

Boston Rescue firm backs Vonn, Putnam backs Ligety

By Thomas Grillo | Monday, February 8, 2010



LOCAL CONNECTIONS: Ted Ligety (left) speeds down the course during the Alpine Ski, Men's World Cup Giant Slalom last month in Slovenia. Lindsey Vonn celebrates her third-place finish in the Women's World Cup supercombined race in Switzerland - PHOTO BY: AP

U.S. Olympic downhill skier Lindsey Vonn counts Red Bull, Rossignol and Rolex as sponsors, but her most important corporate connection may be the one that could save her from a snow-covered mountain.

A Boston company, Global Rescue LLC, has been the official medical evacuation provider to the U.S. ski and snowboard team for more than three years and will be ready for duty this week for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

The just-in-case-of-emergency service, set up for high-profile athletes going for gold medals in a globally televised sporting event, stands in sharp contrast to Global Rescue's most recent mission: saving clients from the chaos in earthquake-ravaged Haiti.

One of the company's missions involved rescuing 14 Lutheran missionaries who were caught in the capital of Port-au-Prince following the catastrophic Jan. 12 earthquake. The rescue team, including an armed former Navy SEAL and Army Green Berets, got the missionaries safely aboard a U.S.-bound plane.

"We evacuated the missionaries - who were trapped in a compound, running low on fuel in a building that had been compromised," said Global Rescue CEO Dan Richards. "We hope it will be a lot more boring in Vancouver."

Global Rescue's prices for corporate memberships vary, but individual memberships for medical services cost \$329 per year, or \$655 annually if security is included. Security involves evacuations for non-medical reasons, such as a war or natural disaster.

The private firm's emergency response teams include paramedics, doctors and security personnel, many of them veterans of elite U.S. military rescue squads, who use medically equipped planes and helicopters to bring people safely to U.S. hospitals.

Global Rescue's clients range from the State Department to Bay State employer EMC Corp. The company's motto is, "If you need us, we'll be there."

The service for the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association, in effect since September 2006, involved helping team doctors in diagnosing, treating and transporting injured or sick athletes back to the United States as quickly as possible.

For the games in Vancouver, Global Rescue will have at least two medics on the slopes if there's an S.O.S. - Save Our Skier - call. "I hope for the sake of our athletes that our services will not be needed," said Richards, a native of ski-happy Vermont. "The U.S. ski team has their own doctors at the events, but one guy on the side of a hill can only do so much. We can provide consultation right after an accident."

That goes for Vonn or U.S. teammates such as giant slalom skier Ted Ligety, whose sponsors include another Boston-based company, the money manager Putnam Investments.

Ligety, a 2006 Olympic gold-medal winner who will compete in four races at the Vancouver Olympics, sports Putnam's logo on the front of his bright green helmet.

"The more Ted wins, the more visibility for our logo," said Bob Reynolds, chief executive of Putnam and U.S. ski team trustee.