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Rippon on coming out: 'I wanted to share my story'

U.S. silver medalist first openly gay men's singles competitor since Galindo

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Adam Rippon said that he is proud of the recent story in 'SKATING' magazine in which he came out as gay. -Hans Rosemond

On the day the October issue of *SKATING* magazine was released, with [Adam Rippon](#) on the cover (alongside close friend Ashley Wagner) and a revelation inside that made him the first men's singles skater to come out as gay in nearly 20 years, Rippon was preoccupied with back-to-back practice sessions in Colorado Springs.

Then, his Twitter and Instagram notifications started exploding.

"I kind of almost forgot that I had done it," Rippon told icenetwork two weeks after his and Wagner's interview with Amy Rosewater sent ripples through the sport. "It was less about sexuality and more about accepting who you are and knowing that, no matter what you're dealing with, you have friends and people who are going to support you."

It's an understated point of view from Rippon, now 25, who has an overstated personality. Slicked with platinum hair and must-look-twice costumes this season, the two-time U.S. silver medalist is the first openly gay men's singles skater since Rudy Galindo, who came out in 1996. Earlier this year, Canadian pairs skater (and world champion) Eric Radford came out publicly as well.

While Rippon's revelation left many shrugging or rolling their eyes with murmurs of "*obviously*," the Pennsylvania native said it was less about being "shocking" and more about being true to himself -- and to the person he has become.

"I never felt the need to have a 'coming out' article," Rippon said. "I had the opportunity to do the interview, and U.S. Figure Skating really wanted to be a part of it. Knowing that everyone was on board felt great, it felt awesome. To me, it sends such a positive message."

Rippon himself received an outpouring of messages online (one from entertainment blogger Perez Hilton) but also in calls and texts, and in person. Less than two weeks after the article came out, Rippon competed at the Finlandia Trophy and had "a dozen or so" fellow competitors and others within the sport approach him with congratulations.

"People kept coming up to me and saying that they were proud of me," Rippon relayed. "I just said that I wanted to share my story. That was really nice. I've been on the circuit for a while, so people know me and they know what kind of person I am. But to be honest, it was a little surprising."

To those outside of figure skating, it could come as a surprise that in the sport's history, only Galindo, Radford and Rippon have come out publicly while still competing. (Olympic gold medalist John Curry of Britain was outed by a German tabloid prior to the 1976 World Championships, and Johnny Weir came out as gay in 2011 during a break from competing.)

"It's got to be a difficult thing to go through," said Ryan Bradley, the 2011 U.S. champion. "What Adam is doing is opening a door for young people who are going through a hard time in their lives and showing that it's OK to be who you are and just own who you are. There are assumptions about male figure skaters all the time, but he's giving people a light and he feels comfortable about it. He's not walking on eggshells anymore."

The Los Angeles-based Rippon said he isn't surprised that more figure skaters haven't come out as gay. He believes the intense focus and mental and physical demands that come with skating at this level leave little room for personal expression.

"As athletes, we have to focus a lot on what we're doing," he said. "When we're doing interviews, those are about our skating and our training. It's not about our personal lives. You have to make a point to be personal. I had the chance to share my story in this magazine piece."

In the interview, Rosewater asked Wagner about her outspoken stance on gay rights and the treatment of homosexuals in Russia before and during the Sochi Olympic Winter Games. Rippon said he had thought about coming out before Sochi but decided against it. Considered a contender for the U.S. team, he finished a disappointing eighth at the 2014 U.S. Championships

"We all didn't know what we would be facing when we got there," he told icenetwork about the build up to Sochi. "Nobody really knew what was going to happen. Like, if you were openly gay, would you be arrested once you stepped off the plane? Would I be putting my teammates in danger? For me, it was about focusing on how I was *trying to go* to the Olympics.

"It was such a big deal heading into Sochi that it would have been incredibly distracting because of what was going on there at the time. I was focused on my skating. Would I have said something when I was there had I made it? Honestly, I just don't know."

Firmly rooted in his mid 20s, Rippon has his eyes on the Olympics once again. He revived his standing in the U.S. last season with a runner-up performance at the 2015 U.S. Championships, then turned in a respectable eighth-place finish at worlds. His quad is becoming more and more consistent, making him a big threat on the international stage.

"I've had to come to terms with where I was at the end of the last Olympic cycle," he said. "I was putting so much pressure on myself. This year, I have been pushing myself everyday in practice to take it one season, one goal, one day at a time. I'm a lot older, I know that. (Laughs) But I'm improving still. I want to stay injury free and healthy, and I want to continue this momentum that I feel like I have. 2018 is the long-term goal."

His bold, new look on the ice this season is paired with a continuously outspoken Adam, one that is completely out now, too.

In every respect.

"As I've gotten older, I've explored different genres and different characters," he said of his Queen and Beatles programs. "You shouldn't be afraid of who you portray. I wanted to do something a little new and different on the ice. I'm always the type of person who says that I want to try something and then I actually do it. That's what I did with my hair. I got a way better response to it than I thought I would. I thought people would think it was unprofessional. I'm a little bit edgy, and I love to go out there and perform."

As for that "coming out story" and sharing who he is in full, Rippon still just shrugs it off. But even he had to give himself credit at one point: He did what he said he was going to.

"With Amy, we were just having an honest conversation," he said. "I read the article and thought, 'Wow, I'm saying something here.' It was pure me. I let it soak in and realized it represents me and it represents my story with Ashley as my friend. I'm proud of that."



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