



Mission Statement

It is our mission to help athletes achieve success in ski racing by helping them learn sound skiing technique, race tactics, training habits, mental preparation, safety practices, and proper equipment choice. We encourage dreams of success at the highest levels of the sport while providing a rewarding and enjoyable experience for all participants, regardless of their ski racing aspirations. With an open mind and learning attitude, all racers have great potential for improving their skiing skills and race results. Taking up this challenge provides the athlete with many positive benefits which are not tied to those results – among them: self-confidence, critical thinking, self-discipline, camaraderie, and pride of accomplishment. Racing skills guarantee enjoyment of skiing as a life-long sport. But the most important benefit to be earned is fun – and we believe that fun is an indispensable part of the learning process.

Program Philosophy

Preface.

This document will give you a head start in understanding how we approach our mission to help our athletes enjoy the sport of ski racing, stay safe, and learn the habits and techniques which lead to improvement and success. We address the best practices for athletes to employ in their quest for proficiency and, ultimately, excellence. Also embedded are a few rules and procedures to keep us safe and on track, along with explanations for each. There is not much here on the specifics of technique and tactics – we will save that for training sessions, video review sessions, and chalk talks. We have indoor sessions for athletes from time to time to discuss various aspects of ski racing – and, on occasion, parents are encouraged to attend. Beyond that, at appropriate times (usually *not* during a training session), the coaches and I welcome parents to ask questions, share feedback, and work with us to find the best approach for each child. – Cary Adgate, BOYNE Racing Program Director

Fun.

Fun – the joys of skiing, learning, competing, achieving, and sharing with peers are both a necessary ingredients for, *and the results of*, success in ski racing.

Reaching the highest personal and collective achievement is not possible unless the process is fun. Conversely, fun is hard to come by unless it is accompanied by effort and accomplishment. Learning new skills is fun. Being faster and more consistent is fun. Attaining constantly improving race results is fun. Making friends and developing relationships with other competitors and coaches is fun.

The process of learning to become a better racer involves serious work, but that work is most effectively done with a light-hearted attitude and an open mind. The best racers in the world are doing it for fun – and are successful *because* it is fun for them. Why would it be any different for junior racers?

Safety.

Ski racing is generally quite a safe sport, but like virtually all sports, it carries some risks. The good news is that, in large part, the risks can be managed. BOYNE Racing is very proud of its safety record. But safety can only be maximized if everyone on the hill is aware of safe practices and follows them religiously. (Please refer to our 'Ski Racing and Injury' educational piece.)

Respect.

While our Code of Conduct establishes the boundaries of acceptable behavior for all people associated with the program, we want to live by the *spirit* of these requirements – not simply avoiding negative behaviors, but sharing in positive ones which benefit everyone.

All relationships within the program are based on mutual respect – and every individual should strive to earn the respect of others. This mandate will extend to relationships with all people with whom we interact – e.g. the skiing public, ski resort management and employees, race officials, etc. The Golden Rule applies to everything. Due respect will be shown by participants to those in positions of authority and responsibility, AND conversely as well – those in positions of authority and responsibility will show appropriate respect to those for whom they are responsible.

If unexpected misunderstandings or conflicts occur, the default response should be calm, mature, and appropriate. BOYNE Racing and all its members have a fantastic track record of friendliness, mutual respect, good judgment, helpfulness, and consideration – and we expect no less in the future.

Attitude.

Attitude is a powerful factor which has strong control over outcomes. Maintaining a positive one is a habit of the happiest and most successful athletes – and they strive to do so even when encountering difficult challenges. This is something that tends to rub off on those around you, so we encourage a positive attitude on the part of all athletes, parents, and coaches. It's contagious!

Keeping a learning mindset is also critical to the process. Confidence in one's ability and knowledge is important to success – but so is realistic self-assessment and a proper dose of humility. An inflexible, "I'm the expert", "I'm the fastest", "don't question me" attitude is not compatible with growth and learning. This concept applies equally to racers, coaches, and parents: we all have things to learn.

Your coaches have certain proven levels of ski racing expertise. At the same time, not one of us has, nor do we as a group profess to have, all the answers all the time. In the evolving sport of ski racing, that is impossible. We take pride in the fact that we will occasionally answer a question with "I'll have to watch you more, analyze your video, and consult with the other coaches before I answer that." We think that the wrong answer is worse than no answer. And at all times, the athlete must participate in the process of finding the *best answer*.

