



# **Competition-Coaching Introduction Advanced (T2T)**

## **Step 6:**

# **Athlete Support at a Competition**



**Reference Material  
for On Snow Workshop**



# PARTNERS IN COACH EDUCATION

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## 6.1 Determining a Racing Calendar for T2T athletes

Building a race schedule for aspiring athletes is often a challenge as the number a races available often far outstrips the capacity of the athlete. Also, questions arise as to which format of races are appropriate, travel considerations and the level competition of the races themselves. The following section is intended to provide guidance when developing a racing calendar for T2T athletes. Before building a racing calendar for T2T athletes it is worth examining the competition model the T2T stage of development:

Table 1: Competition Model for T2T athletes

Average age range/ category	Major Goals for LTAD Stage	Race distances and durations	Factors to Avoid
(13)-14-15 Juvenile Girl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skill development</li> <li>Develop aerobic capacity</li> <li>Develop maximal aerobic power</li> <li>Develop strength</li> <li>Develop tactics</li> <li>Develop anaerobic power and capacity</li> <li>Athletes compete to win and do their best, but the major focus of training is on refining technique skills</li> <li>Top level athletes should aim to make their divisional development team in order to be on target for international success</li> </ul>	<p>Sprints:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 x 0.1k (or ≤ 20sec.)</li> <li>2 x 0.8-1k (&gt;2 min.)</li> </ul> <p>Distance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3-10k (7-40 min)</li> <li>3 x 2-3km as team relays or prologue</li> <li>6 x 5-7.5k</li> <li>2 x 10k</li> </ul> <p><b>TOTAL: 13-17 races</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distances that are too long</li> <li>Not enough racing experiences</li> </ul>
(14)-15 Juvenile Boy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skill development</li> <li>Develop aerobic capacity</li> <li>Develop maximal aerobic power</li> <li>Develop speed 2 (≤ 20 sec.)</li> <li>Develop strength using body weight; learn proper technique for using free weights</li> <li>Develop tactics</li> <li>Athletes race to win and do their best, but the major focus of training is on refining technique skills</li> <li>Top level athletes should aim to make their divisional development team in order to be on target for international success</li> </ul>	<p>Sprints :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 x 0.1k (or ≤ 20sec.): 2 x 0.8-1k (&gt;2 min.)</li> </ul> <p>Distance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3-15k(7-40 min).</li> <li>3 x 2-3km as team relays or prologue.</li> <li>7 x 5-10k.</li> <li>1-2 x 15k mass start end of season.</li> </ul> <p><b>TOTAL: 13-17 races</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long anaerobic capacity effort</li> <li>Distances that are too long</li> <li>Not enough racing experiences</li> </ul>

### **Other Major Considerations (both male and female)**

- Emphasis on personal improvement and personal best
- Compete at regional and provincial cup series, provincial youth champs and Games, Eastern or Western Canadians
- Compete at National championships to acquire trip experience at a big event
- Begin racing after 4 weeks of training on snow
- Narrow competitive focus to two sports
- Create race situations that develop tactics and ability to stand ground in mass starts events, start and finish (scramble zones, turns near finish, etc)
- Limited travel to races; some of yearly racing should be one day events; regional and provincial circuit races; not more than one major championship per year (i.e. Nationals)
- Adapt race distances to the “time” guidelines.
- Use all the official race formats
- Continue to include a few “fun” events that emphasize team effort and skills
- Acknowledge achievements/results for each YOB (medals, ribbons, etc)

### **Examining the Competition Model:**

This model provides all the necessary details for building a race schedule for Train-to-Train athletes, including race distances, number of races and LTAD considerations. Often the races offered by the Provincial racing circuit dictate an athlete's racing schedule. Assuming that athletes race 8 provincial races of various distances and technique and another 4 or 5 races at Canadian Nationals, there are a maximum of 5 more races that need to be considered for T2T athletes.

Coaches should carefully examine the needs and experience of the athletes they are working with to fill out the rest of the race schedule. For example, athletes who are new to racing should possibly not race the full provincial circuit and instead focus on local races. Regardless of athlete level, back-to-back race weekends should always be followed with a weekend off from racing to recover and focus on training.

