



Season Preparation

The Pitch for Planning!!!

Our Challenge:

Our snow sports are so often defined by the physical and psychological challenges that our athletes face. Those challenges are often derived from the many external variables that govern the athlete assignment on any given day. From their first exposure, our athletes set forth on a mission to acquire and refine the skills that will allow them to optimize their performance in the face of any adversity created by those variables.

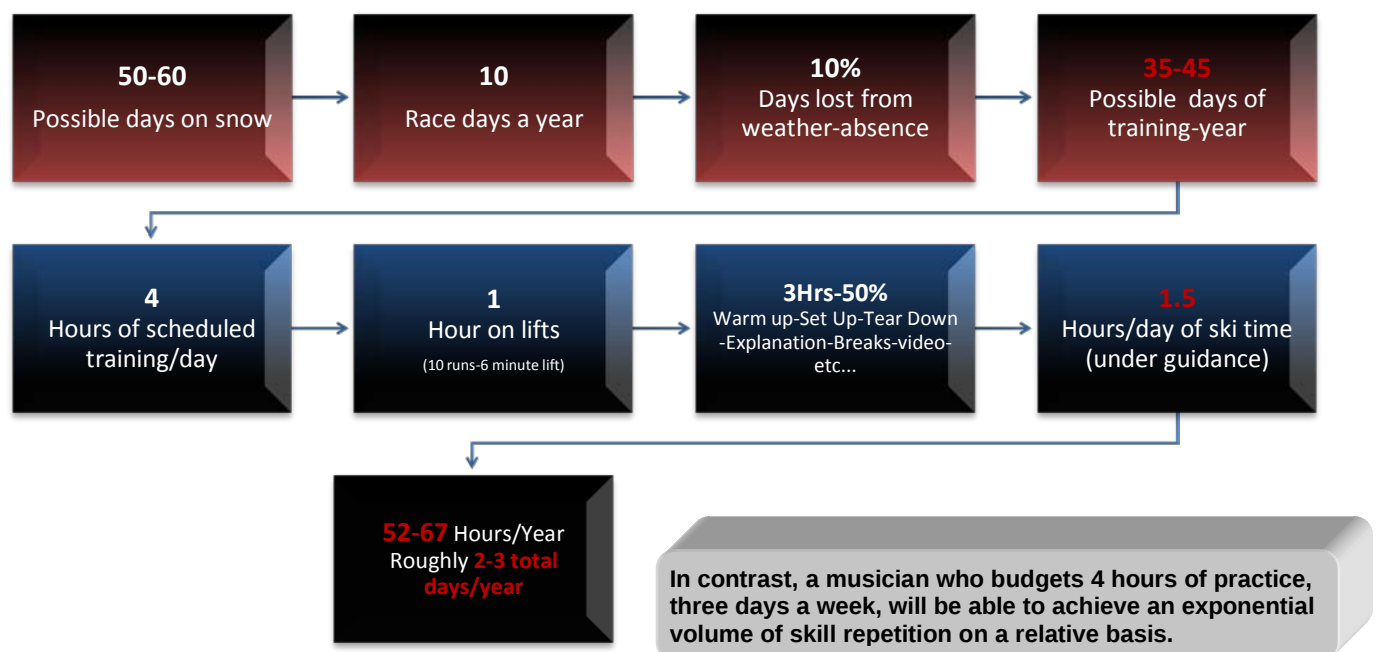
As program directors, coaches and administrators of the programs in which these athletes develop their skills, we have a clear challenge. Our challenge is to provide the leadership, structure and resources necessary for each and every athlete to meet the challenges they will face.

The developing athlete has optimal windows throughout their biological development in which their body is primed to acquire those specific skills that will allow them to meet these challenges. Many of these optimal windows for skill development reside within the early stages of an athlete's participation in competitive sports. Involvement at this level is largely participatory and peak participation in many of our snow sports overlap important windows for development. The subsequent task of identifying and fostering these skills, within those windows, can be extremely difficult for a coach who manages many athletes.

The USSA sports science department, in conjunction with many sport specific experts throughout the country, have developed new guidelines in an effort to aid coaches in their efforts to identify and manage the subjective needs of athletes as they grow. These guidelines have taken shape in a document called the Athlete Training System (ATS). Read more about the ATS at <http://www.ussa.org>

A Scenario:

Within the ATS, athletes that fall within pre-puberty phases 1,2 and 3 (*Roughly J5-J3*) are suggested to ski approximately 20, 50 and 70 days a year, respectively. Consider the following hypothetical scenario based on a 5-6 month alpine program that provides a 2-3 day/week schedule for their young athletes:



Planning: *Control to counter balance what we cannot control*

Large numbers, limited access, cost, unpredictable environments, varied athletic availability, ability, need and motivation define just a few hurdles that lie in front of a programs ability to attain its vision and mission. Developing effective environments and processes that will allow a program to attain measurable progress takes real forethought, vision and planning.

Snow sports are seasonal and variable! As demonstrated in the chart above, the cumbersome accessibility of our learning environment also leaves programs constrained when trying to account for the repetition we know is paramount to effective skill acquisition. With consideration to the previous sentence we must look at our athletic programs carefully. When we receive an athlete into our program we should have a clear understanding of what skills we want our athletes to have when they graduate from the program. The program planning process should account for athletic development throughout the entire span of their involvement with a program. The less time a program has with their athletes the more important it becomes to develop a long term schematic that accounts for exposure to, and repetition of, all of the components that create the most complete athlete we can build.

Programs build a launching pad through a clear plan that seeks purpose behind everything they do, even if the purpose is to have no purpose at all! As programs continue to drive strong planning, with vigorous evaluations after those plans are executed, athletes will thrive. Athletes will be happier when they have a clear long term plan with sequential and subjective markers that, when obtained, equate to objective progress amongst an athlete's peers. Happier athletes will augment the sport as they boost retention and spur growth. As one program provides the environment for their athletes to create a new standard for performance, others will innovate to raise the entire level of the sport in our nation.