Ski racing is a very complex sport, in part, because of the tremendous number of variables. It is constantly evolving. Equipment and course setting evolve, and new techniques are constantly being explored. Each athlete brings different physical attributes and abilities. The only way to possibly ride the crest of the wave is to keep an open mind. Take confidence from the knowledge and skills you have, but realize that it's *what you don't know* that provides your challenge. The ultimate self-confidence can be obtained by resolving to maintain an open mind, as this guarantees that you will continue to learn new things and improve.

Patience is another required element of a learning attitude. Maintaining patience actually speeds up the process of overcoming challenges encountered as we develop our skills because it frees the mind to work productively. While everybody has moments of frustration, we should recognize that frustration is an enemy of progress and do our best to keep it at bay.

In a nutshell, we strive for an attitude of optimistic, humble, and open-minded learning.

Athlete-coach connection.

Our program's goal is to help you build a strong technical and tactical foundation which will allow you to think of progress in terms of seconds, not tenths. In order for this to work, it is important for the athlete to understand and 'buy in' to our philosophy. It will require patience, faith, and, as soon as possible, trust – athletes and coaches must trust each other in order for the relationship to be productive. We are confident that our approach will work for you – but *only if you believe it will.*

Each athlete is somewhat different physically, mentally, and emotionally from every other. All are products of an infinite number of variables in athletic and life experiences. So it shouldn't be a surprise that coaching is not a 'one size fits all' undertaking.

Finding the right 'connection' between coach and racer is seldom simple, never black and white, and once you find it, it's likely to change. Everyone involved must recognize that learning goes both directions, and that coaches and athletes need work together to find the most helpful style. Racers can maximize the opportunity by realizing that they are at least 50/50 partners in this effort, and that they should not hold back communication with their coaches. When it comes to learning styles, as athletes discover which things work, and which don't, they must tell the coaches. For example, some racers might like input from a coach just prior to a race or training run – others may not. We try to ask the racer if she wants coaching input at a given time. When a racer declines because she has a thought process going which she doesn't want interrupted, we will respect that and consider it normal. The input, if still necessary, can be taken up later at a more appropriate time. For the reasons already outlined, we want to do everything possible to help you develop your own thought processes and mental routines – and the last thing we should do is interrupt progress. So, "not right now" is *always* an acceptable answer.

We strive to simplify concepts as much as possible when teaching skills. Fast skiing *is* simple (not necessarily *easy*), and we will do our best to coach simply, and in a way that makes things clear in the most concise and understandable way. When you don't understand something, *do not* nod your head and say "OK". No racer will ever be criticized for asking an honest question or saying he does not understand what has been said. Keep in mind, though, that your progress will be quicker if you take time in advance to study and try to understand this document and other reference pieces we provide.

Just as your coaches may not give an immediate answer to a question – like when we need time to contemplate the best and least complicated answer – we are also willing to accept a response like "I'll have to think about it" from you. Again, getting it right is more important than getting it quickly.

Athletes should not expect to receive feedback after every training run or drill. Many times, there might be multiple issues which need addressing. Often some of these things are symptoms of a problem, and not the root cause itself. Together with you, we will try to identify the most important underlying problem – which in turn can eliminate whole batches of symptoms. Taking extra time to contemplate and identify the underlying issue is always worthwhile – on the part of both the coach and the racer – even if it means waiting for video analysis or the next training session to get the best answer.

In an ideal world, we would have athletes working on the hill with coaches one-on-one much of the time. While economics do not allow that, we do use split groups and work individually from time to time. If, in a given training session, you are not singled out for individual attention, that does not mean that we care about you less. It may mean that certain skiers have problems which the group as a whole is not experiencing. If you are the one singled out, it may be because you have unique problems, or are perhaps ready for more advanced input than the rest of the group.

We are there to help each individual as much as possible, regardless of his or her current proficiency. Just because you might be among the least experienced and skilled today, doesn't mean you will be next year. The biggest indicator of future performance is the effort, concentration, and level of engagement in

the day's training opportunity that you bring. The racers who do this well will get the most value from our program. Over the years, we have seen many progress from 'the back of the pack' to become leaders and race winners.