When selecting local races athletes and coaches should look for events that offer new challenges and different competition for the athletes. For example loppet style races or sprint relays should be highlighted to give athletes the chance to add some variety to their racing regime. Coaches should also be aware that the racing calendar set out for an athlete may change significantly over the course of the season.

Coaches should be flexible and add or subtract races as needed as the athlete progresses through the season. When in doubt about whether an athlete should do another race, err on the side of caution as athletes in this age group can easily become stale with too many races.

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**Sample Race season for a T2T athlete:** Note the variety of races and gaps for training between major competitions.

<b>Date (weekends)</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Technique</b>
Dec 14-15	Club Time trial	Classic individual
Dec 21-22	Training	
Dec 28-29	Provincial Cup # 1	Classic individual/Skate Sprint
Jan 3-4	Training	
Jan 10-11	Local Race	Regional duathlon
Jan 17-18	Local Race	Junior Skate individual
Jan 24-25	Training	
Jan 30, 31, Feb 1	Easterns/Provincial Cup #2	Classic Sprint, Skate Mass Start
Feb 7-8	Training	
Feb 14-15	Local Race	Backcountry Loppet, Classic mass start
Feb 21-22	Provincial Cup# 3	Skate individual/ Classic pursuit
Feb 28, March 1st	Training	
March 7-8	Provincial Cup # 4	Classic individual/Skate Mass start
March 13-22	Nationals	CI Tsp, CI Ind, Sk Ind, Sk Sp, CI Mass

### **Key Points When Building a Competition Schedule for T2T Athletes:**

- Follow the guidelines of the Competition Model
- Prioritize races that serve the development considerations of the athlete
- Schedule rest and training opportunities away from racing into the training schedule
- When selecting local races look for events that offer new challenges and different competition for the athletes.
- be flexible and add or subtract races as needed as the athlete progresses through the season
- When in doubt about whether an athlete should do another race, err on the side of caution

## **6.2 Familiarizing Athletes with Competition Rules**

At the T2T stage of development athletes are quite familiar with the general procedures and rules of cross country ski races. However as racing becomes more competitive and all formats become more prevalent, athletes need to be aware of rules and regulations of ski races so they aren't disadvantaged by unintentionally breaking rules. The full rules governing ski races in Canada can be found on Cross Country Canada's website under '**Rules and Regulations**'. Coaches should familiarize themselves with this manual so they can properly educate and answer questions athletes have on competition rules. Below are some common rule questions and points to note for train to train athletes and their coaches.

**Tracking:** In individual start races (which include sprint qualifiers) an athlete being overtaken by another athlete must yield the track when asked by the overtaking athlete. The onus is on the overtaking athlete to yell 'Track', 'On your right' etc. before the athlete being passed has to move. If track is not called the athlete being overtaken can maintain their line or track for as long as they please. For T2T athletes it is important to note that athletes being tracked do not have to stop skiing when being passed. They should continue skiing but switch to another lane or different line on the course.

**Sprint Heats: How Lucky Looser and Lane Choices are Decided:** In sprint races lucky losers are either decided by qualifier time or by heat time. In the case of qualifying time deciding lucky loser positions, the athletes who finish third in each heat will be compared by examining their sprint qualifying time. The 3<sup>rd</sup> place athletes with the fastest two qualifying times will move on to the semi-finals. This means that if an athlete ranks 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> in qualifier they are guaranteed to move on to the semi-final if they finish 3<sup>rd</sup> in their quarter final heat. From semi-final to final, the top three skiers in each semi-final move on to the A final. If lucky loser is based on heat time the heat finish times of every skier in each heat are recorded. The skiers with the fastest two heat times outside of the top two receive lucky loser positions to the semi final. This means that even if an athlete finishes fourth in a heat they could potentially make it to the next round if their heat was fast. In the semi-final the same procedure holds true.

