

SKI COACHING, INSTRUCTING AND MENTORING PHILOSOPHY

People learn best by following good skiers, imprinting and being mentored. Too often coaches and instructors try to talk someone into becoming a good skier rather than skiing them into a good skier.

Many students seek certified instructors at a given level, or coaches that have the performances of athletes on their resume.

Formal qualifications give a measure of assurance that your instructor meets certain *minimal standards*, whereas post-secondary education gives someone some theory. But a discerning student with clear performance goals would look further.

The real teaching advantage is derived from a combination of elite personal skiing attributes, streamlined pedagogy, well articulated methods, supporting published curriculum, kinesthetic empathy, demonstrable performance and superior communications skills.

Certified Nordic Skiing Professionals should possess knowledge of teaching Pedagogy, Training Concepts, Biomechanics, Progressive nordic skiing technique (theory, Application, Critical Analysis) and equipment. They also must be able to ski better than their students and perform to the highest standards. Therefore, certified professionals must demonstrate both

teaching and skiing proficiency with specialist qualifications.

THE NORDIC SKIING PROJECT PROVIDES AND INTEGRATED APPROACH

The organization of Nordic Skiing Professionals (www.proski.org) fully supports the Nordic Skiing Project as a means to arbitrate an unified approach to Nordic Skiing Technique by bringing together recognized experts in the field, generating discussion, consolidating ideas and arriving at an clear approach to instruction that all stakeholders can agree on.

The project consolidated current understanding of Nordic Ski technique and teaching methods by engaging key principals in discussions and in the production process to the greatest extent that is practical.

The Canadian Association of Nordic Skiing Instructors, Cross Country Canada, Biathlon Canada, the US Ski Association, the Professional Ski Instructor Alliance, key athletes, coaches and instructors were contacted through their associations or by direct communications soliciting their input. The draft of technical content was released to all stakeholders in 01 June 2004 with a deadline for review by 15 September 2004. The proposed content was posted publicly 15 September 2004 with a Request for Comments (RFC). A press release has been published to this effect to all clubs and associations. All comments were incorporated into the final manuals 01 April 2005.

The National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) for Cross Country Skiing and Biathlon, the Canadian Association of Nordic Skiing Instructors (CANSI) and the Professional Nordic Skiing Certification is now fully integrated.

ROUGH GUIDE TO SKIING ABILITIES

BEGINNERS - Try to stay on their feet. They are at the initial discover phases. May have never skied or rarely skied beyond this point. Whomp! Nearly all hills are too difficult.

NOVICES - Can make their way around on flats but cannot fully exert themselves without losing coordination. Stability is a major preoccupation. Some trails are beyond what they can ski. Techniques very limited. *The National Coaching Certification Program does not require skiing proficiency past this point.*

INTERMEDIATES- Can get around pretty much everywhere although it ain't pretty. Their skills are good enough to get a great workout. Limited techniques. Can sustain locomotion using a bridging or hybrid technique. Only 1/4 of propulsive phases are emphasized. These skiers lack body unity. Legs arms and torso all move independently. Timing and phasing are jumbled. They kick late and make the mistake of over-edging. They ski with stability rather than with dynamic balance. Strong physical attributes often overcompensate for good technique. They often forget recovery and relaxation phases. These skiers are in the cognitive learning stage.

ADVANCED - Can maintain proper school technique on established terrain. They ski in balance rather than using static stability but have limited capability in terrain reading and change-ups. They ski in-rhythm, exhibiting smoother dynamic weight shift. Propulsion is more balanced-up to 50 percent efficiency. Relaxation, glide and recovery are more important now. They can handle hills and are able to apply power. Their kinesthetic perception is growing, but their technical universe is expanding rapidly with no clear end in sight. Complex schemas are used to try to understand technique. Movements are very deliberate, clinical and lack natural flow. Technique breaks down in extreme terrain. *A Level 4, Canadian Association of Nordic Ski Instructor or Professional Ski Instructor of America should ski at this level.*

EXPERTS - Are able to perform all techniques perfectly over all terrain and conditions. They complete seamless terrain reading and perform change-ups with unconscious (feeling) broken rhythm. They can adapt instinctively to terrain and conditions based upon resistance feeling on the 1/4 beat with maximum dynamic range in motion. There is body unity. Full use is made of all propulsive phases with correct timing. Technical concentration is now focussed on interaction between mind-body-skis and snow-terrain. At this point they are free of technique. Understanding of skiing is simplified to just the basics.

ELITE - They are already an expert technician and also possess high performance power-endurance attributes. This level of skier applies instinctive application of technique under race conditions over difficult terrain at international competitive level. Considered skilled practitioners with a high level of physical and mental fitness, they are free to execute tactics and strategy. Can handle the most extreme terrain under difficult conditions. *Certified Skiing Professionals must demonstrate skiing abilities at the Elite Level and skill proficiency beyond what is generally required at*

an Olympic Level for qualification in specialist skill categories.

TEACHING EXPECTATIONS

Good teachers are not passive observers, but active participants and mentors in nordic skiing. When they are not teaching, they are studying, playing, training or racing.

“No man’s knowledge can go beyond his experience.” – John Locke,

An essay concerning human understanding.

An instructor/coach should have the courage of their convictions to: contribute to ski manuals, published books, produce materials for the sport, state and demonstrate their ideas. There is a line of products (Common Body of Knowledge) available to professional Nordic skiers that have withstood public scrutiny for a decade and achieved best consensus to date, on a unified approach to nordic skiing technique.

An instructor/coach should be confident but not arrogant or dismissive. They need to fully understand alternative views on technique, training or pedagogy, and be able to explain the nuances, in all fairness, to their students. And remain open-minded. It is not that any technique is necessarily wrong, just its application.

An instructor/coach should be intimately familiar with the learning process and understand what stages each student has to go through. They ought to know the answers before the questions are asked, because they have been there, done that. There is no problem that they should not have seen resolved; first for themselves and then for their students.

An instructor/coach should teach students key aspects of Nordic Skiing that are guaranteed to shorten their learning curve and give them the edge.

First and foremost, they should save the student years of development effort in one lesson, by steering the student clear of what not to do, and point your skiing in the right direction. An instructor/coach guarantee superior results.

Although, residual old-school rhetoric persists, as it did in early days of skate skiing, an instructor/coach should not be bound to a particular doctrine. The skier should

learn the most progressive nordic skiing technique, suitable for their goals.

The student should learn how to train technique in the most optimal fashion, with a few key, purposeful and high-value drills. The student will become “ruthlessly efficient” in their methods. An instructor/coach should make the best use of the student's time; telling them precisely what the student want and need to know, and bringing them a significant step forward. An instructor/coach will help the student make the connection between solid bio-mechanical principles and a holistic approach to skiing technique.

An instructor/coach should not only tell the student how it should look, but show the student; using imagery to provoke the correct feeling and impart the secrets of execution drawn from real experience; knowledge that the student can simply cannot get from a passive observer (relying on and critiquing taped race footage).

The explanations should be tailored to what interests the student. The instructor/coach should use clear progressions and meaningful exercises in an open learning approach.