



Feats of mommyhood

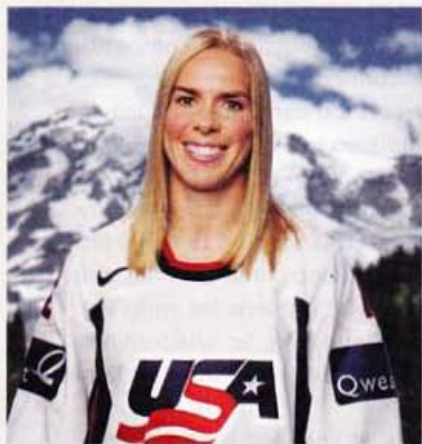
Find out how these Olympic-level supermoms overcome the challenges of competing *and* having kids

BY AMY LEVIN-EPSTEIN

For the moms vying for spots on the U.S. Olympic teams competing this winter in Vancouver, B.C., the largest challenges don't always come on their sport. Like working moms everywhere, they struggle to balance responsibilities at home and at "the office."

Skeleton racer Noelle Pikus-Pace's work is sliding headfirst on a sled down a slippery track. Off the ice, she's mother to 22-month-old Lacey, and she looks to fellow athletes for inspiration. "Something that helped was seeing other women and how they were able to do it—Dara Torres and Paula Radcliffe bouncing back," she says.

But while she admires these ladies' six-pack abs as much as we do, Pikus-Pace most respects their ability to be parents and athletes, too. If you're similarly enthralled by how they get it all done, here's how some sporting supermoms handle their toughest mom challenges.



Jenny Potter
HOCKEY PLAYER

#1 Bouncing back from birth

As you would expect, these fit moms stay active while they're pregnant. Pikus-Pace was running through her fifth month and playing volleyball up until her daughter's birth. Tracy Sachtjen, a curler—think shuffleboard with brooms, on ice—jogged for her first seven months, then biked and walked through the rest of her two pregnancies, lifting weights throughout.

But baby weight can be a tough opponent. Hockey player Jenny Potter, mother of 2-year-old Cullen and 8-year-old Madison, signed on to a second team to drop the pounds—she worked with the swim team at the local high school. "I went there for two hours a day. I probably did that for six months," she says, adding that all women

should heed the saying "nine months on, nine months off" when it comes to pregnancy weight.

A routine is a must for maintaining the weight loss. Natalie Nicholson, curler and mom of 1-year-old Stella, works out to DVDs and with a trainer; she also Rollerblades and walks. Still, her real fitness secret is her daily planner. "I really schedule all my activities—my workouts, meetings with my dietician, my curling practices, my job, and even time at the grocery store and food prep," she says.

GOLD-MEDAL MOM SOLUTION:

Take the time you need to make it happen.

#2 Staying focused at work

Many working moms spend more time than their bosses realize sneaking glimpses of their kids' photos or checking in with the nanny. But for Pikus-Pace, the collision of home life and work life was more abrupt, coming during her first competition back, with her infant daughter in the stands.

"I'm standing on the line, getting ready to go, and the green light goes off and I'm thinking 'curve one, curve two,' and all of a sudden my daughter started screaming. I looked over and thought, *Is she OK? Should I get her bottle?*" says Pikus-Pace, who was able to get her concentration back and have a good run. Nicholson admits, "I often felt like I needed to rush to get home from training, even though I never was pressured to get home quickly. It's some weird maternal feeling."

To maintain focus, Nicholson now uses advice from an old teammate: "She told me to just do the best I can each day and to be completely present in each activity I do at all times." Potter envisions the proverbial finish line to get her head back in the game: "I've spent so much time preparing for this moment, or this season. I don't want to throw it all away."

GOLD-MEDAL MOM SOLUTION:
Keep your eyes on the prize.



Natalie Nicholson
CURLER



Alison Pottinger
CURLER

#3 Being fully "there" with your family

With Blackberries and iPhones extending the office day from 9 to 5 to 24/7, these athlete moms—many of whom have other careers outside of competition—definitely need to disconnect at home.

