



**MANSFIELD
NORDIC CLUB**

MANSFIELD NORDIC PARENT PRIMER

Part 1: INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Mansfield Nordic and great world of Nordic ski racing! At any level, dedication to sport requires large investments of time and energy...nowhere is this more true than with Nordic skiing, an activity that regularly challenges the limits of both physical and mental strength.

With that said, these same qualities bring out the best in everyone involved with this sport. By becoming a part of this community you will find yourself traveling all over New England and experiencing a wide array of towns and venues large and small: one weekend you may be soaking in views of Mt. Washington from a small cafe, and the next weekend you may be overlooking the village of Stowe from atop a tall open valley...New England's premiere ski races are held all over and classic stories from each venue abound!

You will also meet many new people of all ages: skiers and parents from your own club, along with those from other clubs and other states (and maybe even skiers from other countries!). Chances are you will even get to know some race organizers, course officials, groomers and timers on a first-name basis. It doesn't take long to realize that in a niche sport like Nordic skiing the world is a small one!

This primer is designed to help parents of skiers navigate the hectic world of Nordic racing, particularly when it comes to effectively surviving a “race weekend” such as 2-day NENSA Eastern Cup events or the busy Bill Koch League (BKL) Festival. Some general topics covered will include

- **The structure of a typical race-day, from the point-of-view of the athlete**
- **Some info on how to best support athletes before, during and after a race**
- **Common parental headaches and how to avoid (or at least minimize) them**
- **Notes on wax, equipment and more**
- **A list of this season's races and venues, with helpful information on travel, lodging, dining and more for each location (updated yearly, dependent on race calendar)**
- **A reference list of other helpful sites related to the sport**

Keep this primer handy for both planning the season ahead and as a reference during winter. This document will try to cover as much information as possible, but every race is a different experience! The Nordic community is incredibly supportive and helpful, so never be afraid to ask questions of others!



Part 2: RACE-DAY STRUCTURE

Most race days actually feature far more than one race. Competitors are divided into age-groups based on birth-year: the first race of the day may take place as early as 8:30 or 9AM, and the final racer of the last age group may not even begin until mid-afternoon! It is important to realize that a club may have racers competing in every age group.

This is a good place to note distinctions between mass-start and individual-start race formats

- Mass-start events mean all racers begin at the same time (think of an XC running race). Racers are timed, but place is determined where a racer is at in the field when he or she crosses the line
- Individual-start events are a race against the clock, with racers typically starting at 30-second intervals (think of a time-trial stage in the Tour De France)

At a NENSA Eastern Cup event:

- The J2/U16 group will race first. These races are typically 5 kilometers in length, taking between 15 and 30 minutes to complete
- The U18/U20/Open category often races next. This is often the largest field as it encompasses the most wide range of ages. High school athletes compete side by side with college skiers, professional racers, “masters” (30+) racers, and even the occasional US Ski Team member on a break from the World Cup. These races are typically 5 and 10 kilometers for women and 10 to 15 kilometers for men, with the longest event (15k) taking up to 50 minutes.
- Eastern Cup events also often feature a BKL race for younger athletes. These are usually either the first or last event of the day. Much like the longer races, BKL events are grouped by age, most typically by grade-level. Events range from 500m “lollipop” races to 3 kilometer distances.

This type of schedule is typical of most larger events, from a local citizen's race to the Junior National Championships: a series of races, divided by age-group, going off one at a time. The time between races is usually determined 2 ways:

- One race begins a set time after the final competitor from one race has *finished* (ex: the women's U16 race will begin 20 minutes after the final men's U16 competitor begins)
- One race begins a set time after the final competitor from one race has *finished* (ex: the women's U16 race will begin 10 minutes after the final men's U16 racer crosses the finish line)



Part 2: RACE-DAY STRUCTURE (continued)

A typical race-day from the athlete's point-of-view.

For the purpose of setting the scene, the athlete is a U20 competitor with an individual start classic race. The athlete's start-time is 11:35AM

The night before:

6PM – Eat dinner, making sure to avoid foods that upset the stomach (one rarely eats ethnic foods the day before a race...)