Finally, when we discuss athlete/coach connections, it's important that we acknowledge the third critical influence in a young ski racer's world: parents. Parents provide an indispensable support system and have the largest role in a child's success with life's various challenges. But it is important to respect the line between providing support and the parent being the sole source of motivation. It is also generally counter-productive when parents engage in technical coaching on the side. It is our experience that neither of these well-meaning efforts work. The main reason for this is that when young minds receive different input from different trusted sources, they lose trust in one or both. 'Buy-in' goes away, confusion sets in, and fun is diminished. With fun, goes motivation. Please refer to our piece, 'On Parents Coaching Kids'.

Commitment and goal setting.

You get out what you put in.

The most important commitment is one toward *long term* improvement. The learning curve is never perfectly smooth. There are highs, like those wonderful days when a new skill clicks in – and other periods of seeming lack of progress which test your patience and tenacity. Meaningful gains are achieved with commitment to persistent effort, mental concentration and, importantly, *patience* over the *long* term.

How you approach your commitment to improvement is just as important as the amount of effort you put toward it. Your time and placing in today's race are less important than the long-term progression toward solid, consistent, correct technical skiing. It's not that success in today's race isn't important, it's just that it's less important than maintaining the technical and tactical discipline you will need to be five seconds faster sometime in the future. Shortcuts to chopping a quick three tenths off your time are, in many cases, dead ends which end up reversing your progress toward to great performances. Happily, keeping focus on correct technique and tactics generally makes you faster in the short term as well. Mikaela Shiffrin is perhaps the best example of this. When she was young, she raced less, trained more, and free skied and worked on drills the most. With that approach, her race results improved faster than anyone in the history of the sport.

Regarding goal setting, striving for improvement and accomplishment is the life blood of athletics. But it is critical that the way you think about your improvement as a ski racer does not get in the way of progress. Everyone experiences gaps between expectations and race results from time to time. Allowing the resulting disappointment to take root can dampen or halt the learning process.

One way to set yourself up for frustration is by making the mistake of setting specific and inflexible goals. Goal setting should be about things which can be controlled, like commitment to a certain expenditure of time and energy, and commitment to a defined approach to learning. Goals like, "to win Race X" - or "to beat Racer Z" can create more problems than they solve. You never know in advance what your potential is, and you have even less of an idea of what the competition will bring. On one hand, if your goal turns out to be too lofty, the result can be frustration and a feeling of failure – and this can slow progress and dampen the fun. On the other hand, even if the goal is met, it may not have served the larger goal of maximum improvement. For example, a racer who meets the goal of winning a certain race, but does so with less than full preparation and effort, could probably have won that race by a bigger margin.

The goal of '*doing my best*' is perhaps the highest goal you can set, because it means that you will be constantly challenging yourself – not coasting when things are going well, but also experiencing less frustration when they are not.

Learning – the most important skill.

We acknowledge a couple basic rules of learning:

- 1) You must learn and be able to *execute* a skill at least once before you can *practice* it.
- 2) The path to success requires that you become consistent with basic skills on simpler and less demanding venues before you try to execute and practice those skills, or more advanced skills, on more difficult terrain and in more complex courses.

By far, the most important skill for a developing ski racer has nothing directly to do with ski technique, tactics, equipment, or even snow. Become skillful at *learning*. Exert the mental effort it takes to gain knowledge from all the sources available to you, like your coaches' words, observing good skiers, and video analysis. Much of this isn't automatic, and it requires your commitment to mental work to sort it all out and simplify complex concepts in your mind. It's up to you to be a good partner in the effort to build communication and solid relationships with your coaches. Great skiing and racing is simple when you master it, but the steps leading to it are not easy.

It is very important to learn how to let go of bad, if comfortable, habits. It takes a patient attitude to embrace the idea that you may have to take a couple steps back in order to build a foundation which will allow many steps forward. Executing correct techniques which are new to you may feel strange. This it to be expected and embraced. With repetition, executing the correct technique will soon no longer seem strange – it will become your new 'normal'. But beware, old habits can be powerful adversaries and it usually takes lots of resolve and persistence to be permanently rid of them.

Free skiing is the primary activity with which to learn and master proper skiing technique – accompanied by concentration, discipline, and as much repetition as possible. Racers who want to progress as fast as possible will always take every opportunity to free ski and make the most of it by concentrating and striving to make every turn clean, carved, and balanced. The best way to slow, stop, and even reverse your progress as a ski racer is to constantly try to execute techniques in a training course that you cannot consistently do outside the course.

