained when he was at a comparable stage of development.

In other words, it you attempt to take on the work-load of one of these top racers too soon or try to copy their technique too soon, you may find you just can't do it right now. You just need to work up to it, that's all. Find the period in their careers that is appropriate to where you are now and begin there.

* The French and German support systems seem almost ideal -- lively competitive structures with lots of opportunities to race at young ages but not too much pressure on you to win at that age, thus creating a lot of stress.

* Each of these athletes speaks of conquering the mental aspect of the sport as the final obstacle to their winning.

* All but Giddens talks about training and racing in wildwater when they were young and how useful that was. Giddens was also the only one who didn't have much access to artificial courses during the year.

* None of these athletes kept a training log but all have coaches who keep records. This is a different pattern from the past when many champions kept their own training logs.

* Each of these athletes had setbacks, but each overcame them.

In order to come to some conclusions about paddlers' size, weight and paddle lengths, and at what ages they hit certain benchmarks in their careers, I decided to do a little survey. I would particularly like to thank Marcus Flechtner and his phenominal index at www.slalom@flechtner.de for much of this information. I can't claim what I've done is a valid statistical sample, but I do think it's suggestive of the trends!

Here's a table I made of recent athletes:

Name	DOB	Height meters (feet)	Weight kilos (lbs)	Paddle Length cms (inches)	1st Senior Team year (age)	1st over-all EC/ WC Medal year (age)	1st WM Medal year (age)	1st Olympic Medal year (age)
K1								
Doerfler, F.	9/8/83	1.77 (5'10")	63 (139)	202	2002 (18)	2005 (21)	2005 (21)	--
Fix, O.	6/21/73	1.79 (5'10")	73 (161)	203	1993 (20)	--	1995 (22)	1996 (23)
Ford, D.	3/23/67	1.79 (5'10")	75 (165)	202.5	1985 (18)	2002 (35)	1999 (32)	--
Lefevre, F.	6/18/82	1.78 (5'10")	71 (156)	201	2001 (19)	2001 (19)	2002 (20)	2004 (22)
Peschier, B.	5/20/80	1.77 (5'10)	74-5 (163)	201-3	2000 (20)	2002 (22)	--	2004 (24)
Ratcliffe, P.	11/12/75	1.80 (5'11")	71 (156)	204	1994 (18)	1998 (22)	1999 (23)	2000 (24)
Walsh, C.	11/26/77	1.73 (5'8")	64 (141)	198	1999 (21)	2004 (26)	2006 (28)	2004 (26)
K1W								
Giddens, R.	9/19/77	1.70 (5'7")	64 (141)	200	1996 (19)	--	2002 (25)	2004 (27)
Hilgertova, S.	4/10/68	1.64 (5'41/2")	55 (121)	199.5-201	1988 (20)	1989 (21)	1997 (29)	1996 (28)
Kaliska, E.	1/19/72	1.72 (5'8")	65 (143)	202	1990 (18)	1998 (26)	2005 (33)	2004 (32)
C1								
Bell, Robin	11/16/77	1.93 (6'4")	86 (189)	151 (59.5)	1997 (19)	2003 (25)	1999 (21)	--
Estanguet, P	?/?/73	1.82 (5'11 1/2")	73 (161)	149 (58.5)	1994 (21)	1996 (23)	2002 (29)	1996 (23)
Estanguet, T	5/6/78	1.85 (6' 3/4")	74 (163)	150 (59)	1996	2003	2003	2000

Name	DOB	Height	Weight	Paddle Length	1st Senior Team	1st overall EC/WC	1st WM	1st Olympic
					(18)	(25)	(25)	(22)
Martikan, M	5/18/79	1.70 (5'7")	73 (161)	140 (55)	1995 (16)	1996 (17)	1995 (16)	1996 (17)
C2								
Hochschorner, Pa.	9/7/79	1.76 (5'9 3/4")	75 (165)	146 (57.5)	1998 (18)	1999 (19)	2002 (22)	2000 (20)
Hochschorner, Pe.	9/7/79	1.88 (6'2")	82 (180)	152 (60)	1998 (18)	1999 (19)	2002 (22)	2000 (20)

