From the Top

By Witold Kosmala
PSIA-E Alpine, Level III
Ski School Trainer
K2 Ambassador

It looks like February wanted to get in favor with us by starting out with a warmest day this region has seen in a long time. I think many of us were happy to get a temporary relief from all those sub-zero temperatures that January sprung upon us.

January was “Learn to Ski & Snowboard Month.” Did you help others in their learning? When you were assigned a lesson, did you sincerely want to help them learn our great sport, or were you looking at the clock just waiting till your time with them was up? How about yourself? Did you try to improve your own abilities? You can turn from side to side, so, is that good enough? Who is to say that your turn needs improvement, any way? Besides, why would you want to improve your turning?

That’s right, why would any one want to improve their skills? Some don’t. They are perfectly happy with their current abilities. Others do not want to be corrected, so there will be no change in their skiing unless they can figure out a way to fix things on their own – usually a very slow process. Yet others don’t understand why there is a need to improve. So, let me just throw out a few reasons why you might consider improving your turns.

If you improve your turns you will

- be able to ski under more control
- be able to avoid easier other people and objects in your way
- be able to get out of the way of other skiers and riders
- be able to ski more difficult terrain and be more versatile
- be able to ski in variety of snow conditions
- be able to ski longer and in less pain because your turning will be more efficient
- perhaps attempt next certification level and continue your journey
- be able to show off in front of others
- have a chance of getting hired
- become a better instructor or coach
- you will have more technical knowledge.
There are many ways to improve your turns. For us, instructors, here is a start to the list.

- Read books about ski technique. *Peak Performance* is one of them.
- Surf internet.
- Look at videos.
- Teach a lesson (we practice turning when we teach).
- Shadow instructors with higher certification level and with more experience.
- Attend in-house clinics.
- Become a member of a ski organization and attend their events. (Sugar Mt. is a PSIA-E affiliated school, so many of us are steered toward PSIA/AASI).
- Train for the next certification level.
- Talk about technique with others and know what you need to do to make better turns.
- Ski at other mountains, ski during difficult conditions.
- Practice.

Now, about this last one – practice. There is a saying: “Practice makes perfect.” Do you believe in that? Well, I don’t. For one, there is no perfection. There is always room for improvement. Two – what kind of practice are we talking about, any way? If you keep repeating a wrong move, there is no way you will reach perfection, or even adequate performance. You need to repeat CORRECT moves in order to get better, in fact you need to repeat them about 300 times before they will become part of you. Repeating incorrect moves will just make it harder to change things further down the road. It is all about the precision. Sloppy technology did not put the man on the moon. Sloppy practice will yield sloppy performance.

Practice also makes me think of: “No pain, no gain.” I don’t know about you, but if pain means spending time doing it, then you are doing a wrong sport. If pain means “hurting,” then you are probably doing it wrong. For healthy human beings, recreational skiing should not be hurting. (Racing is something totally different.) Most common pain is that in the quads and knees. More often then not, it is caused by skier being in the backseat. If that’s the case, skier’s stance first needs to be corrected before excessive and damaging pain results. A physical pain should be analyzed individually because that is your body trying to tell you something. Some people have complicated issues dealing with pain, or luck of it. I am one of these people. Some places on my body hurt excessively all the time, and other places have zero feeling. I have to be very careful to recognize what pain is OK and what pain is not. But, places that have no pain I have to visually inspect in order to pass judgment whether I pushed my limit.

This month *Peak Performance* is beginning its 6th year. Wow, can you believe that? I have truly enjoyed putting these publications together and promoting our great sport. I know that many also really enjoyed writing for this gazette. Gordon Carr is one of these individuals. He has also put together an *Index* of all published issues. It is posted on the bottom of my web page together with all our previous publications and can be found at

www.mathsci.appstate.edu/~wak/.

I strongly encourage you to look up these publications and reread previous issues of *Peak Performance*. They can easily be downloaded. Also, please, don’t hesitate to write me at

Kosmalaw@bellsouth.net.

Don’t forget the Valentine’s Day on February 14. A perfect gift for your sweetheart is a trip to the slopes. You can even pull out a small box of chocolates on the lift to make the day that much more special. (Don’t let them melt in your pocket!) With best wishes to all our readers!!!

Peak Performance
Main Course

Song Without End

By Gordon Carr
PSIA-E Alpine, Level II

I’m not sure anyone wants to read this one (wasn’t sure about any of the previous ones either) but I wanted to write this one…so “this Bud’s for me”. But I can, perhaps, justify writing this article because there is a moral to the story.

There are moments in our lives when time slows to such an extent that we can see every detail, feel every sensation, and hear every sound…all more vividly…seemingly more real. And best of all, these special moments seem to live forever in our memories, fading just a bit perhaps, but because of that slight blurring, they become even more treasured as the years pass. There are many of these moments in our life; I hope each of you treasure yours as I treasure this one.

