

Shiffrin

Continued from B1

Plus, a tweaked back forced Shiffrin to sit out the season opener in October, delaying her comeback by five more weeks.

For a racer who thrives on training volume, the break was detrimental to Shiffrin.

"If you drastically alter the volume of training that she's getting from one year to the next, that's going to affect her," said Jeff Lackie, Shiffrin's strength and conditioning coach.

Making matters even more complicated was that Lackie got stuck in his native Canada during the offseason because of the pandemic.

"That was challenging," Lackie said. "Definitely had to get creative to coach remotely, and that's never easy. Doesn't replace being there in person."

That Shiffrin has returned to racing and has been performing consistently entering the world championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo is a testament not only to her own will and mental strength but also the influence of her coaches.

Day, who is in his fifth year with Shiffrin, and Lackie, who is in his sixth, have to tread lightly with an athlete who felt that her life got derailed.

"There is obviously a certain amount of sensitivity that goes into how you handle each day," Day said. "There is waves of grief and you don't really know when these waves are going to come. Emotionally and from a caring standpoint, we have to approach it a little differently."

For Lackie, it all comes down to empathy.

"I can sympathize with what she's going through. I lost my father when I was younger and it's challenging," Lackie said. "Sometimes what I am telling her is not what she wants to hear. But I am always quick to remind her that I am trying to help. If I don't say something that I see her doing that's not to the level I know she's capable of then I wouldn't be doing my job."

Avoiding conflicts or low-



Giovanni Auletta/AP file

Mikaela Shiffrin awaits the podium ceremony after winning a World Cup slalom event in Flachau, Austria, on Jan. 12.

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— Jeff Lackie, Mikaela Shiffrin's strength and conditioning coach

ering expectations would be counterproductive.

"Over time it's easy to fall into a state of complacency where you're no longer challenging and you're trying to avoid conflict. Do I not tell her something because I don't want to hurt her feelings? Is that justified?" Lackie said.

"She is incredibly resilient, despite everything that's happened. As a coach your No. 1 job is to believe in your athlete and in your athlete's abilities to succeed and perform. Mikaela makes that aspect of my job very easy. What she has overcome in the last year has been

incredible, a testament to her strength."

Even before the tragedy, Day and Lackie had the delicate job of balancing their duties while also working with Shiffrin's mother, who is also one of her coaches.

Shiffrin revealed before the season she wouldn't have returned to the World Cup if her mom, Eileen, had decided against traveling the circuit throughout Europe with her.

"It's an all-or-nothing situation between the two of them," Lackie said. "They always were incredibly close."

"It's funny, I see other peo-

ple look like they don't understand that connection, that bond," Lackie added. "I have a really close relationship with my mom as well and it's definitely something I'm grateful for. It's such a powerful tool, to be able to have that unconditional love and support with you all the time. It's such a huge advantage for her."

After being separated for so long last year, the tight-knit Shiffrin team has drawn closer together since they reunited.

"They've been incredibly patient with me through ups and downs of the last year, sticking with me, finding all of the positives and being enthusiastic on the good days and still keeping my spirits high on the tough days," Shiffrin said.

"I know it's not easy for them. But they've been really sticking together and sticking with me and trying to sort of pull me up by my bootstraps and help me to get back to a really high level of skiing."

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