Skiing. It’s my passion. It all started when I was 3 years old or so, in Polish mountains in Zakopane. My Mother put leather boots on my feet and wooden skis with not even a metal edge to them. Skis attached, with no quick release bindings, only to the toe of my boots. Now, 50 years later, life is very different for me. In fact, it almost ended a year ago on March 4. You probably read my article that was published by PSIA-E in SnowPro, Summer 2008. I attached a copy of it below. My recovery is not complete, and later in the year I will still need more surgeries. But, now, I invite you to celebrate LIFE with me. All through my months of recovery skiing kept my spirits up. I publicly want to thank you all for being my support group. I want to thank Keith Li, a PSIA-E Alpine, Level III ski instructor and a supervisor at Ski Roundtop in PA for all his help before and after my accident. He was the first familiar face that walked thru the hospital door to see me a year ago.

I cannot possibly name everyone who helped me in my recovery, but you know who you are, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Don’t forget to count your own blessings. You never know when they will be taken away from you. You need to be ready. Make the most out of every day, and make many turns while you can.

DCL Tryout Turn from Dangerous to Inspirational!

By Witold Kosmala
PSIA-E Alpine, Level III

On March 4 — 5, 08 PSIA - E had DCL tryouts at Whitetail Mtn. in south-central Pennsylvania. After years of preparations, I felt that I was very ready for the event and for joining the PSIA –E educational staff. Many thanks go to Jeb Boyd and
other PSIA members who helped me with preparations, as well as the ski areas that hosted me, including my home resort – Sugar Mt. in North Carolina. Furthermore, I need to express many thanks to members of the ski schools at Mammoth Mt. in California for working with me over the years. In particular, to Albert Arnaud, who was on French National Olympic Team for 1972, 1976, and 1980 Olympics, and later became coach for the US Ski Team; and to the trainer – Steve Davis, who was extremely kind and helpful. Many thanks go to my brother Andrzej, who was my skiing mentor since childhood and who is currently also teaching at Mammoth. But, my deepest thanks go to my immediate family who was so supportive.

March 4 was a relatively warm and cloudy day, most of the slopes were groomed and spring conditions were prevalent. Everyone trying out for DCL was put into three groups as the skiing part of the exam begun. On the first half of the blue square slope we were doing white-pass turns. On the lower portion of the slope the drill was to go from point A to point B in long turns. My interpretation of the task description was to ski fast and not to leave anything behind. I thought to myself, no problem. I can do this, and have done it before many times. As my turn came to go, I pushed off, making very calculated moves. The slope was extremely slick; an examiner carefully watched all my moves, so I was very accurate with my performance. I had very high speed, but it didn’t seem so fast since I was in 100% control. My run was going great - I felt great! Toward the end of the run, there were some bare spots in the center of the slope, so with one swooping turn I had to move closer to the wooded side of the slope. As I was approaching the side of the slope, I hit an extremely slick surface and my skis stopped moving forward. They were sliding sideways. I flew into the trees and rocks at a high rate of speed. I thought that I was going to be killed.

But no, I survived. I shattered my right shinbones. The big bone was broken in 4 places, and the small in half a dozen. As I was tumbling, these sharp bones were eating away my muscle and skin tissue creating a huge hole in my leg. Another problem with getting so banged up was that my body was bleeding internally and creating a huge hematoma (bubble) all around

In front of me is Albert in a jacket and my brother Andrzej in a vest. (February 2008 in Mammoth, CA. Photo by Weneta Kosi-mala)
my hips. Needless to say, I was extremely upset. Why should such a good run end like this? I was the first one eliminated from joining the DCL team. Years of preparations down the drain. But, this anger did not last long. After all, I was still alive. How was that possible? Whatever shattered my leg could have shattered my head. I never even lost consciousness.

And then, a wonderful team of patrollers came, got me out of the woods, put me on a sled, and gave me a very painful ride down to an ambulance. Then a 12-thousand dollar ride in a helicopter put me in the York, PA, hospital. Operations and other procedures followed. Then I was transferred to Hershey (PA) Medical Center – the Penn State University teaching hospital - where wonderful orthopedic and plastic surgeon teams took care of me. Now, I am back home in North Carolina looking at many months of recovery time, with hopes of skiing again.

