

TV Sunday

For a few days, the biggest stars on TV will be athletes you've never heard of accomplishing feats you never imagined. Here are four of the Winter Olympic hopefuls

Four on the floor: Timothy Goebel is the most likely competitor to skate past the Russians with his "quadruple Salchow" move.

Reaching for a cold gold

By MICHAEL GILTZ

It happens every Olympics. The superstars expect to win the glory but a newcomer wins TV viewers' hearts. With more than 375 hours of events airing on three different channels (NBC, CNBC and MSNBC), discovering those magic moments can be tricky.

So here is a quick look at four athletes poised to make history between February 8 and February 24. Expect the newest celebrities to be slaloming down the ski slopes, flying in a bobsleigh, striving for a goal or skating the quad.

TIMOTHY GOEBEL

Nickname: King of the Quad

Event: Figure skating

Age: 21

Hometown: Rolling Meadow, Illinois

Unique feature: Those quads. Goebel has become increasingly confident in his artistry, but it's the quads that have made his name. Goebel was the first skater in the world to land a quadruple Salchow (a variation on a move Scott Hamilton taught him personally) and also the first to ever land three quads in one program. By the way, his new coach is Frank Carroll, the man Michelle Kwan just dumped to go solo. If Goebel wins and Kwan loses, Carroll would clearly be the biggest coaching news since Bela Karoli.

Athletic highlights: Goebel was the national champion in 2000, but elder statesman Todd Eldredge took it away from him this season. Still, the Russians are far ahead of the Americans and Eldredge has no confidence in his quad, which is essential if you hope to beat them. That leaves Goebel as the likeliest one to skate past Yevgeny Plushenko or Alexei Yagudin (the serious favorites) for a silver or gold medal.

When to watch: The men compete on February 12 at 5:15 and February 14 at 5:45. But whatever happens, Goebel will be certain to dazzle the crowd with his quads during the post-competition exhibition on February 22 at 6:45.



How romantic: Caroline Lalive's big event is on Valentine's Day.

CAROLINE LALIVE

Nickname: Liner

Event: In skiing, you name it; she competes in five different events

Age: 21

Hometown: Truckee, California

Unique feature: Maybe she's too aggressive. Lalive has tremendous skills, but has yet to put it all together. At the 2001 World Championships, Lalive crashed in every event — including one where she was ranked second with one slalom run to go. She could capture numerous medals or simply make her mark by coming heartbreakingly close time and time again. Either way, Lalive is ready for the press. "I remember watching the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary," says Lalive on her personal web page, "and just feeling the passion to be there in the future. I went into my room and did a pretend interview."

Athletic highlights: Lalive was the U.S. champion in slalom and combined events in 2000 and has always done well on the European World Cup circuit.

When to watch: She's in so many events, you can hardly miss her. But make sure to check in on Valentine's Day. That's when her best event, the combined (downhill and slalom) takes place. NBC plans to air a profile of Lalive called "America's Sweetheart" that same day, though if she chokes again, it should probably be titled "Broken Hearts."

TODD HAYS

Nickname: Hollywood

Event: Bobsled

Age: 32

Hometown: Del Rio, Texas

Unique feature: He's been here before. Almost. Hays made it to the Olympics in '98, but a teammate's use of a cold medicine that



Todd Hays on board and (inset, left) with bobsled teammate Paul Janovic.

contained ephedrine kept all of them from competing and delayed Hays' chance to win a medal. If he does, it will be the first medal for a US bobsleigh team since 1936.

Athletic highlights: Hays is a national champion in kickboxing and captained the University of Tulsa football team to a bowl game. (Hays plans to coach football with his brother in Texas when his competitive years are behind him.) He's been on fire in World Cup competition leading up to these Olympics and has never looked better.

When to watch: The two-man runs are on February 16 and 17 at 3; the four-man runs take place February 22 and 23 at 3:30. Don't blink, though: those bobsleds move at up to 90 miles an hour.

LYNDSAY WALL

Nickname: Wally

Event: Women's ice hockey

Age: 16

Hometown: Churchville, New York

Unique feature: Wall is the youngest player on the team. If they win the gold (the women's ice hockey team won the event in '98, the first time it offered at the Olympics) she'll be the youngest gold medalist in that event. Some



Lyndsay Wall: Goes to school online.

of the other players are almost twice her age, but since women's hockey doesn't include checking, speed and skill are far more important than power. She takes her junior year classes mostly over the Internet.

Athletic highlights: Wall captained a boy's hockey team in '98, a la The Bad News Bears. Also a terrific softball catcher.

When to watch: The women face Germany in the first round, February 12 at 11 am; the gold medal match is February 21 at 5.