Forty Eight (48) years ago, December 8, 1965 at about 7:00 pm I stepped on skies for the first time at Song Mountain in Sully NY, a few miles South of Syracuse, NY. Several months earlier I had begun graduate school at Syracuse University and had been welcomed to upstate New York 2 months after arrival, on November 5th, with what was to become a five (5) foot snowfall; Friday night, Saturday, and all day Sunday. Cars were buried and snow drifted to the rooflines in married student housing sealing some apartment doors unless dug out from the outside by neighbors. The ground was next seen in the middle of May! What a “New England calendar scene” for a Midwestern, snow starved boy.

(Coincidently, our Sugar Mountain colleague, John Gaida, was there; he was director of the Ski School at Drumlins, just two miles from where I lived. Odd how we had to come to Sugar Mountain to meet these 40+ years later.)

Alpine skiing was in its ascendance in the 60’s with baby boomers hitting the slopes in record numbers and ski slopes were opening in unprecedented numbers all over America. If you had a hill, if it snowed, and if you had an old truck or tractor engine with a few extra pulleys and a couple of thousand feet of “glove-shredding” hemp rope, you were in the downhill ski business.

But the place to be in New England in 1965 was Song Mountain! The winter before in the 1964 Olympics, Billy Kidd and Jimmy Heuga became the first American men to win Olympic medals in alpine skiing taking a Silver and Bronze, respectively, in the slalom. Women alpine racers had been winning international alpine and Olympic races for years. But the media’s disinclination to recognize and appreciate the women’s team alpine successes was just reflective of the pervasive, prejudicial attitude towards women’s accomplishments widely extant in that era. But, Oh! The hoopla when Billy Kidd took a Silver in the 1964 Olympic Slalom!

Anyway, Song Mountain was Jimmy Heuga’s “home mountain” and mid-upstate NY basked in his glory. I was a Midwestern farm boy experiencing few snowy winters in my youth and relatively fewer hills! Old timers often remarked, “If it weren’t for all those goll danged hedge rows and trees separating our fields, you could see to where the world dropped off.” And they were right. Upon a return to my “roots” in later life, when every last tree, bush, and stump had been grubbed out and burned to get every last acre in cultivation, you could see forever!

But something drew me to Song Mountain and to skiing that cold December night so long ago. The country side was deeply blanketeted with snow. Several days earlier, however, even though the temps had been consistently 5
to 10 degrees, it started to rain lightly but steadily, coating everything in ice and saturating that miraculous marshmallow snow.

I had tire chains and the $6.00 necessary for equipment rental and the lift ticket. So after a slow, bumpy, and slippery ride down I-81, I arrived at Sully, NY, the exit for Song Mountain. After several more really torturous miles on secondary roads I made it to Song Mountain’s parking lot, which I later realized abuts the learning slope and was just 15 yards from the combined small ticket office and rental shack at the base of the Bunny Hill. I mention the Rental Shack because it plays large later in that evening. The same parking lot still abuts the learning slope, circa 1997, when I made a journey down memory lane one Fall while living in CT. Of course the ticket office cum rental shack was gone but that same Bunny Hill lives on in more than just my memory. I now realize it is steep; it has a steady pitch greater than Fanny Hill on Easy Street at Sugar Mountain (as steep as the Landing for my Sugarloaf pals). Steep for learning, yes. But the slope had a single, non-complex fall line and also fortunately (?) had been washed smooth by the steady rain before freezing into a solid block of bullet proof blue ice.

I really should have had a clue when there were only 8 or 10 cars in the parking lot (probably all staff) and not one person was visible on that memorable Bunny Slope. Ah, but the blind optimism of youth and that all encompassing certainty of personal immortality! I thought it was a gift from the Gods when the ticket seller said the rope was frozen into the ice so the rope tow was inoperable on the learning hill. If I wasn’t going to “ride a chair” (How do you do that?) and if I stayed on the Bunny Hill, he said the cost would only be $3.00 for skis, boots and poles rental. $3.00! Hey, what a deal; I could walk up the slope side…I was just learning anyway. All this excitement and only half price to boot (pardon the pun).

“Hold your arm straight up over your head” and the rental guy slapped a pair of Northland wood skis into the palm of my hand (220 cm or 7'2½”). “Just right!” Good old Northland wood skis with metal edges screwed with these teeny, tiny screws onto the base (the edges were flat and didn’t go up the sidewall in those days) and with forward throw cable bindings. Just looking at the gear I knew this was my cup of tea! Next the boots. As night had fallen the temp had dropped to –5 or so and you could see your breath in the rental shak. The lace-up, ankle high leather boots were basically frozen stiff, but the rental guy said my foot heat would soften them up and in a little while I could, and should, re-lace them more tightly. He was right; but lacing those puppies was a bit more of a chore than lacing ice skates!