So, why am I writing this article? Because there are many lessons here for each one of us. For one, are we thankful? Are we truly thankful to be on the hill? Do we regularly count our blessings? Do we stop to “smell the roses?” Do we realize that our life can be changed, or taken away, in a split of a second? Are we ready for that?

It is a good idea to carry information regarding whom to contact in case of emergency. In rainy conditions some of us leave wallets in the car. If so, at least take your driver’s license with you.

Here is another lesson. Donate blood! Someone else’s blood gave me life. Do we have health insurance? My total bill was well into 6-digit figure. How many lessons would you have to teach to pay for a bill like that? Also, stay fit! Then, any recovery is quicker and complications are less likely. Impact is less damaging when you carry less weight.

My family and friends, all cards, calls, thoughts, prayers, and all other good deeds, really made a difference in my frame of mind and in my recovery process. When was the last time we visited someone in a hospital or a nursing home? When did we fix supper for those in need?
We, the professional skiers and riders, can make a difference on the hill as well as other places - every day of our life. Let’s make a commitment to do it!

Education

Hand Position for Skiers 101

By Doug Washer
PSIA-E Alpine, Level II
AASI-E Snowboard, Level I

Whether you are teaching a beginner lesson, or looking for improvement in an “intermediate” skier, the position of the hands (and arms) is something that should be introduced to a student.

The proper positioning of a skier’s hands will aid in maintaining balance while in motion, as well as giving the student some “style points”.

When introducing this concept to your students, the key words are “relaxed” and “natural”. You might have your students shake their arms loosely at their sides, in order to relax. Then ask them to raise both hands in front of their body, so that they can see their hands within their field of vision. Suggest holding the hands and arms “up in front”.

Be sure that the back does not move backwards as the hands are raised in front. Ideally, the shoulders should “slouch” a little, and the back should be “rounded”. One teaching method for establishing a good body position is to pretend you are hugging a large, but short, person. An incorrect body position would be similar to hugging a tree—which creates a stance that is too upright.

For “general purpose” skiing, the hands should ideally be held about shoulder width apart, or maybe a little wider. Emphasize that the arms should stay relaxed, and to keep the hands and arms very “quiet” (which means keep the hand position consistent, and not move them unnecessarily). Keep both hands even (in other words…one arm is not higher than the other), and keep each hand at the same distance from the body.

Beginner students who are falling backwards can definitely benefit from good hand position. You might consider telling those “problem” students to hold the hands and arms higher than what they consider to be “normal”.

Take a look at the student after talking about hand position. Do the arms look like some
thing on a robot (are sticking unnaturally straight out)? If so, give them a little guidance on keeping the arms relaxed, and more natural-looking. You might tell them when they ride up the chairlift to watch the “expert” skiers below. In what position do they see the “experts” holding the hands? You might point out certain “experts”, to better make your case.

Explain to the students that if your hands (and arms) drop down to the sides, then there is a strong likelihood that balance will tend to shift to the back—and this is not good. Also explain that excessive movements of the hands up and down, or swinging from side-to-side, either separately or together, should be avoided (because these erratic movements can put a skier out-of-balance). Again, the best motto is to “keep the hands/arms quiet”.

**Good hand position contributes to an “athletic stance”,** and allows the skier to be ready to handle the changes in speed, terrain, and snow conditions. Remind them that most “stand up” sports require the hands to be up and out from the body, to maintain balance (compare to skating, surfing, basketball, volleyball, football, karate, gymnastics, etc., etc.).

A good instructor drill for developing steady, quiet hand position is to have the student hold both poles in the hands, palms down. Poles should remain level, with no side-to-side movement, and held “up in front”. You can even grab the poles between the student’s hands, to offer guidance or to steady their balance.

Also, a proper hand position will allow better “pole swing” movement, which becomes increasingly important as the student progresses in ability.

**How can hand position enhance the skills of the “advanced” skier?** The answer is that there are certain conditions and situations where hand position will actually “make or break” your balance. These conditions are: bumps (often called “moguls”), crud (this refers to various snow types such as wet, heavy, chunky, lumpy, etc.), and deep powder. With the high degree of grooming on all slopes at Sugar, these conditions are rare. However, these special situations are quite common in other parts of the skiing world.

