

# Failed Olympians Compete For the Best Excuse

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Finland's victory over Russia in the men's hockey match on Feb. 19 put a stunning end to Russia's expectations at home.

Even after the events have finished and the medals have been awarded at the Winter Olympics in Sochi, athletes are still outdoing each other in one area: excuses.

Olympians are blaming the condition of courses, equipment choice and the type of wax they use as they explain why they weren't as fast or as accurate or as good as their rivals.

"Maybe we made the wrong choice in terms of the conditions today," said French cross-country skier Celia Aymonier, who finished sixth in the sprint classic semifinals. "Because of the wetness of the snow a different waxing might have made a difference."

With 74 medals awarded from Sochi's 98 events, athletes are running out of time for success as the Winter Games are entering their last days.

Himanshu Thakur, an Indian who finished last in the men's giant slalom, said he would have been much faster than his 3:37:55 minutes if he was using gold medal winner Ted Ligety's equipment. The American's time was 2:45.29.

"It's very difficult to buy good equipment in India," said the skier, who trains near the Himalayan mountains. "It's the first time I've competed in the Olympics, I was a little bit nervous."

Having finely tuned equipment has been a source of complaints for the U.S. speed skating team, which voted to change out of a more technical skinsuit made by Under Armour Inc. to a previous model after being shut out of medals. The Americans still haven't mustered a podium finish. The United States won four speed skating medals in the 2010 Games.

"If you have a bad performance at a World Cup because of a suit then it's OK, you switch the suit," Shani Davis, the two-time defending silver medalist, told reporters after finishing 11th in the 1500-meter speed skating race Feb. 15 while wearing the less-technical suit. "You can't do that at the Olympics. There's too much riding on it."

Meanwhile, Canadian cross-country skier Daria Gaiazova blamed her equipment for her performance in the women's team sprint classic. The country failed to advance.

"I took the wrong skis in the first lap; I had no grip," Daria Gaiazova told reporters. "There was a moment of panic because I needed so much energy, staying with everyone and laboring my way up the hill with my arms. The time and energy I lost in the first lap made a huge difference. I made a mistake."

German Alpine skier Felix Neureuther said whiplash sustained in a car crash less than a week ago made his run in the giant slalom more of a training run for Saturday's men's slalom than an actual competition.

"I really tried to attack but you can tell that I have been lying down for the last five days," Germany's Felix Neureuther told reporters after finishing eighth in the giant slalom today. "It was absolutely the right decision to start this way. It was a good practice run ahead of Saturday. I said before that there would be no excuses."

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