And then for comparative purposes, here's a table I made from an earlier cohort of athletes, primarily ones from the 1970s and 1980s that I wrote about in my earlier books:

Name	DOB	Height meters (feet)	Weight kilos (lbs)	Paddle Length cms (inches)	1st Senior Team year (age)	1st over-all EC/WC Medal year (age)	1st WM Medal year (age)	1st Olympic Medal year (age)
K1								
Fauster, P	10/25/56	1.72 (5'8")	70 (154.4)	206	1973 (17)	--	1979 (23)	--
Fox, R	6/5/60	1.75 (5'9")	70.8 (156)	206-7	1977 (17)	1988 (28)	1981 (21)	--
Hilgert, L	10/25/60	1.87 (6'1 3/4")	74.8 (165)	210	1980 (20)	1989 (29)	1981 (21)	--
Kerr, A	5/31/54	1.73 (5'8")	68.4 (150.4)	208	1977 (23)	--	1977 (23)	--
Prigent, J	5/16/54	1.75 (5'9")	70 (154)	207	1976 (22)	1980 (26)	1981 (27)	--
Sattler, N	10/4/51	1.69 (5'6 3/4")	69 (152)	206-8	1969 (18)	1974 (23)	1973 (22)	1972 (21)
Wolfhardt, E	9/30/58	1.85 (6' 3/4")	76 (168)	207	1975 (17)	--	1979 (21)	--
K1W								
Deppe, U.	12/9/53	1.80 (5'11")	61.7 (136)	203	1969 (16)	1974 (21)	1969 (16)	--
Grothaus, G.	2/20/55	1.66 (5'5 1/3")	56 (123)	?	1972 (17)	--	--	1972 (17)
Jerusalmi, M.	10/24/61	1.61 (5'3")	52 (114)	199	1979 (17)	1986 (24)	1987 (25)	1996 (24)
Harrison, L.	9/17/55	1.80 (5'11")	65.8 (145)	207	1975 (20)	--	1977 (22)	--
Hearn, C.	6/1/58	1.70 (5'7")	65.8 (145)	204-5	1977 (19)	1980 (22)	1979 (21)	--
Sharman, E.	8/8/57	1.78 (5'10")	59.9 (132)	208	1978	1980	1979	--

					(21)	(23)	(22)	
C1								
Hearn, D	4/17/59	1.78 (5'10")	72.6 (160)	149.9 (59)	1979 (20)	1980 (21)	1985 (26)	--
Lugbill, J	5/27/61	1.75 (5'9")	79.4 (175) (59)	149.9	1975 (14)	1980 (19)	1979 (18)	--
Robison, B	11/11/61	1.88 (6'2")	78.0 (172)	149.9 (59)	1977 (15)	--	1979 (17)	--
C2								
Garvis, M	10/27/59	1.84 (6'1/2")	83.9 (185)	143.5 (56.5)	1977 (18)	--	1981 (22)	--
Garvis, S	10/27/59	1.73 (5'8")	70.3 (155)	143.5 (56.5)	1977 (18)	--	1981 (22)	--
Haller, F	5/28/59	1.78 (5'10")	74.8 (170)	145 (57)	1981 (22)	1994 (35)	1983 (24)	--
Haller, L	8/2/57	184 (6'1/2")	79 (175)	153 (60.5)	1982 (25)	1994 (37)	1983 (26)	--
Jacobi, J	9/26/69	1.70 (5'7")	74 (163)	146 (57.5)	1987 (17)	1989 (19)	--	1992 (23)
Strausbaugh	7/23/63	1.75 (5'9")	59 (130)	146 (57.5)	1987 (24)	1989 (25)	--	1992 (29)

Taking these two cohorts of athletes together, there is evidence that the following conclusions may be true:

* The top K1s today are usually between 1.73-1.80 meters tall (5'8"-5'11") and weigh 63-75 kilos (139-163 lbs) and they use paddles that are 198-204 cms long. They are usually very successful at early ages, making their first Senior team within a year or 2 after leaving the Junior ranks and then winning their first World and Olympic medals by age 24. But there are some big exceptions!

