

Loop Is ap of the

[NBC Pushes Too Far in Bringing Bode Miller to Tears](#)

Difficult Day for South Koreans as Native Son Wins Gold, for Russia



U.S. in Nordic Combined It's About Now

Sochi 2014

News Results Photos Interactives

Follow @SochiNYT

Get daily recaps

671 COMMENTS

NBC Pushes Too Far in Bringing Bode Miller to Tears

FEB. 17, 2014

TV Sports

By RICHARD SANDOMIR

EMAIL

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

SAVE

MORE



Bode Miller had just tied for a bronze medal in the men's super-G at the Olympics in Sochi, Russia, on Sunday and it was time to be interviewed. [NBC](#) had already established Miller's quest as an emotional story line, putting a microphone on his wife, Morgan, to hear her reactions to his races, and having the couple sit for an interview with Tom Brokaw. He was being humanized — as the changed man, the family man, the mature 36-year-old whose brother had died last year.

This is the type of storytelling that lubricates NBC's prime-time Olympic engine.

This time, the engine backfired.

It was not out of bounds for NBC's Christin Cooper to ask a medal winner

questions about his brother's death. (Miller's brother, Chelone, was a snowboarder who [died last year at 29](#).) It was a relevant area to pursue, part of his Olympic biography. And Miller brought it up in response to her first question, saying that he had "a lot of emotion riding" on the race.

Cooper picked up on that quickly and asked, "Bode, you're showing so much emotion down here, what's going through your mind?" That probably should have been the last question about his brother. This was, after all, an interview with a great skier who had just won a bronze medal, the sixth Olympic medal of his career. He had done no wrong to be milked for more emotion than he wanted to reveal.

Cooper needed to strike a far better balance in her questions so that the takeaway for viewers would not be that she was badgering him.

Maybe the absence of detail in his answer — he said only that it had been "a long struggle coming in here. And, uh, just a tough year" — compelled her to go forward.

"I know you wanted to be here with Chelly experiencing these games; how much does it mean to you to come up with a great performance for him? And was it for him?" she said. Now she was sounding intrusive, and maybe doubting his fraternal inspiration. It was one question too many, at least the way it was phrased. But it pushed Miller into a thoughtful answer — that he did not know if he had won a medal for his brother or to "make myself proud."

He was holding up, but tears had started to trickle down Miller's face.

He was being a stand-up guy, even if he was being pulled through a wringer.

Now was truly the time to stop. If you've made a medal winner cry, it is time to simply say "thank you" and move on. It was on tape, so NBC could have cut it off and gone to Matt Lauer in the studio. Instead, Cooper forged on, wondering whom he seemed to be talking to when

RELATED COVERAGE



[Always Room at the Inn for Another Medal](#) FEB. 16, 2014

he looked up in the sky before he started his run down the mountain.

It was not a bad question, but by this point, it was overkill.

“What’s going on there?” she said.

Miller’s helmeted head was bowed and he was unable to answer. The clock kept ticking, and I expected NBC to turn its camera elsewhere or for Cooper to say, “Thanks, Bode, you had a great race.” That did not happen. And there was no interview with the gold medalist, Kjetil Jansrud, to plug in and change the tempo.

Instead, Cooper, a former Olympian who won a silver medal in the giant slalom at the 1984 Games, tried to comfort Miller, putting a hand on his shoulder. In all, NBC lingered over this scene for 75 seconds — as Miller continued to weep, as he walked away, as he was comforted and as his wife embraced him. He might have cried on his own, for his brother, for joy, for the way his life had changed. But had the tears not been provoked by Cooper’s questions, we probably would not have seen that emotion.

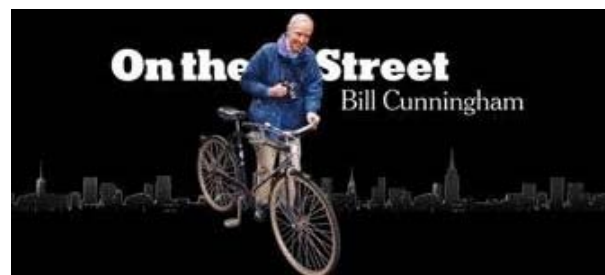
Dan Hicks, who called the super-G race for NBC, talked over some of this tearful imagery — unnecessarily — mentioning how Miller had seemed like a different skier than in the past and how his emotions “continued to flow out.” Yep, we saw that.