In fact, ice skating I could do (after a fashion); it was the one winter sport our gang did in my youth. As much as the territory of my youth lacked in hills it more than made up for with cattle pasture ponds. Ice skating was great sport as long as you stuck tree branches in the holes so you could see them. Farmers chopped these holes in the ice so the bovines could drink. An added thrill to our after school escapades on ice was occasionally skating on this feller’s pond who had a pretty nasty bull in the pasture. Nothing like a bit of broken field running to the pond to get the blood stirring and work out the muscle kinks before the hockey game. It also happened to help avoid ole Ferdinand who for some reason unknown to science always seemed to know when the high school gang was coming for a pick-up ice hockey game. He just always seemed to be grazing between the road fence and the “ice arena” where we were headed and he was dark colored...
so very hard to spot after dark! When he got up a head of steam though you surely could hear his hoof beats! It got so bad that none of us would talk out loud about the evening’s planned skating figuring that maybe Ole Ferd had acute hearing. Passing notes about our plans was a cinch as we all knew he couldn’t read and certainly wasn’t in class! Although looking back with the wisdom of age, I realize now there were times when some of the smells in the hall lockers and definitely from the gym lockers make me, at least, wonder if Old Bully wasn’t attending Freeburg High after all!

But I digress!

With boots on (frozen still) and skis and poles tucked under an arm in a manner which would do any Newbie proud, I took my first steps toward trail right and the climb up toward a slightly level spot, about ¼ way up where I thought I might be able to clamp into the skis and begin the “graceful float” down the Bunny Hill. And it was only a few steps, as with legs windmilling like the Roadrunner escaping Wile E. Coyote, I quickly decided that walking up this tilted blue ice rink with these “worse than clod-hoppers” on was out of the question. On hands and knees pushing the skis and poles up before me seemed the better part of valor (and of intact bones also). Later, crawling up the trail side, I was so proud of myself for devising a method to hook the pole baskets through the tensioning cables running along side the ski from the front eccentric throw back to the hook at the heel. I now could drag my cargo of gear up the hill behind me while crawling.

You see, the skis back then didn’t have ski brakes in the bindings as they do now. What served then to avoid run-away skis was a leather strap, which after getting into the ski, you wrapped around your ankle and buckled. Then if you fell, to add even more excitement to the skiing experiencing this long wooden propeller was kept up close and personal so you could dodge it during the fall to further improve your reflexes.

It was most disheartening on my first climb, when almost to my not quite so level plateau (obvious now that I was actually on the slope) and to my horror one of the skis slipped out of the cargo load in my pushing hands. Of even more concern, it was heading straight toward the rental shack with ever increasing speed and it quickly smashed into the side of the shack with a resounding, but actually, now that I remember, a quite musical, SMASH! Crackle! And Rattle! Fortunately there was no chance of hitting a fellow skier as I was still the only one on the hill. But I instantly dropped flat, (that was almost a mistake as I came close to “being” that run-away ski) willing myself to become “white” or better yet INVISIBLE! I knew it was just a matter of seconds before the rental guy would emerge with teeth still trembling and holler, “Hey, you! Yeah you with only one ski…Off the hill, Buddy! Now! And GO HOME!”

But my soaring spirits when he seemed not to have heard the disaster and didn’t appear plunged into deep despair as it dawned on me that I had two poles but only one ski and the other ski, perhaps in two pieces, had beat me to the bottom of what I had come to realize was a perfectly smooth, frozen pasture pond tilted up on edge at a rather sporting angle.

I can tell you with certainty, from hard earned experience, that no matter how difficult it was to crawl UP that icy rink on edge, it was far trickier to get back DOWN while clutching an almost complete ski gear kit! You’d have thought there would be some irregularity or crevasse or bump where you could safely stash your remaining gear while you retrieved a willfully uncooperative ski. But if there was, I didn’t see it and believe me I looked, especially the second time it happened!

On the second attempt after that magically lengthening crawl up, I finally got all the gear and myself back to the plateau and managed to get one ski in the NON step-in binding. As I reached with my boot to get into the second ski toe piece, I nudged it (and I know it was that same nasty and block-headed ski) a bit off center, and off it went down the hill headed toward that same, about to be demolished rental shack! So back down again, creeping, sliding on my butt, dragging pole tips in the ice to arrest my speed and retrieve that uncooperative, evil piece of hickory! Thank goodness the wool in the good old days was stout stuff and could take a weighted descent without fraying or unraveling! But on the bright side, crawling up on hands and knees and then holding ¾ of your gear as you tried to slowly slide down a gigantic tilted ice cube was a great way to stay warm at –5.

Peak Performance
If me and both skis could arrive at “my plateau” and stay there, until I was well and truly in both bindings, I just knew all would be well. I could balance fairly well from earlier years of ice skating. And even though I was a sloppy skater, I was athletic and had made some creditable emergency hockey stops when flying off the end of the line in “crack-the-whip” and heading toward the hole in the pond ice where the warm spring kept the pond from freezing. I figured skis might also stop with a “hockey stop”. So with a song and a prayer, I hopped those long boards up, pointed them down the hill and selected a schuss path pointed directly toward the now familiar ski rental shak to use as an emergency stop if the hockey stop didn’t work. I figured the flimsy wall which I twice had seen tremble and quiver when just a ski hit it for goodness sake, would be a much preferred emergency stop than the tree line which was on each side of the Shak. Falling down was not an option for stopping…I had already experimented on two previous descents, admittedly not on skis, but learned that 1.) flopping down on the solid ice was pretty painful; and 2.) you DIDN’T slow down anyway. So Rental Shak…look out! Here I come!