Drills. Skiing skill can be acquired and solidified with the use of free skiing drills and other drills using brushes, stubby gates, tall gates, and terrain features. Drills should always serve a specific purpose *which is understood by the athlete*. For example, making a progression of turns using only one ski teaches lateral balance and requires the racer to become proficient at using both inside and outside edges. The better the racer understands the proper execution and desired result of the drill, the more likely it is to do some good. Generally, drills should be mixed with normal free skiing (or gate training) so that the specific lesson of the drill can be incorporated with basic skiing technique – and so that the racer can feel how the drill benefits regular skiing and racing.

Tactics. As skills are acquired and consistency is achieved, the next step is for the racer to learn to apply good (fast) skiing technique to a fixed line (a race course). There are intermediate steps which serve as a bridge between free skiing and full-difficulty race courses. These might include brush or stubby courses, short sections of gates, courses on less steep terrain, and courses with little terrain variation. Our philosophy is that every step of the skill acquisition ladder should be constructed so that the athlete can be successful a high percentage of the time. To use a different metaphor, we don't believe that pushing a non-swimmer into a deep, raging river is the best way to teach good swimming technique – or to create an athlete who has a love for the water.

Slalom deserves special mention here. Tools which facilitate the process of learning tall-gate slalom are critical. Stubby gates and brushes, which allow the racer to become experienced at fitting turns to a course without having to deal with gate clearing and physical contact with full-size gates, are essential.

The benefits of this cannot be overstated. It frees the racer to experiment without the fear (and the real risk) of physical injury – and it allows them to more easily maintain the same technique they learned in free skiing, which is especially important in slalom.

When, and only when, an athlete reaches proficiency in brush and stubby gate slalom – and sufficient physical size – does tall-gate clearing with the outside hand become appropriate. When those qualifications are met, tall-gate slalom is not difficult. At best, gate clearing is an irritation which works against fast skiing technique. For the novice slalom racer, it is the *number one* challenge to good technique and fast skiing. Natural human self-defense mechanisms work against proper technique. Proper gate clearing is not very difficult when accompanied by proper tactics and skiing technique – but a course with full-size gates is not the place to learn either of those things. *What this all means is that racers should not expect to train tall slalom gates until their slalom skills are quite high (as demonstrated in stubby-gate slalom).* It's for this reason that you will never hear us describe *outside-hand gate clearing* as 'cross-blocking', because the latter accurately describes incorrect tactics and technique.

One other thought about your approach to the sometimes bumpy road to improvement: from time to time, even the world's most successful racers develop technical flaws which dictate that they re-set their technique by using free skiing, drills, less demanding terrain, and simpler courses. There should be no stigma attached to the process. On the contrary, it is the mark of the greatest champions – who occasionally reinvent their skiing and go back to practicing beginner's basics, even though they are already at or near the top of their sport. That these athletes demonstrate this attitude *after* reaching the top in their sport might indicate that it is how and why they got there in the first place.

Training Venues.

Several factors control our choice for appropriate venues for training (including free skiing). First, it is always subject to what the resort can make available for us. Significant public skier traffic generally interferes with our ability to safely practice technical free skiing and it is definitely not compatible with race course training. We are extremely lucky to have North Boyne as our home-base training arena, and that we can close it off for our private use – vastly improving safety and our ability to focus.

With regard to the pitch of the slope, we will often choose a pitch which is less steep, particularly when teaching new or more advanced skills. We will make every attempt to avoid setting the racer up for failure because the skill is not yet there to maintain a high percentage of good quality turns on a too-steep hill. We want you to practice proper skiing and clean, carved turns most of the time and, for the same reason that we avoid complex courses until more basic ones are mastered, we choose less steep terrain until a high degree of success and consistency is shown there.

Maximizing your athletic potential.

Athleticism is critical for ski racing success. Strength, power, quickness, flexibility, and endurance give a racer an important feeling of confidence, and can be big factors in avoiding injury. They also increase the range of athletic movements that an athlete can execute with consistency. Coming to the hill fit, strong, and rested is very important to your success – and your safety.

