

THE MOUNTAIN JOURNAL

EARLY SEASON DRILLS FOR EARLY SNOW

By TONY D. CRESPI, TECHNICAL EDITOR

"Games are helpful. People also have to realize skiing is a sport and athletic activity," notes PSIA Examiner and Bromley Mountain Director of Teacher Education Charlie Rockwell. "By taking the time to get the body working and through building strength and agility, you take the opportunity to get the most out of the experience."

Too often, early season skiers leave the mountain feeling stiff, excessively tired and sore. Sometimes folks think they will simply ski themselves into shape, but in truth, that is not a good way to begin your ski season. Ideally, it is best to start the season having completed a solid dry land conditioning program, which can build both muscle and cardiovascular strength. Then in preparation for skiing, it can be helpful to practice several early season drills to help restore your facility and on-snow facility. To aid you, we have prepared a series of early season drills.

CAT TRACKS -

WALK AND STALK TO REFINE YOUR SNOW SENSES

It is been said that some excellent skiers have the balance of cats. The problem is in early season not everyone is as sure-footed as a cat. To regain your family's sure-footed snow senses, practice walking and stalking for a warm-up drill.

"This one's cool," notes PSIA Examiner Alison Cummings, a Stratton Mountain pro in Vermont. "One of the cool things about cats is that they just don't jump straight up. They jump toward their prey. The way that a cat moves is similar to the way you should ski."

Start by pairing up at the top of the ski trail. Nominate one person to be the walker and another person to be the stalker. The walker will walk across the trail on their skis, continually picking up one ski after the other. Just think of it as walking with your skis on. The second person, stalks the walker, trying to mimic each movement of the walker but never quite catching their prey. Like a cat, the walker can vary the pace, vary the height of the steps and vary the intensity. This means, of course, that the stalker must be wary and watchful and mimic every movement.

Walk and stalk for five long and wide traverses. Then change positions, and have the stalker be the walker and the walker be the stalker. In the early season, it can take time to regain your feel and touch on the snow. Nevertheless, there is no need to feel like a frightened kitten. Stop for five minutes. Pair off. Walk the walk. Don't forget how to stalk. Like a cat stalking prey, by walking and stalking your way from one turn to the next you can help restore confidence and regain your sure-footed feel for the snow.

The thing that is so valuable about cat images is that the cat moves toward where it is going, which is exactly what we want to do in skiing.

Before beginning with drills to prepare you for ski season, check with your family physician to determine your well-being and fitness for cardio-vascular exercises. Always exercise in moderation and use sufficient caution to avoid injury when attempting a new program.

COUNT DOWN TO POWER - TO REFINE TURNING POWER

Who has the fastest and quickest feet? Set a turning race to develop fast, quick, turning feet. First, find a well-groomed, easy sloping, less travelled trail. Have the family line up just as you have seen at ski school. Choose a section of hill, say from one pole to another pole or from one tree to another, but it must be from 30 to 50 feet in length. Have one person make 10 quick turns down the fall line. Then the second person makes 15 turns in the same space. The third person makes 20 turns in the same space, and for each subsequent person, add five more turns than the previous person.

There is a real element of challenge in this drill. After all, the last person is making maybe 40 turns, so the turns have to be quicker, smaller and more precise. "One of the things this deals with is situational and spatial awareness, which is so important in skiing," notes Rockwell. "As you develop skills, you need to be aware of what is happening around you. For children to begin to be aware of the surroundings, which change as you

move, is important. Where am I relative to the other people? This game can really sharpen the ability to feel where you are relative to the hill and other people and obstacles."

How many turns can you make in the given space? "Let the last person go first on the second drill," suggests Cummings. "That let's everyone make the most turns."

Cheer on your family members. Keep the family energy high! As everyone turns, let the excitement build. Watch how the energy changes with the terrain and as the number of required turns increases.

"There are a number of good things that come out of this," notes Rockwell. "You have to plan. You have to visualize yourself performing in that space. In addition, as you perform it, you are getting feedback as you get closer to the finish line. I'm really high on this kind of game."

There are many games to build skiing skills. From basic balance drills to slow speed maneuvers, skiers should take the time, especially early season, to regain fundamental movement patterns. As you prepare to start your early season, remember these suggestions to use for all your drills.

START ON MODERATE TERRAIN

Do not ski your first run at maximum speed. Just as athletes warm-up before games, stretch your body before skiing. Take that first run on moderate terrain at moderate speeds.

Be sure your equipment is tuned. Just as a racecar driver would not enter a track with a poorly tuned car, so to, be sure your skis and boots are properly prepared.

Ultimately, be sure to have fun.

Skiing is a great sport. Smile. Relax.

Be aware.