Finally there I was, flying down this beautiful hill with the wind in my face and a smile on my lips. At the bottom, sink a bit and hop up and throw those long boards sidewide across the slope. And I did! Might have waited a bit too long though. I traveled quite a bit further than I intended when I threw that 1st desperate hockey stop. In that fleeting pre-stop moment I was really proud of myself again in selecting a path aimed at the Shak! I also thought I was pretty clever for not turning from that life saving path. Of course I didn’t know how to turn, but I was fully convinced I wouldn’t have turned even if I knew how because I wasn’t sure about the unfolding hockey stop! At the end of the side slip to a stop, I could lean out and touch the Rental Shak with my hand…perhaps next time, I’d start the stop (interesting phrase) a bit sooner. But anyway during that first stop, the ice was SO hard that sparks flew out from under the skis from the steel edges when I cranked on that hockey stop! And that’s to say nothing of the wooden ski chatter which would jar the teeth out of a wood chuck!

I thought this was the absolutely the grandest, most exciting and wonderful thing I had ever done! I was skiing! No wonder all those travel ad posters showed people grinning from ear to ear!

But my awe and wonderment was suddenly frozen as hard and unforgiving as the tilted ice rink’s surface which I had just fallen in love with. What if the chatter of the skis broke one of them during the hockey stop, these weren’t ice skates after all? What if those all too visible sparks coming out from under the skis were somehow ruining the skis? And, horror of unthinkable horrors…what if one of the staff saw me abusing their equipment and took my skis away? When these dilemmas crossed my mind at the end of that first successful schuss (but the 3rd crawl up the hill), I stood for a moment and tried to identify “obvious” staff within sight of the Bunny Hill. Having scoped them out and successfully crawled up the hill again without mishap, I booted up at my plateau, stood quietly (not always easy to do at that stage of my expertise) while gazing at the mountain’s staff waiting for that moment when no one was looking at the Bunny Slope. And then a hop of the skis and OFF TO THE RACES AGAIN!

At the time I felt so clever; in retrospect I now realize with the wisdom of age, the guys couldn’t care less what I was doing and hockey stops were the skiing way to stop. They probably thought, if anything, “Look at that fool who paid $3.00 to crawl up that blue ice for 15 minutes only to fly straight down for 5 SECONDS!” Also in retrospect I realized that the sparks weren’t normal fireworks accompanying this exhilarating sport, but were likely sparks caused when the metal edges hit pebbles from a walking path which were embedded in the ice at the edge of the Rental Shak which I all too often came so close to hitting because of my misjudged hockey stops. Of course toward the end of the evening I got much better at judging when to begin the hockey stop. It turned to be about 20 feet from where I started! Well…maybe I straight lined a bit longer…hard to judge distance when you’re having such fun!

But, Oh! What a glorious time; a life altering moment…an obsession which only grew through the years. A few hours those long years ago on Song Mountain were just the opening bars of a Song Without End!

I did partially justify this tale at the beginning (if you can remember that far back) by promising a moral embedded within. And the moral to the tale of my first night skiing is simply this: When your very first time on skis is on snow (ICE) conditions which I described, EVERY SINGLE DAY ON THE SLOPES EVER SINCE HAS
"BEEN BETTER!" I have never skied worst conditions and probably wouldn’t if given the opportunity. Ice patches, yes…frozen chicken heads, certainly…but a solid trail of unbroken blue ice top to bottom, NO…who would? But with that first night of skiing under my belt, to this day, during almost every run, if even only for a moment, I call up that night on long boards oh so long ago and still feel a glimmer of that glorious thrill; and, I smile. Conditions have ALWAYS been better! Just imagine what I feel at having been given these all too quickly passing 48 years of always skiing “powder”! People sometimes ask me if I like skiing ice…and I usually reply, “Where is it?”

I HOPE EACH DAY IS A SONG FOR YOU

You May Need to Sit Down for This

Sit. Stand. Repeat. This little trick — a deceptively simple measure of flexibility and strength — can predict who will live longer and whose lives will be cut short, according to a study by Brazilian physician Claudio Gil Araujo. He uses the test with athletes, but he also uses it to lay out the stakes with patients: To live longer, they must get moving and maintain muscle and balance.

Araujo noticed long ago that many of his patients, particularly older people, had trouble with ordinary motions such as bending down to pick up something off the floor — difficulty indicative of a loss of flexibility. As people age, he knew, reduced muscle power and loss of balance can greatly increase the risk of dangerous falls.