**Lane Choices:** When lining up for the quarterfinals in a sprint heat athletes are given lane choice by qualifying time. The lowest bib number (fastest qualifier) in the heat chooses their start lane first, followed by the next lowest bib number until all the lanes are filled. For the semi finals, lane selection is based on how an athlete finished in their quarter final, followed by their qualifier position. First lane choice goes to first place finishers in the previous rounds of heats, followed by second place finishers, then lucky losers. If there are 2 athletes who won their quarterfinals in a semi-final together, the athlete with the faster qualifier time gets first lane selection. The second place finishers in the quarter final and lucky losers are also compared in the same manner.

**Going off Course:** If a skier leaves the race trail during competition either by taking wrong turn or lane, falling or skiing past v-boards or markers, they must re-enter the trail at the same place they exited the course. Skiing off course often occurs in the stadium where racers leave the course by taking the finish lane instead of the lap lane or vice-versa. Even if there is no advantage gained (or even if it results in a disadvantage to the racer) by skiing off course the skier must return to the place they exited the course and re-enter to the race course at that



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spot. Failure to do so could result in a time penalty or disqualification.

**Equipment:** If a skier breaks equipment during a race they are allowed to replace it. Replacement equipment can be given to athletes by anyone. Replacement equipment cannot be given to a skier for the purposes of aiding performance (i.e skis with better wax or longer poles for double poling). Athletes should be prepared to show broken equipment to race officials if requested.

**False Starts:** In sprint heats false starts (starting before the starter's gun goes off) are a common occurrence. The first false start in a sprint heat results in no penalty or consequence to the athletes. If a second false start occurs in the same heat, the athlete who false started is disqualified and removed from the heat. This is regardless of whether that athlete caused the first false start.

**Lane Selection in the Finish Straight:** In the marked finishing corridor of a race athletes must select a finish lane and remain in that lane unless they are overtaking another competitor. If an athlete does switch lanes to overtake they must ensure that they are not obstructing another skier. See obstruction.

**Obstruction:** When passing another skier, athletes must ensure that the tails of their skis are ahead of the tips of the skis of the athlete they are passing before they move in front of that athlete. Failure to do so could result in an obstruction charge.

**Exchange Boxes:** As pursuit races are becoming more common, athletes should be made aware that when exchanging gear, classic equipment must be left in the exchange box. Often younger athletes will leave the box with equipment protruding on to a ski track, which can be considered obstruction.

### **6.3 The Selection of Athletes**

Most coaches must, at one point or another, make decisions about the selection of athletes. The goal of these decisions can be to identify those who (1) will be chosen for a team, (2) will take part in a particular competition, (3) will have more competitive opportunities.

These decisions are often unavoidable because of restrictions on the number of athletes who can register for certain competitions or be part of a team. Even in cases where each athlete can take part in competitions or the club or team has a policy stating that each athlete can take part, financial resources may be insufficient to provide everyone with equal support. In either of these scenarios, the coach may have to select some athletes and not select others.

#### **Possible Negative Impacts of Selection**

Decisions about the selection of athletes inevitably leads to some disappointment among those who were not chosen. Indeed, most skiers will have invested considerable effort and energy to be selected, to say nothing of the financial investments made by their parents and others. When they learn the news, the athletes might feel they have failed. Some will be afraid of their peer's reactions or even be ashamed of themselves after this perceived failure, which might negatively affect their self-esteem. Selection therefore is a serious task that coaches must carry out professionally.

#### **Make the Selection Procedure and Criteria Public**

To minimize the negative reactions that can arise after selecting athletes, make sure that all athletes, their parents, and the club or sport association directors know exactly when and how the decision will be made.

In other words, clearly indicate *when* the decision will be made, *who* will make it, *how* it will be made, *how many* athletes will be chosen, and *what criteria* will be used to make the decisions. Other information (e.g. the place [when necessary], the opportunities available in the future for those who were not picked, and the options for appealing a decision) can also be part of the procedure and criteria.