730PM – Team meeting with coach(es). Topics covered include start-times for each group, discussion of ski prep and when to check in about wax, discussion of the course and tactics, reminders of small things like food and hydration, etc

8PM – Getting ready for bed, checking the start-list for the next day and over-analyzing who is racing, who starts near you, who you want to beat, etc. Also ideally making sure race suit, extra clothes, snacks and more are all lined up for the next morning to eliminate any stress when getting ready to leave for the race

930PM – In bed, hopefully on the way to a restful nights sleep but often getting too nervous/anxious/excited about the next day's race...not always a bad thing!

The morning of:

8AM – Wake up, eat a good balanced breakfast and avoiding simple sugars and processed foods. Typical pre-race breakfast might be oatmeal with banana and maple syrup, wheat toast with peanut butter, orange juice and yogurt.

9AM – Grab gear from hotel room and load up to depart for race. Always remember the mantra: “skis, boots, poles? Check!” It's a right of passage that everybody forgets their boots at some point in their career, but try to let it only happen once!

930AM – Arrive at race venue. Immediately pick up race bib from designated bib area, and then go into lodge and sit. Chat up friends and competitors (often one-in-the -same) and search for WiFi on phone to play games. Take a long time to change into suit, boots, etc

10AM – Have a quick snack (half a PBJ) while walking out to check in with coaches and maybe cheer on some younger competitors and teammates who are racing the earlier events. Then return to lodge to double-check gear, and text messages.

1030AM – Head out on course to warm-up. Stress is reaching critical levels here, especially because it is a classic race and kick wax is still undetermined.

11AM – Stop by wax bench to grab skis from coach. Test wax and determine if more/less kick is needed.

1115AM – Return for more wax, then head over toward start area

1125AM – In start area, removing warm-up jacket and getting psyched

1135AM – Begin racing!

1210PM – Cross finish line, grab warm-up jacket and watch other friends and competitors finish their races. When a familiar face crosses the line, ask if he or she wants to ski some more, and begin a 20-minute cooldown ski

1230PM – Return to wax bench for debrief with coach, or (if coach is out on course) ski until you find coach and talk about the race.

1235PM – Return to lodge, change into dry clothes, refresh phone in earnest pursuit of live results online, while also scouting for an official to staple a printed version to the wall. Once that happens, the crowding begins.

1PM – Watch and cheer for more races while eating some lunch.

130PM – Head back to hotel...begin thorough over-analysis of results, texting friends and teammates to see how their race was, and hopefully getting in some recovery-type activities like stretching...after all, there's a whole new race tomorrow!

As this very basic outline shows, there is a lot going on in a race beyond the 30 minutes spent out on the course. There is a lot to keep track of, especially for a teenage athlete. Stress levels are high to say the least! It may take some time to recognize what an individual competitor needs to be successful; some will like having support all the time, and others will want to be more independent, and as a younger athlete becomes more involved with the sport these needs may shift and change.



Part 3: Athlete Support

During a race weekend, parental support is everywhere. For many, transportation is a big part of being a ski parent: many of the athletes are not of driving age, and certainly not of an age to book hotels, travel across the region and facilitate an entire weekend of skiing...not yet anyway!

For tips on travel, lodging, food and more, see the next section encompassing the upcoming race calendar. Notes are included on everything from the best meals to some interesting history and stories.

Below is a list of some common ways parents help out on a race weekend:

- **FOOD TABLE** This is a great community aspect of the ski world. Many clubs (MNC included) have a table set up for post-race snacks. There is an electronic sign-up shared by email a week before each race event for collaboration and discussion. The food table serves as not only a food-stop for hungry skiers, parents and siblings, but a 'home base' to meet up at, discuss the events of the day and keep everyone on the same page. Some suggestions for what to bring:

-Food that is healthy and nutritious, but also in a convenient grab-and-go format; athletes often want something they can eat with their gloves still on! A popular and smart option is small wraps with deli meat, lettuce, cheese, etc.

-Other suggestions are trail mix, granola bars, Fig Newtons, cereal bars, oatmeal cookies (easy on the sugar!), muffins and fruit

-Yogurt in a squeeze tube may work well, but avoid too many foods that involve extra utensils and containers, which can create a hassle for cleanup and disposal

-Hot water is often provided in a carafe, so hot cocoa or tea is nice on cold days

- **ON COURSE** This is where the action is, and understandably this is where many parents want to be. There are lots of possible ways to get involved:

-Cheering is an obvious one! Show support for the racers of all clubs and teams...if you print out a start-list (see below) you can cheer for everyone by name!