Araujo wanted to do more than just lecture his patients about the importance of staying fit. He wanted to give them concrete information about where they had room to improve. He believed that existing clinical tests assessing flexibility, balance and muscle strength were too impractical or time-consuming, requiring ample space for walking or specific equipment such as a stopwatch or a particular type of adjustable chair. And because factors such as the height of the arms on a chair or a clinician’s speed with a stopwatch can vary, the results could also be unreliable. So he and colleagues developed an alternative, which they call the sitting-rising test, or SRT. It requires no equipment or walking paths — just a clear patch of floor and a willing participant.

In a study published in the *European Journal of Cardiology*, Araujo had more than 2,000 patients ages 51 to 80, all part of an exercise program at Clinimex Exercise Medicine Clinic in Rio de Janeiro, take the SRT. People who scored fewer than eight points on the test, he found, were twice as likely to die within the next six years compared with those who scored higher; those who scored three or fewer points were more than five times as likely to die within the same period compared with those who scored more than eight points. Overall, each point increase in the SRT score was associated with a 21 percent decrease in mortality from all causes. Araujo hopes such information can help get more older people walking through the doors of a gym rather than rolling into an emergency room. — BECKY LANG

TRY IT:
1. Stand in comfortable clothes in your bare feet, with clear space around you.
2. Without leaning on anything, lower yourself to a sitting position on the floor.
3. Now stand back up, trying not to use your hands, knees, forearms or sides of your legs.
Planning a trip out west this season? Perhaps to a snowsports area that is part of the Vail Resorts? Vail Resorts is a large company that owns a number of well-known areas, including Vail (of course), Beaver Creek, Breckinridge, Keystone, all in Colorado; Heavenly, Northstar, and Kirkwood in the Lake Tahoe, California area; Canyons, in Utah; and a couple of smaller resorts – one in Michigan and the other in Minnesota. The hill in Minnesota, called Afton Alps, is within sight of my company’s headquarters which is in St. Paul. Afton Alps is a relatively small hill, about the size of Appalachian Ski Mtn., and gets big crowds coming from the nearby Twin Cities area. It is a stone’s throw from the St. Clair river, which runs into the Mississippi, just downstream. I haven’t tried this hill yet, but I have cross country-skied near Afton Alps Resort when I visited my company’s home office in the winter months.

Anyway… during my March 2013 trip, in my skier visits to Heavenly, Northstar, and Kirkwood, I learned of a new and interesting program that Vail Resorts offers its’ customers. The program is called EpicMix.

How I became aware of EpicMix was because when I arrived in the Lake Tahoe area, I learned that (surprisingly) there is no longer any resort there that sponsors NASTAR public racing. In researching the situation, I learned there was a public race course at Kirkwood, called the Lindsey Vonn Race Series. I signed up for the race, and then I started looking at some printed materials regarding this EpicMix program. EpicMix is a comprehensive collection of web-linked programs, information services, social media connections, a racing program, a photography service, and a “dashboard” to track your ski/ride statistics.

Back to the Lindsey Vonn race… needless to say, I didn’t beat Lindsey’s time on the course, but I did have fun trying. Later in the week I skied at another Lindsey Vonn race course at Heavenly Mtn. While this race series was well run, I’d say that I prefer traditional NASTAR program – probably since I am much more used to the format and the handicapping system. I must add that there is a very successful NASTAR program at Sugar Mtn., and I hope it continues for a long time.

In addition to the Lindsey Vonn race program, I learned that EpicMix includes an on-mountain photography service, which (at least to me) seems unique. As with many larger resorts, there are a number of photographers stationed at lift unload areas and at strategic slope spots. Traditionally, if you want a photo, you have to visit the photo shop, and then pay for the ones you want. With EpicMix photography, you can view your photos online, and download your favorites for free in lower resolution (quality is not too bad), or pay for a downloadable high resolution version. When up on the mountains, I noticed that the photographers were using a lot of creativity to arrange the shots of customers, such as having folks hold skis over their head, like they were going to throw them like a javelin. Weird, but funny. Kind of entertaining.
Each EpicMix lift ticket (actually, it’s like a paper “credit card”) has an RFID device (radio frequency ID) that allows the resort to track or record various criteria, such as vertical feet skied/ridden. To find out your tally, you have to officially sign up for an EpicMix account online, and have kept your ticket number. I had misplaced my tickets from my first two resort visits, and so after my return to N.C. I was only able to retrieve my stats for Heavenly – and it was 26,541 vertical feet. In later research, I saw on the EpicMix website that the #1 skier stat was a guy named “Charles A.”, who skied 3,075,148 vertical feet, over 120 days last season (and over 18 million vertical feet for his EpicMix “lifetime” achievement)! Whoa Nellie!

Once you have activated your “EpicMix” account, the program offers numerous “pin” awards, based on various milestones or accomplishments. Pins (these exist in cyberspace, not actual pins) are awarded for things like riding the most chairlifts at one or more mountains, demonstrating a certain skill on the mountain, racing, taking a class, skiing/riding a certain number of days, visiting the various mountains, etc., etc.