Next time you encounter difficulty in handling the above situations (bumps, crud, and deep powder), **try holding your hands higher than what you consider “normal”**. This will help to prevent you from getting kicked “into the back seat”.

Finally, this concept is an easy one to teach, and really shouldn’t require more than one minute to introduce. However, I suggest, especially in intermediate lessons (such as on Easy Street), that you remind the student as many times as necessary to keep the hands “up and in front” and “quiet”. You might say it 20 times in a lesson, but they will get the message eventually and it will stick with them from that day forward.
How to Earn “Style Points”. Good advice for Ski Students (and Instructors).

By Doug Washer
PSIA-E Alpine, Level II
AASI-E Snowboard, Level I

The following tips for students are good ones to pass along during any level of lesson, and provides a little “value added” to your lessons.

- Pant legs kept over the boots, not tucked in.

- Jacket kept zipped up when on the mountain. An open jacket coming down the hill on an instructor could result in the automatic loss of a season’s worth of style points.

- Maintain an athletic “stance”. Balance over the feet, with relaxed flexing of knees and ankles.


The above illustration represents an ideal skier stance for typical ski conditions, along with good hand position.
• Always wear gloves when on the mountain. Warm days? Get a pair of “spring gloves”. Gloves should not be clipped to your jacket, either.

• Make the final turns in each run to be absolutely perfect, so that the lift line crowd will break into applause.

• Get on and off the chairlift with both poles held in one hand, right in the middle. Have an “emergency hand” ready.

• When riding with a stranger on the chairlift, announce “Bar Down” and “Bar Up”.

• Keep the chin up. Never, never, never, never look at the feet or skis while in motion. (Instructors: especially try to avoid this when doing your “demos”). Multiple style points are available on this one!

• Keep the hands “up and in front”. Quiet hands = Better skiing.

• Avoid tilting the head as you turn.

• Keep everything in alignment: hands, arms, shoulders, head, hips, knees, feet. This is a technical issue which is covered by PSIA manuals.

• No full-face masks allowed on warm days.

• Scarves tucked in, to prevent them from catching on equipment.

• A good hat always provides a “style point” (or more). A bad hat will take style points from your total. Instructors: Don’t wear bad hats.

• Camouflage is for hunting, not skiing.

• Don’t walk on the slope. Put skis on and take skis off at the very edge of the slope.

When “That’s Good!” Ain’t Good

By Gordon Carr
PSIA-E Alpine, Level II

Generally the process of learning new motor movements is divided into three phases: CONCRETE, ASSOCIATIVE, AND AUTONOMOUS.
During the CONCRETE phase, which occurs in the early days of learning new muscle movements, a Coach’s interventions and teaching strategies should be directive, specific, and very focused. Tell the new snow sport enthusiast what muscular movements to make and how to effect these movements. (Sorry snowboarders, I will use skier examples as I am not knowledgeable about snowboard movements; but, the learning stages are the same.) This detailed knowledge and instruction must be given more than once and accounts for the disproportionate amount of “talking” during early lessons. There is just a lot of “stuff” Newbies need to be told HOW to do so they can LEARN to do.

During the ASSOCIATIVE phase of learning the Coach must help the student develop LINKS between a.) making a muscular movement; b.) their internal feeling or kinesthetic awareness state; and, c.) the resultant snow/ski interaction! They need to start “owning” the movements. The ASSOCIATIVE learning phase, which is ultimately aimed toward promoting bodily awareness, cannot be assumed to be intuitive or to occur spontaneously. The kinesthetic awareness dimension is vast and we have guests in our beginning ski and snowboard clinics at each extreme of this variable. Dancers, ice skaters, gymnasts, to name but a few, tend to have high degrees of bodily self awareness and do sense the links between their body movements and environmental consequences and they tend to learn new movements quickly. That is why we love “Newbies” who roller blade, etc. Others, when told to point their toes toward each other by twisting on the balls of their feet, tilt their knees inward until touching!! ...and all steps between.