Having said that, the best performances are set apart from the crowd by racers correctly employing good technique and tactics. While athletic effort and strength are required in some measure to execute good technique, it is a mistake for a racer to rely on them to compensate for technical and tactical deficiencies. The closer you are to using your maximum available strength, quickness, and athletic abilities (aka 'skiing on the edge'), the more likely it is that you will make mistakes. A skier who is using all, or almost all, of his physical ability may be doing so just to stay even with those who are employing better technique and tactics – and is unlikely to be able to do this with the same consistency. Watch the best performances at a World Cup race – or at a Region III race, for that matter – and one thing stands out: the fastest skiers are

also the most consistent ones – and, with almost no exceptions, they're the ones who look relaxed and smooth...in fact, those performances often look quite effortless. This seeming contradiction is not an illusion – because the fastest skiers are generally using a lower percentage of their maximum physical abilities. *Skiing skill trumps effort and risk every time.*

So, good technique and tactics are the key. The combination places more of the loads ('G's generated in high speed turns) on the skeleton – and requires less work from the muscles. A racer who is not pushing his physical limits as much can complete entire runs, run after run, without mistakes. This is what it means to perform 'within yourself'. It explains why the fastest racers are almost always more consistent than the racers they regularly beat.

Proper technique is also about economy of motion, which explains why fast racers often don't look that fast. Simply put, they are doing less stuff within a given amount of space and time, so they aren't as rushed to get it done. Again, it's not an illusion – they are actually doing less. They are doing what is necessary, and not more. You can stick with flawed movements and a 'let it all hang out' plan and possibly be a bit faster – if you're lucky. Or, you can work over time to improve your technique and tactics and be *much* faster, every time, no luck required.

You may have noticed that the words *consistency* and *confidence* keep popping up as we talk about skills and tactics. They are directly linked. Correct tactics and technique bring consistency. Consistency builds confidence. The combination brings consistently good race results. Remember this on those days when the course seems to be coming at you so fast that you can't imagine how you could go any faster. The answer is never in simply 'trying harder'. Most often, the most productive type of effort to increase is your *mental* effort – the mental effort which is required to learn, understand, and visualize proper technique and tactics. Now review the efforts listed in the last sentence – did you notice that all are accomplished *before* you leave the starting gate? Do you see what a huge advantage it can be for you over those who don't make those same efforts?

Learning tools.

About *words*. Those of you who have experienced frustration when trying to convert words into actions in the physical world will know why our program tries to avoid the use of words to teach. The good news is that there are other very effective techniques and tools to shortcut language as a means to communicate ski racing concepts. Among them: diagrams, demonstration & imitation, video, and computer analysis. We use them all, but we simply cannot avoid using words altogether. So it's critical that the words mean the same thing to the person speaking them as to the person hearing them. We make every effort to standardize our glossary of terms so that things are not lost in translation. Additionally, since we are often stuck with verbal communication, we encourage racers to learn to process verbal input and then use *visualization* to convert those words into mental images, feelings, and motions before trying to execute what has been verbalized. Thinking words while trying to negotiate a race course is not so productive. We will provide specific instruction about what visualization is and how to do it. Once you have learned to translate verbalized concepts and merge them into a first-person mental movie, you will be on your way!

When practical, demonstration will be used on the hill in place of words to teach skills. This might mean a coach or a racer demonstrating – or using video to do the same during breaks. Simple computer-controlled analysis is a fantastic tool with which to slow down and break down technique and tactics so that it can be appreciated and understood.

We believe that watching good skiing and racing helps you become good too. Streaming services on the internet are great ways to watch the best racers in the world. Along with your own video clips, we also provide clips of World Cup skiers for you to analyze using your computer's stop-frame and slow motion features.

Using video to watch, identify, and understand your technical and tactical shortcomings is appropriate and valuable. At the same time, we believe that you should spend most of your time watching ski video of yourself and others when they are skiing *well*. See and understand your mistakes – but don't dwell on them. Watching your best runs, and the best runs of world-class skiers, shows you the positive solutions – so that's where you should concentrate your time and mental effort. Even though it is obviously different from actual skiing, we strongly believe that watching good skiing helps your brain learn good skiing – even when you aren't trying to analyze exactly what makes it good.

Sometimes the latter is best done away from the slopes – and this is something that each racer can do on his own – for example, it's a productive thing that can be done during car rides. A bonus is that becoming a World Cup fan adds to the fun – go USA!

Approach to training and racing.

On-hill training time is a racer's most valuable resource and is more scarce than we would like. Our activities are planned to take the best possible advantage of every minute available. Even with a very low athlete-to-coach ratio, it is not practical (or desirable) for the coach to dictate every minute of a training session for every single athlete. Coaches will share suggestions about how racers can get the most from training sessions – but then it is up to the racer to execute those habits.

Regarding course setting, many of our training and drill courses are set in a way to make the learning of technique and tactics easier, and to help build confidence. Sometimes, this means *corridor* courses with uniform *spacing* and *offset*. Our goal is for you to achieve proficiency, consistency, and confidence in these simpler tests so that you can move on to courses with more variables – more like what you will experience in races.