But probably the biggest attraction of EpicMix, for many people, is the complete coordination of the various programs with Facebook and Twitter. For example, all the award pins, photos, race results, etc. can be instantly posted, for viewing by friends and family. The various EpicMix apps can also be used on smart phones or tablets/laptops to track skier locations on the mountain (for your location or friends/family), provide information such as weather conditions, snow reports, special events, as well as to provide messaging services.

There’s plenty more information available online regarding EpicMix, so feel free to learn more at your convenience. Likely this is some technology that will continue to spread throughout the snowsports industry.

### Training

#### White Pass Turns

*By Witold Kosmala*

*PSIA-E Alpine, Level III*

*Ski School Trainer*

White Pass turns are named after Steve Mahre who trained at the White Pass Ski Area in Washington State in 1980s. A true understanding of what is meant by “White Pass turn” is controversial in the world of skiing. So I wrote Steve Mahre asking for clarification and accuracy of my proposed description: “In the transition the upper body moves so far at the diagonal that the skier starts the new turn on the outside edge of the future inside ski. The outside ski gently goes up a little into the air at that time. Then it is gently placed on the snow when the fall line is reached due to the evolved pressures.”

Phil Mahre replied me in writing by saying: “Witold, you nailed it with your explanation. It all started with a tactical mistake in GS. Steve often went too straight and would catch himself at times. Because he had released the previous turn too early he would hang onto the old turning ski longer, resulting in the start of the new turn on the inside ski. A mistake that was fast on the clock. Not very consistent, but fast just the same. Not something he tried to do, something that he just did by instinct because of a mistake. Yes it is a fun exercise.”

Connecting the above-described turns creates a linked “White Pass Turns” drill, which provides a great training tool. See the illustration created by my son Konrad. It should be observed that there is no active move in picking up the ski off the snow and no active move of putting it down. The outside ski comes to the ground in a gentle way and quickly gets firmly pressured into the snow. Also, note that the pressure is on the inside ski until the fall line is reached. Then it quickly moves to the outside ski.
Here are some reasons for performing White Pass turns as a drill.

- The drill encourages strong diagonal movement of a skier at the transition. Provides an outstanding way of feeling a cross-over and diving down the hill.
- The drill encourages big pressure on the tip of the inside ski.
- The drill encourages transfer to the new edges in the transition, even though one ski is in the air.
- The drill provides a great exercise for developing lateral balance skills.
- The drill encourages a long body position by the extension movement toward the inside of the new turn and the fall line.
- The drill encourages a strong outside edge engagement in a transition of the future inside ski, a good ability to have when needed.
- The drill eliminates an unnecessary A-frame if there was one.
- The drill eliminates jetting skis.
- The drill provides a super example of what is meant by a “strong inside half.”

To be successful in performing White Pass turns, it is recommended that you:

- first attempt the drill on a tame groomed terrain with relatively flat ski.
- in the transition you roll your shin and toes all around the front of the future inside boot.
- start training on skis with 14m side cut radius, or more. Smaller side cut radius skis are snappy and might overturn if diagonal move is not accurate.
- practice other one-ski drills.
- are willing to go out of your comfort zone.
- think that you are turning on your bicycle with the pedal on the inside of the turn in the down position.

About Platform Angle

By Witold Kosmala
PSIA-E Alpine, Level III
Ski School Trainer

You probably hear others comment about skiers needing higher edges in order to perform better. You hear them remark about how high some famous racer’s edges are. But, quality skiing and racing is not all about the edge angles. It is, in fact, more important how one pressures those edges into the hill. There can be 2 riders with the same edge angles, skiing on the identically tuned skis and being identically build, yet one will be able to grip the hill and the other will skid out and slip. It is all dependent on platform angle, that is, on how each skier pressures their skis.
**Edge angle** is simply the angle measured from the bottom of the board to the slope under the board. Bigger angle does not necessarily mean that the ski will hold you up better. There is such a thing as too big the edge angle and the board slips out. **Platform angle** is a little more tricky to measure. It is the angle measured from the top of the board to the force that is applied to that board. Platform, in actuality, is the platform formed by the ski cutting into the slope’s surface. See the illustration for details. So, one edge angle can have many platform angles. The board is more likely to hold if the platform angle is 90 degrees or less. If the angle is bigger than 90 degrees, then the board will likely slip out even if the edge angle is plenty big. One can decrease platform angle by driving (actively pushing) the board’s edge more into the hill. This can be done by moving the upper body further away from the hill and, in the skiers’ case, applying more force into the hill with big toe of the outside ski and shins into the side of the boot. Lifting the outside foot’s little toe will help. If in transition a skier leans toward the hill, then the platform angle will be increased and the ski will likely slip out. (Of course, here we should not confuse leaning with inclining.)

As another example, stand across a slope balancing yourself mostly on the outside leg. When you do this, your platform angle is 90 degrees. (Note that sometimes this ski will slip out even though your platform angle is 90 because the snow does not have enough force to push against skier to hold them up, like on ice-covered slope.) Then release your binding with your ski pole. If you are standing on this ski, you will probably fall since after ski is released, its platform will became the snow’s surface creating a very large platform angle.