It is in this ASSOCIATIVE phase of learning, when our guests finally make their first effective foot rotating and balancing muscular movements which results in a slow tentative turn that we most often hear from Coaches (me included at times) “THAT’S GOOD!!” What’s good? That the student is still standing? That the student isn’t cursing us and all our future offspring? That the sky hasn’t fallen? What? At this stage, WE know what we are looking for in movement patterns and snow/ski interaction, but the student still hasn’t made those crucial, internal links. We may have watched a outside ski boot shuffle slightly forward with a twisting motion in the direction of the desired turn (as we had instructed and wished would happen), but I will guarantee that the student is just as likely to have been paying attention to fore/aft and lateral large muscle and upper trunk movements in their attempt to keep from falling. (Several years ago, while teaching Learn to Ski at another resort, I did an informal survey of new skiers over the course of the season. No matter what movements I was initially focused upon, those students who had any kinesthetic awareness at all reported attending to upper trunk position, feeling flexion at the waist and arm motion in an attempt to balance while moving. Humm…let’s see… upper trunk, gross movements, flailing arms…?? A familiar picture in the Magic Carpet area, perhaps?)

When hearing his instructor yell out very enthusiastically, “That’s Good!!” the “Newbie” has very little idea as to which muscular movements specifically, the “GOOD” refers. As Coaches we must maintain eternal vigilance over words, especially in the early ASSOCIATIVE phase of learning so that WE don’t confuse our intended instructional results feedback with “motivational high 5s!!!!” The “Hey, that’s great, you’re really skiing!!”;

N e w s l e t t e r
“Right!”…”Perfect!!” are legitimate MOTIVATIONAL and CELEBRATORY comments helping to psych up the guests, but during the ASSOCIATIVE phase of early learning they can be confusing to the student. The “Good” as feedback to a student who has made an effective motor movement with the desired snow/ski interaction is NOT GOOD, and at best is probably only confusing.

Yes, during the ASSOCIATIVE phase of learning we have to tell them the movement was correct, and we have to tell learners, again and again, specifically, what movement they made. But also we have to tell them HOW it was correct and WHAT they were likely feeling in their feet (leg, body etc.), and then point out clearly WHAT the desired snow/ski interaction was. This doesn’t have to be a long, convoluted dissertation. “Hey, did you notice when you kept your hands in front of you and felt more pressure under the balls of your feet that it was easier to keep up with the skis when they started moving? That was just right (or, OK maybe after drawing attention to muscular position and feelings a “That was good!” is alright) Sometimes a question, properly phrased, draws attention to the movement-internal feeling link. “When you came to a stop back there, how did you do that?” “What were you feeling in your legs?”

There is nothing wrong with the “Terrific!!” “Great!!!” “That’s good!!” “You got it!!” as motivational high 5’s to stir the blood as long as we remember they are not, by themselves, instructional feedback comments terribly helpful or appropriate for students in the Associative phase of learning new muscle movements.

All of the above is a generality, of course, sweeping in scope to make the point for this article and, therefore, not true in some particular instances. There are circumstances in a private lesson where you have a clear understanding with a student of what the focus is AND you are certain the student is with you on the focus, where “That’s Good!!” can be an effective feedback statement. But even then it is helpful and necessary to label internal kinesesthetic feelings and link them with snow/ski results for the client.

To fully achieve the AUTONOMOUS phase of motor skills, most sport physiologists believe it takes 600 to 800 CORRECT repetitions of movements for full internalization to occur and for the muscular movements to become automatic. We at Sugar Mountain probably mostly don’t work with these kinds of skiers (except maybe the race coaches and an occasional upper level private lesson) so that our coaching mental focus needs stay on the principles of the ASSOCIATIVE phase. But as a concluding aside, it can be interesting and amusing when riding the chairlift to watch obviously experienced skiers pretty much into the AUTONOMOUS phase (or automatic stage) of motor skills who, during their (probably self taught) ASSOCIATIVE learning phase, incorporated all sorts of irrelevant movements and postures into their skiing. They made a link that these particular, unnecessary, and inefficient muscle movements were necessary to effect a ski turn. (e.g. whole body rotation and tilt or weird arm movements). Working with these folks is an entirely different kettle of fish. Trying to unlink and suppress irrelevant or less effective movements which have become unconsciously ingrained in a skier’s movement pattern can be a challenging coaching task at best! That is why it is easier to teach correct, effective, and efficient muscular movements early in learning a sport than it is to address and unlearn habitual, ineffective, and inefficient movements. The latter involves working with CORRECTIVE versus DEVELOPMENTAL EX-
ERCISES and using specific skiing exercises which are proven “Habit Breakers. But, enough already… more about that later, in another article perhaps.