"I make sure I turn off the computer and leave work until after the girls go to bed," says curler Allison Pottinger, mom to Lauren, 1, and Kelsey, 3. Pottinger also recommends taking a personal day. "Prior to Olympic trials, I was starting to feel a little overwhelmed, trying to balance time with the girls, training, work, and organizing things for while we were going to be away," she says. So, she told her teammates she needed an extra day with her family before leaving.

"They understood that I needed to feel good about my home and work lives to be able to come to the event and be 100% focused," Pottinger says. Chances are, your boss may also understand when you need a breather.

GOLD-MEDAL MOM SOLUTION:
Unplug from work and plug into your kids.

"I just do the best I can each day and be completely present in each activity I do at all times."



#4 Making time for mommy

Between deadlines and diapers, meetings and meal making, life can seem like a never-ending checklist. But even these high achievers know to take a time-out.

"My 'me time' is going out for a run with my chocolate lab Koda," says Sachjten, mom to Sierra, 15, and Desmon, 9. "I try to do this in the early morning before anyone is out of bed, or when the kids are at school." Potter and her ice hockey sisters, on the other hand, have formed a de-facto book club, passing around favorite reads almost as fast as they do pucks. "I got my team addicted to the *Twilight* series," she says.

Moms who feel like me-time just never happens should take a page out of Nicholson's playbook—she pencils in time for herself just like workouts. "I enjoy getting massages, pedi/manicures, and shopping. And I schedule them, like everything else in my life right now," she says.

GOLD-MEDAL MOM SOLUTION:
Book "me-time" into your calendar.



Tracy Sachjten
CURLER

#5 Letting go of busy-mom guilt

Any mother who's spread thin can wonder, "What's the point?" These women, who hope to inspire girls around the world this winter, say they take comfort in bring a role model for their own children. "I try to remember that what I'm doing is setting a good example for my daughters. I know that when they see me achieve my goals and dreams, it confirms for them that they too can do anything they set their minds to," Pottinger says.

Her best mothering advice, though, came from her husband: "I was getting stressed about doing things like other moms I'd seen or read about, and he told me that we weren't like everyone else and we were never going to be. He told me that as long as we did the best we could for our family, we had to be happy with that."

Sachtjen agrees that her children benefit from her giving it her all, even if this means time away from them. "I feel that my kids are old enough to understand that I'm working toward a goal. They also understand the commitment it takes at this level. They're excited for our team's accomplishments, which makes it easier when I get the guilty feeling," she says.

GOLD-MEDAL MOM SOLUTION:
Make your dreams a family affair.



my worst mommy moment

"I was trying to make dinner and I had my daughter in a front carrier. I put something in the microwave to defrost and I shut the door while I was turning to grab something else. It bounced back open, and I looked at her and she had the saddest face. She just started screaming. I had whacked her, not hard. She was totally fine, but here it is two years later and I still think, *I can't believe I did that!*"

—Noelle Pikus-Pace

"One time after I returned from a competition, our eldest daughter was trying her darnedest not to go to sleep. It had been a really long week and I was tired. After numerous trips upstairs to tuck her in, I lost my temper. Immediately after it happened I felt bad—she was looking to find a way to spend more time with me. I climbed into bed with her and we told stories. She fell asleep with her head on my shoulder."

—Alison Pottinger

#6 Staying connected with far-away family

These Olympic hopefuls say family support is key—especially knowing their kids are safe while they're traveling. When away, they keep in touch with technologies like Skype. "I use my webcam a lot!" Nicholson says. "I call and chat with my husband, mother, and mother-in-law and ask them about my daughter's day. They know I want to hear all the details: what she ate, what she's wearing, what she played with that day."

