

Ski Racing and Injury

Ski racing is generally quite a safe sport, but like virtually all sports, it does carry some risks. The good news is that, in large part, the risks can be controlled and managed. Aside from the several obvious downsides of being injured, it is important from a development standpoint to avoid injuries. Even with 100% recoveries (which are, thankfully, quite common), training time is lost.

So, how does one control the risks? Is it by skiing 'carefully' or 'timidly'? Certainly not, as this can actually increase the risk. The answer lies in the same philosophies which help you go fast: prepare appropriately, ski purposefully, use common sense, and strive to master good tactics and technique.

You do not avoid injury by going slow – you avoid it by being smart about how you go fast. Proper tactics and technique, the things that we talk about all the time – the things that make you *faster* – also make you more consistent. Being consistent means that you are not falling or putting your body in vulnerable positions.

Here's are some common sense habits which can help reduce the chance of injuring yourself:

- 1) Be physically prepared. Practice pre-season and mid-season fitness habits, like cardiovascular, strength, and flexibility exercises.
- 2) Be self-aware. Persistence is a very good quality, unless you allow it to overtake common sense. Your ability to successfully complete long training sessions is controlled by your preparation (physical preparation, rest & nutrition). Trying to 'tough it out' when your intuition tells you it's time to stop is a recipe for trouble.
- 3) Strive to ski in balance and within your comfort zone. If you need wild upper body motions in order to maintain balance, it is a sign that you need to fix more basic parts of your technique or equipment setup. Address this, with the help of your coaches, sooner rather than later.
- 4) When skiing a course, or even free skiing, timely reaction to your mistakes can help you recover and complete your runs – and there are very few runs which don't involve a couple of small recoveries. But there is a limit to this. If you are way out of position, trying to muscle or force a recovery can add unacceptable risk.
- 5) Take the time to be mentally collected and concentrating clearly before each run – there is no prize for rushing, or 'keeping your place in line'. DO NOT continue to train when you are getting physically and/or mentally tired and sloppy.
- 6) DO NOT try to do something *anybody* (including your coach) asks you to do that you don't feel comfortable



doing. "I'm afraid" is *always* an acceptable reason not to attempt something outside your comfort zone - and it's nothing to be ashamed of. Skipping a couple runs or sectioning a course is *much* preferable to missing a whole season because of a significant injury. Be proud of your ability to make the right judgment. Building confidence slowly over time is preferable to being in a rush and learning your lessons the hard way.

- 7) When you have fallen and are sliding, don't try to recover and pop back up before you stop. The only reason to try to use your skis to stop your fall – ever – is to keep from colliding with something or someone.
- 8) If you lose a ski and there are obstacles around, do not try to ride it out on one ski. Doing so maintains your speed, which is not a good thing if there is any chance you could hit something or somebody.
- 9) No race is important enough to take unreasonable risks for. Trying to shave time by taking irrational risks is not a good plan for long term improvement anyway, because it diverts your effort away from practices which *will* yield improvement – and because it can result in a scare or an injury, and therefore erode your confidence.
- 10) Know where you are going. DO NOT ski a course without inspecting it first, and don't ski fast *anywhere* that is blind or that you are unfamiliar with.
- 11) If you stop anywhere on a ski slope, or enter or traverse a slope, keep an eye uphill. Yes, those above you are supposed to avoid you – but that doesn't make a collision hurt any less. Ski with high awareness of your surroundings when there is traffic. *Expect* others to do the unexpected!
- 12) NEVER ski fast *anywhere near* fixed objects (towers, trees, etc.), or people. No matter how proficient you are at skiing, an edge can be caught, and your day, career, or life can be shortened.

Speaking of that, please remember our rule about not doing a 'hockey stop' directly above any person or thing (like a coach or a group at the bottom of a training course). This is a zero tolerance rule. Stop to the side or below the group, so that if something goes wrong we won't have a collision. Thank you.