Compared to 20-30 years ago, though, this pattern is a bit different. Twenty-thirty years ago, there was a greater range in heights. They were between 1.69-1.87 meters tall then (5'63/4" - 6'1 3/4") and they weighed slightly more then, 68.4-76 kilos (150.4-168 lbs). But the biggest difference is paddle length. Twenty-thirty years ago, 206-210 cms was the range; now it's a lot shorter, about 6-12 centimeters shorter.

And while the top K1s today often have success at young ages, it was even more true 20-30 years ago. At that time, a lot of top K1s would make their Senior team while still Juniors. And the earlier group also tended to win its first World/Olympic medals a bit earlier, too, by age 23, not 24.

* In the K1W class, today the top boaters are between 1.64-1.72 meters tall (5'4 1/2"-5'8"), weigh 55-63 kilos (121-143 lbs), and use paddles that are 199-202 centimeters long -- just about the same as the men's length today. They make their first national Senior team at the same age as the men do; age 18-20, but their first World/Olympic medals have come at much later ages, 25-32.

Compared to 20-30 years ago, again, the pattern is different. Back then, the women were generally bigger: 1.66-1.78 cms tall (5' 5 1/3" - 5'11"), 56 -65.8 kgs (123 - 145 lbs). And their

paddles were longer then, 203-208. Back then, they tended make their first Senior team earlier than now, 16-21. And they tended to win their first World/Olympic medals much earlier, 16-22.

(I tend to see Myriam Jerusalmi as a sort of transitional figure in this class. Her career came later than the rest of the K1Ws in my early cohort, even though I have her listed there. It's interesting to me that she is smaller and lighter than the earlier cohort and thus more like today's cohort.)

* In the C1 class, there is a greater range in height and weight and paddle length among the very top boaters than there used to be. Today they are between 1.70-1.93 meters tall (5'7"-6'4"), weigh 73-86 kilos (161-189 lbs) and have paddles 140-151 centimeters long (55 - 59.5 inches).

* In the old days, they were 1.75 -1.88 meters tall (5'9" - 6'2"), weighed 72.6 - 79.4 kilos (160-175 lbs) and had paddles that were 149.9 centimeters long (59 inches).

The age of making the first Senior team is about the same, though, 14-20 with the earlier cohort, versus 16-19 today. But if anything, the age of the first Worlds/Olympic medal is younger today: 16-22 today compared to 17-26 in yesteryear.

(I see Patrice Estanguet like Myriam Jerusalmi: his career wasn't as early as the first cohort and only slightly overlaps with the later cohort. So I haven't included him in this analysis.)

* In the C2 class, we don't have as much data and can only say that the Hochschorners are about the same height and weight as the earlier cohort, that their paddle lengths fit comfortably within the limits of the earlier cohort, and so does the age at which they won their first Worlds/Olympic medal (20, compared to 19-29 for the earlier cohort).

* In trying to determine for planning purposes the average age at which an athlete wins the Worlds or the Olympics, I think it's a mistake to look just at the ages at the time of each win and averaging them. The important thing is to know at what age the athlete FIRST wins a Worlds or Olympic medal and averaging those. Because once an athlete has done it the first time, the data shows there is a good chance he or she will do it again.

* Winning the overall World Cup is more likely to come after you win your first Worlds or Olympics, not before. But winning medals in individual World Cup races usually comes earlier than winning the World Championships or Olympics.