

Pros better prepared to recover from injury than weekend warriors

By Amanda MacMillan, Outdoors

Lindsey Vonn made history this year with her 64th World Cup win – the most ever for a female skier – after spending most of 2014 rehabbing a torn ACL. Even more remarkable: she had not one but two major knee surgeries in the past two years.

Many people who tear their ACLs are told it can take at least a full year, post-surgery, to get 100 percent of their strength and function back. For them, Vonn's return to the slopes, just 10 months after her second operation, may have seemed a bit hasty.

But compared to other professional athletes who've battled similar or equally devastating injuries, a recovery like Vonn's has become standard, if not leisurely. Take Adrian Peterson, who returned to football just nine months after his own ACL tear in 2012. Or Monster Energy snowboarder Iouri Podladtchikov, who won a bronze medal in Snowboard SuperPipe at last month's X Games just two months after having surgery for a fracture, torn ligament, and misplaced tendon in his ankle.

So what is it about the pros? Do they recover more quickly because they're better athletes, or because they get better care? According to John Xerogeanes, chief of sports medicine and professor of orthopedic surgery at Emory University Hospital, it's usually a bit of both.

When an injury occurs – whether it's a torn ligament or a broken bone – it's the muscles and tendons around that injury that are so important for recovery after surgery, says

Xerogeanes. And compared to amateur athletes, the pros almost always have an advantage there.

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