Emotion is a real and honest element of athletic triumph and defeat. And you don’t want a network to tell its journalists to stick to soft questions when interviewing the winners. But in this instance, Cooper and NBC lacked the sensitivity to know when enough was enough.

It did not end there. Later Sunday, Miller visited Matt Lauer in the studio on Sunday night.

“You always strike me as someone who likes to keep your emotions pretty close to your vest, and yet this has been a pretty challenging year for you,” Lauer said to Miller, again bringing up his

ELSEWHERE ON NYTIMES.COM



Watch the new episode of "On the Street" with Bill Cunningham

- Watch: Legacy of Lyndon B. Johnson
- Watch: New York Fashion Week's fifth element

brother's death and his [public custody battle](#).

Miller, who did not bring up the interview, said he talked to his brother at the start, saying "give me a couple hundreths today, give me that little extra push."

He continued: "Then for it to come down and be as close as it can possibly get in ski racing and end up with a medal, it just seemed kind of connected. At that point, I was just pretty overwhelmed with the feeling of getting a little bit of help from my brother."

Battered by online criticism of Christin Cooper's interview of Miller after it was broadcast Sunday night, NBC released a statement Monday.

"Our intent was to convey the emotion that Bode Miller was feeling after winning his bronze medal," a spokesman for the network said. "We understand how some viewers thought the line of questioning went too far, but it was our judgment that his answers were a necessary part of the story. We're gratified that Bode has been publicly supportive of Christin Cooper and the overall interview."

Miller also came to Cooper's defense in [a pair of posts](#) on Twitter on Monday and expanded on those comments in an interview on NBC's "Today" with Lauer.

"I've known Christin a long time, and she is a sweetheart of a person," Miller said. "I know she didn't mean to push. I don't think she really anticipated what my reaction was going to be, and I think by the time she sort of realized it, I think it was too late and I don't really, I don't blame her at all."

He continued: "I feel terrible that she is taking the heat for that because it really is just a heat of the moment kind of circumstance, and

RECENT COMMENTS

Running Deer Yesterday
This is another sad example of the over feminization of our culture. It would be interesting to have been a fly on the wall in NBC strategy...

Tom Kennedy Yesterday
The entire situation seems disgraceful to me and smacks of a set up. From Mrs. Miller's "wired" mommyism and "good jobs" to her champion...

Benwelgoed Yesterday
CC, apparently you stand by the approach you took in that infamous interview. It is sadly par for the course in journalism to push, push...

[SEE ALL COMMENTS](#)

I don't think there was any harm intended. So, it was just a lot of emotion for me, it's been a lot over the last year and that you sometimes don't realize how much you contain that stuff until the dam breaks and then it's just a real outpouring."

More in Olympics

[Go to the Olympics Section »](#)



SPORTS
Women's Figure Skating Live Updates



SPORTS OF THE TIMES
Figure Skaters Battle for Steady Nerves and Legs

Top News

[Go to the Home Page »](#)



As Deaths Rise in Kiev, So Do Fears Ukraine Will Use Troops



Russia Deplores West's Threat of Ukraine Sanctions

MOST EMAILED

1. [Well: Learning to Cut the Sugar](#)



2. [DealBook: Loan Complaints by Homeowners Rise Once More](#)



3. [The Task: 54 Drawers](#)



4. [Maureen Dowd: History: Get Me Rewrite!](#)



5. [DealBook: Facebook Enters \\$16 Billion Deal for WhatsApp](#)



6. [Doctors Train to Spot Signs of A.D.H.D. in Children](#)



7. [The Flexitarian: Stew Season Gets a New Star](#)



8. [Thomas L. Friedman: Breakfast Before the MOOC](#)



9. [Spain, Land of 10 P.M. Dinners, Asks if It's Time to Reset Clock](#)



10. [Nicholas Kristof: Is That Sausage Worth This?](#)



Advertising