Continuing on this topic, did you notice that if you are standing across the slope trying to put your skis on, it is much easier to put the uphill ski on than the downhill ski? It is because since the ski is flat on the snow’s surface, the platform it is on is actually the slope’s surface itself. Your uphill leg can easily create a 90 degree angle to the slope, so slope’s surface will create enough pressure against the ski boot that you can actually click the ski on. It is much more difficult to create a 90 degree angle to the slope with the downhill leg, and so putting the downhill ski on on a steep slope can be a real challenge. Do you
remember having someone actually hold that ski for you so that it won’t slide away on you? Note that I did not say that you should put on the uphill ski first. In fact – you should not. Can you tell me why not?

The width of the platform cut by the board is also going to determine whether the board holds or slips even if the platform angle remains the same. Surlly you noticed that your edges hold better when the snow is soft and there are several inches of it, then when the surface is bullet proof. On soft snow your board digs into the snow more, creating a wider platform. This platform creates forces coming out of the snow to support you over a larger area which prevents slipping out. The wider platform is more stable and it is easier for you to maintain 90 degree platform angle, or less. To make my point even more pronounced, look at the picture of me standing on a thin wall. You can try this on a park’s bench, a picnic table, or balance beam. I want to concentrate on the pressure exerted on one foot when that foot hangs off the edge. More it hangs off, more difficult it is to stand on it. If you want to feel more intense pressure, just pick up one leg and stand on the other. Forces on the standing leg will become automatically more defined. These pressures on the foot will decrease the platform angle on the slopes. Practice this before you go to the mountain. As you will soon witness, foot strength is of vital importance in snow skiing. It is not all about the quads! Good luck!

Health Course

Swallowing the Pain

By Bonnie Church

Pain is part of the human experience. We lose loved ones. We experience disappointment. We feel financial pressure. Relationships get rocky. This pain produces emotions. These emotions stimulate a cascade of stress hormones which can trigger cravings and mindless, fast eating. There is a logical reason for this. Food provides a form of relief. Stress creates an imbalance of the ‘feel good’ hormones such as serotonin and dopamine. The body craves food in an attempt to bring those hormones back into balance. The hunger triggered by stress is called emotional eating. Emotional eating differs from genuine hunger in these ways:

1. Emotional hunger comes on suddenly; physical hunger occurs gradually.
2. When you are eating to fill a void, you crave a specific food such as chocolate chip cookies or ice cream. When you eat because you are actually hungry, you’re open to options.
3. Emotional hunger feels like it needs to be satisfied instantly with the food you crave; physical hunger can wait.
4. Even when you are full, if you’re eating to satisfy an emotional need, you keep eating. When you’re eating because you’re hungry, you’re more likely to stop when you’re full.

Emotional eating can become ‘hard-wired’ and habitual. This is dangerous as it leads to over-eating unhealthy...
foods, weight gain and disease. Here are some things you can do to manage your emotional eating habit.

Journal for awareness: Write down the things that trigger stress, the foods you crave and the negative consequences of eating those foods. This will make you more mindful of your food choices under stress. Mindfulness is the first step toward self-control.

Drink a soothing cup of green tea: Green tea contains an amino acid called L-theanine. L-theanine crosses the blood brain barrier and has mood-soothing properties. Studies have shown that L-theanine is involved in the formation of dopamine. It supports a relaxed alertness and sense of well-being.

Eat lean Protein with a small bit of a starchy carbohydrate: Proteins contain tryptophan which helps the body produce serotonin [the feel good hormone]. Starches [i.e. potatoes] help drive serotonin into the receptor sites in the brain.

Take a fish oil supplement: In a study [recently published in Science Daily] fish oil has been shown to counteract the detrimental effects of mental stress on the heart.

Take a brisk walk: 20 minutes of exercise every day will naturally release serotonin and dopamine.

Cuddle with a loved one: A hug releases oxytocin, the ultimate ‘feel good’ hormone. Oxytocin reduces the stress hormones, lowers blood pressure and improves digestion.

Massage the feet: Take off your shoe and place your foot over a tennis ball. Rub your feet, one at a time, over the top of the ball until they feel relaxed and soothed. Besides feeling great, self-massage has been shown to reduce stress hormones.

Relax and breathe deeply: Close your eyes. Stare at the blackness of your eyelids. Slowly breathe in and out as you consciously relax your body. Relaxed breathing with eyes closed tricks your body into thinking it is time to sleep. This triggers the hormones of relaxation.

Do the best you can: When you are in pain, just getting through it can be a challenge. Make the best choices you can under the circumstances you find yourself in. If you fall into a binge of emotional eating triggered by stress in your life, forgive yourself and move on. There is grace in the journey.

Bonnie Church, CNC, CTLC, CLC – Bonnie is a wellness columnist for All About Women Magazine, a Certified Life and Wellness Consultant and certified Trainer for the TLS Weight Loss Solution. Bonnie has conducted wellness and motivational seminars throughout the US. She served as a writer/consultant for an internationally marketed weight loss system for kids. She recently co-authored, with Lydia Martinez, “Coach Lydias' No-nonsense Guide to Getting Off your Butt, Out of your Rut and On with your life.” Please, visit www.ailfenow.com for more information.