A Funny Turn

We have all taught many children from Florida and South Georgia who are seeing snow for the first time. One 5 year old boy, however, has made that experience special for me. In mid-January I was teaching a 5 year old boy and his 8 year old sister, both of whom were seeing snow for the first time. Both were doing very well and by mid lesson were making it down the Magic Carpet trail safely and slowly in a braking power wedge (a bit to my pleasant surprise). I thought it odd, though, that the runs were interrupted only by the little girl when she would stop and reach down and grab a handful of snow, throw it in the air, rub it on her face, and do all the other things with snow which are supposed to be done by children. I wondered why the little boy did none of these things. Imagine my delight a few minutes later when he stopped and in all seriousness asked, “Sir, is snow the white stuff out there?”!!

Gordon Carr

I have a funny one also, or perhaps not so funny. When I was riding up the magic carpet I heard our ski instructor say very loudly to a member of the large group they were teaching: “don’t do what I do, just do what I asked you to do.” My student who was riding up in front of me turned back toward me and said: “what a new approach to teaching.” We should be very careful with what we say and how to our clients. It is often that we do differently than they do, like ski backwards for many different reasons. But we should know that all our students watch us very carefully, hoping to imitate and thus make it down the hill. So, we should try doing more of what we want them to do.

Witold Kosmala

Announcements

• Thank you for all your kind words pertaining to the Newsletter. There is so much knowledge in our Ski/Snowboard School, we just need to get it out in the open so all can benefit from it. Next Newsletter will come out after our slopes close, so make sure I have your e-mail or surface address. Write all your comments to me, Witold Kosmala at Kosmalaw@bellsouth.net.

Enjoy your trip to the other winter (or summer) places, and don’t forget that off-season is an integral part to all winter sports.
I, Witold, thought I will make the following announcement, or shall I call it a request, before you hear it from our Director. This season and every season, try your very best to come to line-up on time. We should not have to see Len looking for instructors and running up and down the stairs to find them. We need to be professional.

Remember some special days during March, for example March 11, designated as a “No Smoking Day.” Of course, you do as you wish, but you should always dispose of your cigarette butts in a way as not to trash the world. They will decompose, but it does not happen as soon as the butt is dropped on the ground. Also, have a wonderful St. Patrick’s Day on March 17.

There are no PSIA-E March events for Region 7. If you would like the Region 4 listing, please let me know, “Mike Simmons” <mds@i-americainet>, or look at PSIA-E Web site www.psia-e.org.

Please be informed that Wintergreen Ski Resort is hosting an In House, Level 1, Alpine and Snowboard Exam on March 14th and 15th. Please get this message out to your staff. Interested folks should contact Tomas Sbertoli at tsbertoli@wintergreenresort.com, or call at 434-325-8065 or fax at 434-325 - 8001. Any problems, get back to me. Also, Canaan Valley Resort Hotel continues to offer a $39.00 midweek room rate. Call 304-866-4121.

Ski Shop at Sugar offers 30% off all 2009-2010 Spyder Sale items starting Feb. 26. Quantities and sizes are limited, so come early. Additionally you’ll receive up to 60% off other Spyder Sample items. You won't find this kind of a sale anywhere else!

Newsmakers

- Bill and Brad passed their Snowboard Exam I. Give them a big hug when you see them.
- Aaron, Doug, and John went for a snowboard update clinic. Talk to them about getting your bag of tricks refilled.

Marketplace

- K2 skis, snowboards, and accessories are available at pro prices. For pro forms contact Witold Kosmala at Kosmalaw@bellsouth.net.