The word *consistency* again pops up when we discuss training and racing. It is critical for fostering confidence – and it is a product of good concentration and a proper tactical approach to training and race courses. Here is where the saying that 'perfect is the enemy of good' applies. It's the rare run that does not have a few imperfect turns – and, if your reaction to small mistakes is to give up and ski out of the course, this becomes your habit. Instead, your instant reaction to a small mistake should be to quickly recover and fight to stay in the course and complete your run. Racers routinely win races with imperfect runs – and those who do have developed this habit of consistency.

Back to training courses. In addition to the simpler drill courses, a significant portion of our gate training will simulate races. On occasions when full-length, full-featured courses are used (whether or not timing is used) racers can and should practice most or all of their race-day routine. This should include equipment preparation (although with less expensive training wax), nutrition and hydration routine, warm-up, course inspection, pre-run visualization, removing outer clothing layers, etc. This approach has many benefits over a more haphazard approach – the main one being that the racer is getting a new race experience with each new training session and course. A racer can get years of 'race' experience in a month or two of training this way – but only if you take the opportunity and make the effort to approach it that way.

Conversely, most race days for junior racers should be viewed as 'enhanced training' – not an end in themselves, but part of a progression to higher levels of performance. This means that risk-taking (tactical aggressiveness) should be reasonable and in line with the racer's current abilities, yielding a fairly high probability of finishing without serious mistakes – just as in training. This race-day approach has the benefit of taking away some of the pressure to perform – but actually makes a good performance more likely. It also teaches the racer a mental routine and relaxed mindset which will serve her well in future months and years, and in races at higher and higher levels. This is not to say that you should be 'careful' in races, or worry too much about avoiding all mistakes. Whether you're in the start for a training run, or getting the count down in the most important race of the year, your focus and thought process should be the same. Your plan to employ correct (realistic) tactics should be mixed with an appropriate amount of 'I

don't care!' Caring too much about finishing can handcuff your athleticism and get in the way of trusting your skis and skiing the way you know how. *'Train like you race, and race like you train'* – it works.

How many races should you enter, and which ones? When planning, each racer (along with her parents and coach) should give full consideration to the trade-offs related to these questions. Race experience is very important to a racer's development. On the other hand, when looking at the total number of opportunities to ski, we believe that it is counter-productive to use a high of a percentage of those opportunities to travel to races (even if you ignore financial factors). It is a fact that the amount of skiing and training that a racer gets on a race day is almost always substantially less than on a typical training day. If you are going to continue to progress as a racer, it is important to find the right mix. Keep in mind that on training days which feature a simulated race or a time trial, the training opportunity does not stop after two runs – so you get the benefits of both racing and training in the same session and maximize the value of your days on snow.

Training day rules & practices.

Assume that, *at a minimum*, in addition to your off-hill preparation, you will *always* do two free ski warm-up runs and one course inspection (unless directed otherwise by your coaches). This means that you should be loading the chairlift well prior to the scheduled training time, enough so that you can complete your warm-up *before* the scheduled session.

We do not enforce punctuality, but you will get more from your sessions if you are on time. Often, we announce the plan and the specific purpose of the session at the scheduled start time. If you come late, you will miss this – and you will need to seek out a coach to catch up. Most importantly, coming late is not a habit that fits with 'train like you race', since races will not wait for you to 'catch up'.

Always get a go-ahead from a coach before entering a training course for your first run.

Never follow closely behind another skier down a course (or free skiing, for that matter).

Always inform a coach if you are tired, shaky, afraid, or uncomfortable attempting any training exercise or course. We will *never* ask you to attempt something you do not feel right about.

Always reduce your speed to a safe level when near objects or people. *Never do* a 'hockey stop' directly above any person or thing (like a coach or a group at the bottom of a training course). Stop to the side or below the group, so that if something goes wrong we won't have a collision. This is a zero-tolerance rule.

Our philosophy is that that the quality of your training always trumps quantity. With that in mind, there will be times when we will ask you to assist with course-setting (rarely), and course maintenance (almost always when the snow is soft). There is not enough coaching staff to adequately maintain the racing surface on some days. Note that, at races, coaches, officials, and volunteers maintain the courses – and we try to simulate that during training. Course maintenance and 'side-slipping' are not the same thing. Slipping with flat skis over a course does virtually nothing to improve the racing surface. Your coaches will instruct you on the proper techniques to smooth chatters and remove loose snow from a wide racing line. On many days this will be critical to the quality of your training runs. (Please refer to our 'Would Ted Ligety Train with Us?' and 'Proper Technique for Course Maintenance with Skis' diagrams.)