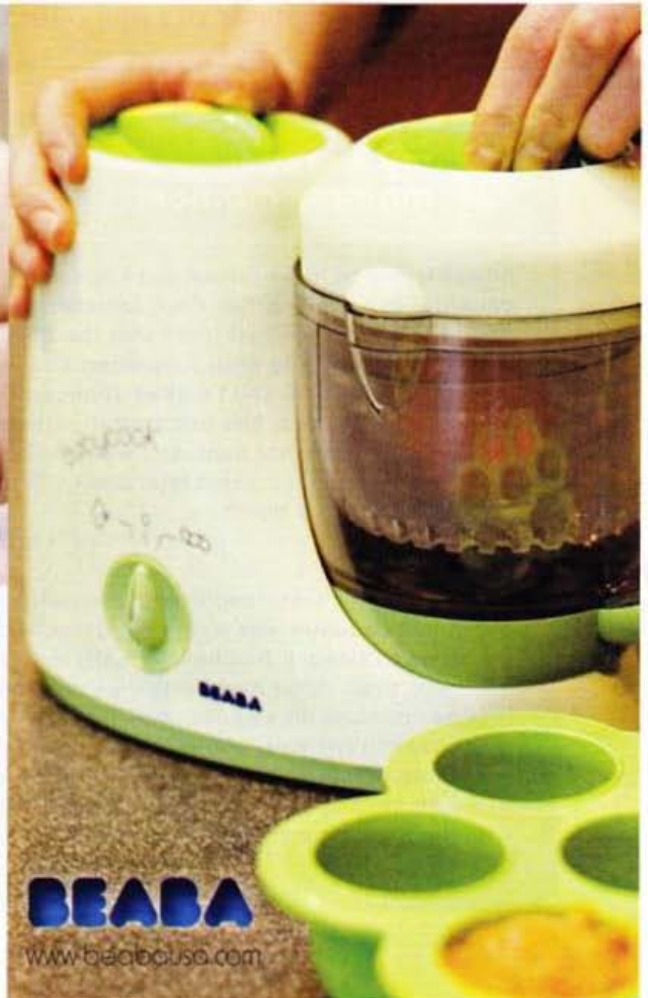
And because time at home can be so short, Pikus-Pace says she and her husband indulge in tiny but regular rituals instead of forced date nights. "I can't remember the last time we went to dinner, but we leave notes on each other's cars or call to say 'I love you.' It's the small, simple things," she says.

GOLD-MEDAL MOM SOLUTION:
Little things mean a lot.



Noelle Pikus-Pace
SKELETON RACER

"We leave notes on our cars or call to say, 'I love you.' It's the small, simple things."



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my worst mommy moment

"When we had our first Olympic training camp, I called my stepmom and asked her if she could take Desmon to swim practice. I told her I would check with my husband to see if he could pick him up. Well, Friday came and, at about 5:30 p.m., I received a phone call from an acquaintance saying, 'Your son has been sitting outside for over an hour waiting for a ride... I asked him if I should call you and he said, 'Oh, my mom is busy with curling so you probably won't get a hold of her.' I was devastated that I forgot. When I spoke with him he was like, 'Mom, I'm fine, I was reading my new book.'"

—Tracy Sachtjen

#7 Being strong when everything's going wrong

When things fall apart, you can either cry or crack up. Pikus-Pace says she tries to find humor where she can. "The other day I gave my daughter a bath with her little cousins and the bath was still full of water. I went to grab a sippy cup, and I turn around for a split second and see her sitting down in the tub—with a new diaper and fresh clothes on," she says. But instead of freaking out, Pikus-Pace managed to laugh, and even took a picture so she could remember the moment. "I could have been frustrated. I had so much to get done, but instead I thought, *These moments aren't going to last forever.*" ●

GOLD-MEDAL MOM SOLUTION:

Laugh when you want to cry.

Amy Levin-Epstein often interviews athletes and celebs for magazines like *Pregnancy*. Her articles have also appeared in *Glamour*, *Prevention*, *Self*, and *More* magazines, as well as on *BettyConfidential.com*.



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