Defining the selection procedure and criteria is often more difficult than it appears at first glance, given the stakes involved for the skiers, the resulting consequences and emotions, and the numerous unforeseen situations that can arise. It is therefore useful to talk about this subject with other coaches, experienced directors, and even with the athletes themselves. This will provide you with feedback and ideas from people who often have a wide range of experience with the difficulties involved in trials and who have developed effective ways of managing the process fairly. Even if you have a clear idea of how you want to proceed, the viewpoints of others can help you refine your procedure and criteria and make them clearer and more explicit.

The selection procedure and criteria should be written out and made available to the athletes, their parents, and the club or sport association directors well before the date you intend to announce your decision. Moreover, you might consider having the procedure and

criteria approved by the athletes, parents, and administrators before making your procedure and criteria public. This will provide you with feedback and suggestions and ensure that everyone has understood the implications of what was announced.

### **Selection Procedure and Criteria**

When you are writing up the selection procedure and criteria, coaches should consider the following:

- **Do not conduct trials unless you are obliged to do so, and encourage the largest possible number of athletes to take part in the program activities.** Do not be afraid to call into question certain well-established practices whose main effect is to discourage young people and reduce their development opportunities. For example, consider forming more than one team or more than one training group when possible, and take on some assistants. If you absolutely have to carry out trials, make sure that their timing is well chosen, so as not to interfere with the main principles of athletic development. Moreover, avoid selecting athletes very early in the season. The latter is not recommended in programs involving young athletes for the following reasons: (1) an early emphasis on specific preparation and program performance is detrimental to a more progressive approach to training that focuses on long-term development; (2) the athletes who have not done any specific training during the off-season or who have participated in other sports are often at a disadvantage compared to those who have been involved in sport-specific training all year, even when they have high athletic potential.
- **The selection criteria must reflect the club and organizations values and development goals** (participation, equal opportunities for everyone, performance, progress, effort, attitude, etc.).
- **The procedure and criteria must be simply and clearly described and have no grey zones.** Everyone must unequivocally understand the how, when, and where, as well as other information dealing with the number of athletes who will be picked and the person or group in charge of decision-making. Complicated phrasing should be avoided.
- **Whenever possible, the criteria should include objective elements**, such as specific performance standards, a point system or statistics dealing with important aspects of ski performance, results during previously identified competitions, etc. Such an approach will make it possible to avoid situations where athletes feel excluded from the outset and feel they have no chance of being picked because a given person is in charge of the selection process. These criteria must also appear to be fair and reasonable to the majority of athletes.
- **Make sure that your criteria cover the most likely scenarios and possibilities.** For instance, what happens if one of the athletes is sick or injured, breaks equipment during one of the trial stages, or cannot be present for an unavoidable reason? Moreover, what constitutes an injury or an unavoidable reason? What happens in the case of a tie or if one of the preliminary trials is not held? What

happens if one of the athletes has systematically dominated? Or if certain athletes who are showing considerable potential are not yet able to perform at the required level, despite the fact that, in the weeks to come, they will undoubtedly surpass others who might be picked at selection time? Crossing your fingers and hoping that this type of situation will not happen is not a good strategy, since experience shows that this kind of dilemma occurs fairly frequently. One of the possible options is to prepare for these possibilities by indicating in the criteria that a certain number of athletes will be picked at the coach's discretion. In other words, they will be picked based on your personal evaluation of their current or future aptitudes, their level of commitment, and their attitude. However, you should expect to be asked to justify any choices based on the coach's discretion...

- **Make sure that the criteria are explained exactly the same way to each athlete,** to other coaches, parents, and members of the team or club's support personnel. Avoid presenting different and incompatible selection approaches separately to different people, since the resulting differences in understanding and expectations may prove impossible to reconcile and carry out.
- **When appropriate, indicate that the criteria were developed to identify athletes who have a particular profile or who demonstrate precise performance skills or aptitudes** (e.g. selecting sprinters for a sprint relay). This can allow you to provide additional explanations about why certain criteria are used. In such a case, it could be useful to refer to certain facts or statistics to justify the choice of criteria.
- **Once the criteria are made public, you will have to stick to what was announced,** even if the implementation of the procedure and criteria create some surprises about which athletes are selected. In this way, you will prove your integrity and credibility in other people's eyes. This possibility shows how important it is to seriously think about the procedure and criteria used in selecting athletes.