Learn to be self sufficient, and to be your own best race-day coach.

It is a fact that the best ski racers are knowledgeable in all facets of ski racing. This means that they are able to make appropriate judgments with respect to all the required ingredients of a successful ski race, and *execute*, at a minimum, the last four items in the following list:

- equipment set-up
- equipment preparation – understanding of requirements for today's conditions
- physical preparation – sleep, nutrition, warm-up, stretching, (& bathroom breaks!)
- mental preparation – concentration, mental discipline
- venue and course inspection – formulating tactics and required technique
- scheduling and timing all of the above so that maximum readiness happens at start time

Regarding the latter four, it's not that a racer should never receive help with these things but that, as you progress and become more experienced, you should take more responsibility for each component and for the flow of the entire experience. The reasons for this are twofold: first, it's not practical to expect that someone will always be available to do all these things for you; and more importantly, even if you could have an entourage of helpers, they are not you, and they cannot possibly execute the process as well as you can do it for yourself. An exceptional performance is the result of a process of preparation by you. Your coach and others are there to help you along – but they won't be with you when you leave the starting gate. The confidence you gain by becoming self-sufficient is far beyond what you can get from any other person.

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with racers receiving help with logistical issues like waxing, hauling equipment, etc. – although there is seldom a good reason why all but the youngest racers cannot perform most of these tasks for themselves. Regardless, the racer should manage the planning and execution. A statement like, “[*Somebody else*] forgot to bring my shin guards!” is an example of something that should never come out of the mouth of an experienced racer.

The *purpose* for encouraging self-sufficiency by racers is that it is the best way for racers to reach their potential, both today and in the long term. Check out the habits of World Cup racers and this becomes obvious. The amount of physical and mental effort that they make before entering the starting gate is on full display: planning, inspecting, visualizing over and over, warming up, stretching, checking equipment, and visualizing some more.

Course inspection deserves special mention here. As a racer gains experience, inspection and tactical planning are generally best done by the racer alone – meaning without teaming with a coach or teammate for the most part. Once a racer develops and refines a consistent routine of course inspection and mental preparation for a race run, he passes a very important milestone – he now knows that he can go to any venue with any combination of weather, snow conditions, and course setting and be successful. His performance does not depend on whether a certain coach or teammate is present and available. The resulting confidence will have a big impact on performance. It ensures continued learning on a higher level, because the self-sufficient racer is much more likely to identify and understand small tactical adjustments which will make a good performance better or a better performance great. Coaches and teammates can be consulted, but should not be depended upon.

The beginning racer will, of course, receive coaching on how to inspect and formulate a tactical plan during training sessions – and then receive help with recognizing problem spots at his or her first few races. The goal is to wean the racer off excessive assistance with inspection at races as soon as possible. As a racer learns, tactical mistakes will occasionally happen, and should be expected. Because of the infinite variables that ski racers encounter, there will be trial and error. Although assistance here may, in the short term, improve a racer's consistency, it fosters a very detrimental dependency by depriving the racer of the very important learning experience that would have been had without that assistance. Too much race-day help relieves the racer of the need to develop a preparation routine of his own, and therefore slows his progress. A proper and consistent approach to training sessions will have a big positive effect on race days – because most of the trial and error will have already been experienced when it doesn't count.

To sum up, our philosophy is for coaching staff to provide experienced racers support and assistance on race days on an 'as requested' basis. We will supply advice if and when racers still have questions after making their own effort to plan their tactics and approach. We will avoid offering coaching or criticism immediately after a racer's run – as this is a critical time period for the racer to compare and learn from differences between their plan and their execution – while it is still fresh in their mind. When we do have a conversation later, we will first want to hear the racer's analysis of their execution and how it might have been better – before we might inject any of our observations.

Speed events.

Here are some thoughts about the Super G and Downhill events from a 'flatlander' perspective. First, it's fun! Second, the confidence you gain from participating in speed will make you a better slalom and GS skier. Third, it's quite safe if you approach it correctly.