-Camera use, either still photos or video, is usually encouraged. If filming, a good idea would be to remain in the same spot and film multiple racers at that same location. Film a few of the highest-seeded racers (pro team skiers or US Ski Team racers) and capture club racers at the same spot to provide good comparison. For still photos, Nordic requires a bit of practice, but in general aim for shots when skiers are in a dynamic position. Bonus points for capturing drool!

-Split-timing can be useful, but it is more time-intensive and preferences for receiving information vary by athletes: some like to know where they stand, others prefer to race 'blind' and ski their own race without distraction. If you are interested in learning about split-timing, it is best to first check with a coach and develop a plan of action.

- **START/FINISH AREA** This is a place of high anxiety and emotion both before and after a race. On a very cold day it might be nice to have some blankets on hand for racers, but in general this is a hands-off area for parents. When in the start/finish area athletes are most often deeply involved in their own thoughts. Before a race they are trying to force out distractions, and after a race they may need time to absorb the events that just occurred. A common and good practice is the “20-minute rule” in which after a race athletes take time on their own to reflect on the race alone and feel however they choose (frustrated, disappointed, exuberant, etc) and then, after those 20 minutes, they actively return to a supportive role for their teammates regardless of what happened in their own race.

Part 4: Eastern Cup Game Plan

Each trip to an 'away' or distant locale for an Eastern Cup or other race weekend is an opportunity to see a new area, experience time with other MNC members, and live the life of a traveling ski racer! Over the past several years the club has developed a game plan for continuing to foster community and collaboration even away from Vermont:

- Hotel information and travel plans are shared in advance. See the following section (Part 4 continued) for more detailed info on this season's schedule and hotel info
- Team dinners, pre-arranged, take place on Saturday nights. Keep an eye on email prior to a race weekend for up-to-date info
- There is a potluck/tailgate (see previous section and the “food table”) at most Saturday Eastern Cup races. Depending on the event or location there may or may not be a dedicated potluck/tailgate on Sunday as families may need to travel home immediately following the conclusion of an event



Part 4 (continued): 2015-16 Race Calendar Guide

Eastern Cup #1

12/19-20

Craftsbury Outdoor Center (Craftsbury, VT)

Events:

Saturday: Classic Sprint (1.5k men, 1.3k women)

Sunday: Freestyle Interval Start

Lodging Options

Due to the close proximity of these races to MNC families, there will be no organized lodging for this weekend. However, the Henry/Solow Family has rented a house (1037 South Craftsbury Road Craftsbury, VT 05826) and it would be great to have everyone get together for a brief team meeting on Saturday after the conclusion of the races. Call Sharon's cell (802 589-7072) if you get lost.

Dining Options:

With most staying at home, this is a great opportunity to enjoy a healthy, home-cooked meal before race day! Look for info on a pre-race waxing get-together in the days leading up to the race!

Eastern Cup #2

1/16-17

Black Mountain of Maine (Rumford, ME)

Events:

Saturday: 5/10km Freestyle Interval Start (combined with Bates Carnival race)

Sunday, 1/17

Lodging Options:

Best options for lodging are typically found in the town of Bethel, about 20-30 minute west of Rumford on Rt 2. The Blue Iris (207-364-4495; speak with Jean) is a popular destination halfway between the two towns. A traditional motor inn that is clean but not luxurious.

Also widely utilized is the Riverview Inn in Bethel (207 824-2808), which features suites with kitchenettes and multiple bedrooms. The Norseman Inn (1 800 824-0722) is also just down the road.

The Linnel Motel is closest to the ski area and right in the town of Rumford and is the most inexpensive, but is extremely dirty and lacks most traditional amenities.

Dining Options:

A team dinner will be organized for Saturday, January 16th at either the Red Rooster (Rte 2, Bethel) or the Sunday River Brewery. We dine about 5:30 pm and will have a fixed price dinner with 4 entree choices. Watch your email for details a couple of weeks prior to the race.