Ski with care.

Practice your drills with care.

Technical Editor Tony Crespi has served as both a ski school supervisor and coach. Presently he serves as a contributor to numerous publications throughout snow country.

SKI SEASON PREPARATION TO AVOID INJURY

Special to SKIER NEWS: Sports orthopaedist discusses pre-season strength, flexibility, training

NEW YORK, NY -- Skiing continues to be one of America's favorite winter pastimes, attracting nearly 20 million participants to the snowy slopes each year. Snowboarding's popularity attracts more than eight million Americans to the sport each year. Yet along with the excitement of a day on the slopes, skiers and snowboarders face numerous health risks associated with these activities, which are considered among the most physically demanding of all sports. The good news is that many of these injuries can be prevented with a smart pre-season training program which will add strength and flexibility to muscles, tendons and ligaments that are used while skiing. Many of these are rarely, if ever, used during normal everyday activities.

"Skiing and snowboarding continue to rise in popularity because they are fun and they offer an opportunity for outdoor activity during the cold winter months," notes Kevin Plancher, M.D., a leading NY-area orthopaedist and official surgeon of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Teams. "Moreover, these sports have a very benevolent reputation; and they sometimes look easy to the average non-skier, and many people even believe that the soft, powdery snow will cushion their fall and help them avoid injury," Plancher adds.

Not so. In fact, while an increase in helmet use has resulted in fewer head injuries in recent years, and better equipment has all but eliminated instances of severe leg and ankle fractures, the overall boney injury rate among skiers has remained stagnant for the past 10 years. As for snowboarders, injury rates more than doubled during that time.

"For skiers and snowboarders alike, we are concerned both with the rate of injury, and with the fluctuation in the types of injuries we see from year to year," explains Dr. Plancher. He notes that many of the changes in injury patterns reflect changes in the sports themselves, as younger participants begin to "push the envelope" by incorporating more risky freestyle moves into both sports. "The most prevalent injuries now involve tendons, ligaments and muscles in the legs, knees, and

even in the upper body. These parts of the body, when specifically trained for added strength and flexibility during skiing, may withstand greater load and range of motion without injury," he adds.

Dr. Plancher, who serves as Chairman the Orthopaedic Foundation for Active Lifestyles (www.ofals.org) – a non-profit organization dedicated to advancements in research and education for orthopedics and sports medicine – encourages skiers and snowboarders of all ages and skill levels to begin training early for the winter season. He recommends a program that focuses on four key areas of conditioning:

FLEXIBILITY

"Increasing the flexibility of connective tissue is the most important thing skiers and snowboarders can do to reduce the risk of injury," Dr. Plancher advises. That is because virtually every major joint in the body – including ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, wrists and elbows – are relied upon heavily during active skiing and snowboarding, as well as during a fall. "More flexibility can help skiers and boarders stay on their feet, but it can also help them land properly during a fall with the least chance of injury," he notes. Engaging in a 20-minute full body stretching routine daily, after an aerobic activity that has warmed up the muscles, can result in better flexibility within six to eight weeks, Dr. Plancher assures.

STRENGTHENING

Strength and flexibility go hand-in-hand in preventing ski injury, Dr. Plancher maintains. Here, the key is to strengthen muscles, tendons and ligaments that may not have even been used since last winter's final trek to the slopes. For example, doing squats and rotations on a bosu ball, a device with a large flat surface on top and a soft ball-shaped underside, can give underused leg and knee muscles a stretching, strengthening workout. Dr. Plancher cautions everyone to avoid deep knee squats or leg extension exercises with weights.

ENDURANCE

Overall physical fitness is important, as an exhausted, winded skier or snowboarder may be more prone to injury than one in good physical shape. Between 30 and 60 minutes of daily aerobic exercise can increase cardiovascular endurance, lung capacity and overall fitness. Choose walking, running, tennis or biking to strengthen leg muscles simultaneously.

CORE DEVELOPMENT

The structures that make up the body's core, the spine and abdomen, can improve balance, coordination, gracefulness and overall power and strength when well developed. "This is an often overlooked aspect of pre-season training," Dr. Plancher reveals, "But it can be one of the most crucial ones, because few sports require such a well-honed sense of balance as do skiing and boarding," he adds. Dr. Plancher recommends professional guidance, and for those who enjoy yoga and Pilates to help develop those core muscles and for increasing mental focus, key to reducing the risk of ski and snowboard injury.

"There is no 'magic bullet' to preventing all the possible skiing and snowboarding injuries," Dr. Plancher admits. "However, preparation that starts now can have snowsports enthusiasts well on their way to a safe season this winter."

Please log on to www.ofals.org for more info on the Orthopaedic Foundation for Active Lifestyles.

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