Being a Michigan ski racer doesn't mean you will never be a good speed skier. Lindsay Vonn, perhaps the best female speed skier in history, learned to race on a Minnesota hill smaller than Boyne Mountain – and she has won World Cup races in every discipline. Your program director, who learned to race under the chairlift you ride every day, won the Roch Cup downhill in Aspen, Colorado and placed 26th in his first World Cup attempt at the *Streif*, at Kitzbühel, Austria.

To become a good speed skier, it's critical to approach the learning process appropriately and in a way that builds confidence safely, without crashes and risking injury. Trial and error on a large scale is not a good learning track. With that in mind:

Fast skiing (straight-lining & tucking on all but the flattest slopes) should *only* be done on a controlled venue with coaches' supervision, such as at our Speed Camp. Outside of this, practicing high-speed GS turns should only be done when *both* of the following are available: 1) A slope with no public skier traffic. 2) A slope wide enough so that when you make turns down the middle, there is no possibility that you could hit an obstruction if you fall or lose a ski at any point.

Speed skiing should not be scary. For many reasons, the best approach to acquiring speed skills is to do it gradually, comfortably, and safely. The best speed skiers in the world are the ones who have gained their experience and skills slowly, and have learned their lessons by making and correcting relatively small mistakes along the way. The kamikaze method (involving crashes) is neither healthy nor effective because it kills confidence – and confidence is very important at speed. As with our technical event training, you will never be asked to do anything that is outside your comfort zone, so speak up!

Speaking of staying in your comfort zone – remember that, at speed, your primary brakes are provided by the air. When you want to brake, the first thing to do is to stand up into a tall, athletic position with arms extended to the side. The air slows you down while you are still in a strong, balanced position. On a controlled venue, it is less likely that you will need to use your skis as brakes, but if you do, use a purposeful skid or two. Using a wedge to slow down at speed is not advised.

Equipment.

Years ago, this issue was not part of our focus because we assumed that athletes would come to the program properly equipped and fit with appropriate gear. Over time, we discovered that this was an oversight, as we found that a high percentage of racers were struggling to learn because of improper, ill-fitting or poorly maintained equipment. Since then, we have devoted substantial time to helping member families make the best and most cost-effective equipment choices.

By far, the biggest issue we found was with boots. Most athletes came with boots that were too big, sometimes not designed for racing, and either too soft or too stiff. Our advice is to get help from one of

our coaches when selecting boots. Expect that some fit work may be required to achieve comfort and proper performance. Because new foam liners have never been compressed, a boot that feels great as soon as you first slip it on is almost certainly too big. Custom or aftermarket footbeds may or may not be needed. Do not expect to get more than one year of use for a growing child. While it's potentially less costly, 'sizing up' for future growth is a very bad idea as the extra room and improper match between the boot and the athlete's foot, ankle, and leg make proper stance and ski control impossible. This seriously compromises the ability to learn proper skiing technique. To ease the cost, we try to connect families with equipment that kids have outgrown (not worn out) with those looking for used equipment.

Proper skis are also important. Race skis today are quite specific in their designed turn radius. They are better and faster than the skis that the older coaches and parents learned on – but they are less versatile. U12 racers can make do with one pair of skis if it is a slalom-radius ski. After that, having both GS and slalom radius skis is fairly important, as developing proper GS technique on a slalom-radius ski (and vice versa) is nearly impossible. Again, we are happy to consult on your selection of model, length, and turn radius. Many different manufacturers make great race skis and all have similar model choices. Regarding ski set-up (edge bevels & base structure), there are ski shops with the equipment and expertise to do correct initial tuning. Once this is done, having a shop handle all routine maintenance is possible, but it's really something that athletes or parents can handle – and it will be necessary to know how to do it yourself when you start to travel to training and races away from your favorite shop.

A properly fitting FIS-approved helmet is a requirement for every racer. Shin guards should be used for slalom gates, whether they be stubby or tall gates. Only skiers who are ready for tall-gate slalom will need a removable helmet chin bar (almost never at U10 and under). The same applies to pole hand guards.

A speed suit is far less important than any of the above and, especially for younger kids (U12 and under), is a *much* lower spending priority. We do not require speed suits for any of our training, but older and more advanced kids will benefit when skiing in their suit and a race bib during race-simulation training.

A great opportunity to select equipment is at the SnowSports Summit during Boyne Mountain's Skitoberfest celebration, usually on the first weekend in October. Many manufacturers reps are there with the latest equipment and can help advise you on appropriate equipment. BOYNE Racing staff are there to help you sort it all out.

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