Eastern Cup #3

1/30-31

Mt Van Hoevenburg (Lake Placid, NY)

Events:

Saturday: Freestyle Sprint

Sunday: Classic Mass Start (combined with Supertour race)

Lodging Options

The village of Lake Placid is about 10 minutes from the race venue of Mt Van Hoevenburg. A number of MNC Comp Team families have rented a house in the heart of downtown Lake Placid behind High Peaks Cyclery. While bed space is currently filled up, we would love to host a team dinner at the High Peaks house for the whole MNC family who are in the area for the weekend (see more below).

Art Devlin's Motor Inn (518-523-3700) is directly across the street from the MNC house, and there is an Econolodge (518 523-2817) just down the street that is even closer to the venue. A Best Western (518 891-1970) can be found just up the hill, and pricier yet more expansive resorts like the Crowne Plaza (1-877-570-5891) dominate the landscape. There is also a condo available (<http://www.vrbo.com/598578>). There is no shortage of lodging in this beautiful mountain village!

Dining Options:

The MNC house (behind High Peaks Cyclery, on 2733 Main St, Lake Placid NY 12946) will host potluck team dinners both Friday night and Saturday night. Watch for the email a week or two prior to the event.

Eastern Cup #4

2/6-7

Trapp Family Lodge (Stowe, VT)

Events:

Saturday: Classic Interval Start (combined with UVM carnival race)

Sunday: Freestyle Interval Start (combined with UVM carnival race)

Lodging Options

We are fortunate to have another Eastern Cup in our backyard this year! Most all MNC athletes will choose to stay at home for this event, although numerous options in the Stowe area exist to put yourself closer to the action on race day.

Dining Options:

We will work to have a team dinner on at least Friday or Saturday night, possibly in conjunction with a team waxing event.

Part 5: Notes on Waxing, Equipment and Ownership

In the Nordic world, ski waxing is a complicated and involved topic. Generally as age and ability-level increases, so to does the intricacies and nuance of wax preparation. On race day, this is often the greatest source of stress from a coaching (and more often than not, athlete) perspective.

The level of parental involvement with waxing varies. Generally, it is safe to assume the coaches are in a good place with the days' waxing *unless they indicate otherwise or specifically request help*. That being said, the best way to become involved on race day is to communicate a desire to learn more about wax, take the time to work with a coach to develop a plan for how to best contribute, and follow that approach with tweaks as necessary throughout the season. Stay tuned to club notices for wax clinics and demonstrations.

A lot of this sport also involves wax work and equipment work away from the snow. This is another area where parents play a large role. The available selection of ski gear has exploded in recent years. Like wax, this is something that gets more and more involved the higher the level of athlete. In 6th grade a racer might have one pair of combination skate/classic skis. By age 18 a skier may have 3 pairs of classic skis alone!

The best thing parents can do to help themselves, the athlete(s) and the coach(es) is to not simply buy and provide the equipment. Instead, learn a bit about the gear itself with your athlete, do research to help make informed decisions about what is needed, and encourage the athletes themselves to become invested (pun intended) in this aspect of the sport. The same goes for wax...the coach may apply and test wax on race day, but the athlete who has spent time waxing his or her own skis and knows them well can provide the best feedback and ultimately help produce the fastest boards come race time.

As another note on equipment, do not necessarily go out and look for the highest-priced item and assume it will equal results. While skis may get faster and lighter as you climb the price ladder, costs add up quick. Conversely, it is worth the time and money to seek out good-fitting skis and equipment that will still make for an enjoyable experience. Coaches are a great resource to ask about this area, as are local ski shops like Skirack.

Part 6: Additional Resources

- NENSA

The official association for great ski programming in New England! This should be bookmarked on the browser of every ski family...the most dedicated probably have it as their homepage! www.nensa.net.

NENSA is the home for race results, race schedules and more. It is the source of points lists, which determine end-of-season rankings and qualification for trips like Junior Nationals. To read more about these races and qualifying procedures (as well as in-depth descriptions of how 'NENSA Points' work) visit the "Racing" tab at the top of the site.

- Fasterskier

A site providing news, training tips, equipment reviews and more. This is the ESPN of the Nordic ski world! www.fasterskier.com

- Mansfield Nordic

Of course, the site to keep up to date with club events, photos, race recaps, training information and more. www.mansfieldnordic.org

- USSA

The source of the US Ski Team...usually a clunky website, but the source for license info, qualification criteria and schedules for higher-level racers looking to advance nationally. my.ussa.org