### **Managing Selection Announcements**

- Once your decision has been made, meet individually and as quickly as possible with each athlete who was not selected to tell him or her about your choice. Avoid making public or delayed announcements or relaying the information to an athlete through a third party.
- Do the following when you meet with athletes:
- Reassert their strong points.
- Praise their participation and efforts.
- Go over the selection criteria and the way you applied them.
- Avoid comparing athletes during the discussion.
- Provide simple, precise, and constructive improvement strategies.
- Take the drama out of the trials. Remind athletes that there will be other opportunities and that the most important thing is not the final result but to have tried one's best.
- Encourage them to continue and persevere; express your confidence in them.
- Acknowledge their emotions, and be ready to listen to them.
- Respect their dignity at all times.

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- Actively seek their comments and reactions, and respect their viewpoint.
- Before proceeding with the announcements, find out about the possible alternatives for those who have not been picked so that you can suggest options to them; for instance, provide them with options for other events or races they can participate in.
- Make sure that the athletes learn a positive lesson from the experience; end on a positive note by praising, once again, their participation and effort and reassert their strong points.
- Meet with the parents of each athlete who was not selected to answer their questions as needed.

## **SAMPLE SELECTION CRITERIA**

### **Mountain Nordic Selection Criteria for Nationals**

***Due to the racing development concerns, the high number of potentially eligible athletes and the limited support staff for Nationals, athletes at the L2T stage will not be considered as potential candidates for this year's National Championships.***

- 1) *For an athlete to be considered for Nationals this season they must adhere to Mountain Nordic's code of conduct throughout the training and racing season. Athletes will not be invited to Nationals if they violate the code of conduct in a manner that reflects negatively on the values members and athletes of Mountain Nordic. Code of conduct violations which result in exclusion from nationals are determined by the Mountain Nordic Racing Committee. Athletes must also demonstrate commitment to team practices (attend 8 practices per month) and events (attend at least 2 trail clearing and 1 club fundraising event) and be supportive and considerate of teammates at all times.*
- 2) *Athletes who finished in the Top 15 at Nationals 2010 or Top 15 at the Eastern Canadians 2010, as well as those who finished in the Top 5 at a Provincial Cups in 2010 are pre-selected for National Championships 2011 (Top 15 or 5 in their age category).*
- 3) *Otherwise the following criteria must be met in all fields:*
  - *An athlete must participate in 3 of 4 provincial cups OR 3 Canada Cup races in 2010-2011.*
  - *Athletes must achieve a minimum of 7 CPL points behind the average CPL of the top 3 finishers in one (1) provincial cup race in any technique (sprint or distance) before February 11, 2011. The 7 CPL points cut off reflects the potential of the athlete to place in the Top 40 at Nationals and have a positive competitive experience.*
  - *Athletes must demonstrate due diligence with respect to logging (filled out every three days minimum), and attend a majority of practices (8 per month). Attendance will be taken at each practice. For those athletes commuting over 60 km to practice some leniency will be given in the number of practices attended if the athlete demonstrates a high level of commitment to the program.*
  - *In the event of tie breaks preference will be given to athletes who have attended more practices, logged consistently throughout the training season and have demonstrated a positive and supportive attitude towards teammates (as judged by the professional coaching staff).*

*Force majeure will only be considered in extenuating circumstances, such as compromising weather conditions, injury, or illness. An athlete looking for a force majeure spot must submit a written request by Feb 10<sup>th</sup>.*

*There is space available for 20 athletes – if by Feb 11th, 20 athletes have not met the qualifying standards, the decision will then be based on a descending order of distance CPL Points relative to the average CPL points of the top three racers in an athlete's category from the most recent CPL ranking list. The final team for Nationals will be emailed out on Feb 11th.*

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## **REFERENCES**

CCC Athlete Matrix (2014). CCC Competition Model. Retrieved from <http://www.cccski.com/Programs/Coaching-Development/Athlete-Development-Matrix.aspx>

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