Turn to Wisdom

• Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.
• Success is the quality of your journey.
• Greed is a matter of the heart, not the wallet.
• Since light travels faster than sound, some people appear bright until you hear them speak.
Thoughts for the Month

• Name a few things that differentiate recreational skiers from racers.

• When do you pressure back of a ski boot, if ever? When do you pressure the heels, if ever? Is pressuring the back of the boot the same as pressuring the heel?

• More means better, right?

• What sort of things can you observe in this photo montage of Ted Ligety taken by Ron LeMaster? See more great photos by Ron on http://www.ronlemaster.com/.

• Below is Lindsey Vonn making a diverging move. Is that good or bad?

Elaborations on last month’s Thoughts for the Month.

Question: On an intermediate slope, in a transition, what is the difference in skier’s move to perform a White Pass turn and skier’s move to begin park-n-ride?

Answer: First of all, we need to know what White Pass turns are. So, you can read about them on page 8 of this publication. In addition, park-n-ride was discussed at length in the April 2013 issue of Peak Performance. Now it is easy to point out the difference between these two moves, where in both of them the upper body crosses over the skis. In White Pass turn, the body moves forward over the toes and down the hill, where as to start the park-n-ride the upper body, lead by the hips, moves only laterally. The pressure is instantly placed on the future outside
ski. To park it, the skier never ends up pressuring front of the boot with toes and shin. As soon as the skis point more downhill, they jet and control is jeopardized. In the lateral cross-over, neither leg is extended giving less stability, no forward projection, no release to blood flow, and no chance for lungs to fully inhale. Hips end up too far inside too early. The beginning of the turn looks like the end of the turn.

**Question:** In teaching, what is referred to as “guided discovery?”

**Answer:** Guided discovery is one form of teaching. For more on this topic, see our next issue of *Peak Performance*.

**Question:** What is the difference between an edge angle and a platform angle?

**Answer:** See page 10.

**Question:** In skiing, what causes the pictured outcome?

**Answer:** As you can see from the angles in the knees and hips, I am not in a racing position. This position came out of pivoting each foot about its own axis and resulting in an excessive tip lead. Right leg pressures tails and left leg pressures tip. Not a good idea for all around intermediate skiing. Also, it looks like the right boot cuff is somewhat loose. Overall, not a good stance. So, if you had a student that created this stance while skiing, how would you try to improve it?

**This and That**

**BALANCE LIKE AN EAGLE**

No matter how steep my finger is, this eagle is in perfect balance. That’s how we should be on the slopes.

**MOVING FORWARD**

In the previous issue of *Peak Performance* I gave a huge number of ways how skiers can help their performance by obtaining a more forward position on balls of their feet, and even perhaps – toes. Here are a few more ideas just to keep the spirit going.

- Ski without poles.
- Ski on very short skis.
• Pretend your skis have no bindings to hold your boots.
• Ski with unbuckled boots. Here is what I have done: wear unbuckled rear-entry boots and try to slip them off when initiating a new turn. A weird feeling, I tell you.
• March down the hill by skiing straight down a gentle slope and lifting one leg at a time at least 6 inches into the air. (If you don’t stay forward, the skis will run away from you.)
• Hold your hands on your knees; see the photo. (If this is not done correctly, then this position will result in a backseat position.)
• Awareness: no matter how steep the slope, your upper body should be perpendicular to the slope. This can be demonstrated by crossing 2 ski poles. Your upper body should not be parallel to the trees on the side of the slope.
• Look at alpine racers coming out of the starting gate. They are moving their upper body forward before the skis cross the gate.

If you put your hands on your knees, be sure that you maintain a firm contact with your boot cuffs and keep pressure on the balls of your feet. Do not over-bend in the hips or knees.

Check out Crosby Taymore, member of Appalachian State University Alpine Ski Team. While at National Mogul Competition at Stratton, Vermont he moved forward more then he wanted.
WINTER OLYMPICS

2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia have opening ceremonies on February 7. I mentioned precision in my opening of this gazette. Watch these Olympians to see the precision at work. NBC network will have an exclusive television coverage in the US, but all the details and schedules can be found online. One of the good places to start looking at is http://www.sochi2014.com/en.

Here is Sara Beeken, racing for Appalachian State University Alpine Ski Team. Her upper body is moving down the hill but skis are yet to cross the gate.

Ski pole falling from left to right represents a ski slope. The other pole represents skier’s upper body and the clip is the skier’s head. Since head is looking where the body is going, it may seem like the snow surface is far below. This is why on steeps it feels like we are flying, (falling in style.)
Pet of the Month

The photo of this little guy was taken by Cody Downard, who is pictured below. I wish I could catch him and make him my pet. Looks really sweet. Cody Downard, out of Vail, CO, is a photographer for many occasions that can be found on codydownard.com.

Peak Performance