

Chapter 14: Setting Up Competitive Events

In this section you will learn how to integrate competitive events into your overall club program. The procedures for organizing and running cross country ski races for BKL skiers is explained.

For organizers of multi-age events NENSA's Event Organizers Handbook is another resource.

Setting Up Competitive Events

Competition is a distinct part of the overall NEBKL program. While not all children want to participate in races, each local BKL Club needs to provide for those children who do. In this section you will learn how to integrate the competitive aspects of cross country skiing with your overall program. You will be led step-by-step through the process of organizing and running racing events for BKL skiers.

Philosophy of Competition

It is the responsibility of NEBKL leaders, coaches, and parents to provide children with the skills and knowledge to pursue skiing beyond BKL should they choose to do so. As with all NEBKL activities, competitions are designed to teach each young athlete to participate to the best of his or her respective abilities. No child should be forced to compete.

Cautionary Note

The long-term developmental needs of each child must be observed by club leaders, coaches, and parents. Racing children two and three times a week, and racing children longer distances risks their long-term development, and is too much to handle for the BKL aged skier. While it is true that all children develop physically and mentally at different rates, the danger of “rushing” young athletes is well-established.

Children who race several times a week may experience short-term success but truly jeopardize long-term development. They are more susceptible to injuries as well as physical and psychological burnout.

Children who consistently race distances longer than those recommended for their age group risk neuromuscular development of the speed that is their natural gift. Psychologically and neuromuscularly, they quickly become efficient at moving themselves over the snow at a conservative pace. In almost every case children who race too often or who race at distances which are too long, are doing so to please an adult.

Racing Opportunities

Clubs that are too small, or feel too inexperienced to hold their own competitions can participate in the races of neighboring clubs, or in district races. Volunteering to help others is a great way to learn how to run competitions yourself. Leaders should contact their district chair or contact NENSA to find out more about these opportunities. Also, many NENSA races feature a BKL race prior to or after the main event. Contact the NENSA or consult our website to find out more about these events.

Organizing a Cross Country Ski Race

Organizing a cross country ski race requires planning. Poorly organized races are frustrating and discouraging to both competitors and parents. Procedures must be thought out in advance and communicated clearly to the team of workers. Beginning race organizers should observe activities at a host club before running their own race. Volunteering to work at other club's races is a great way to learn.

Equipment required to run a ski race is minimal and inexpensive. Race administration techniques vary. The suggestions here are provided as a basic outline to help the organizer establish procedures for a local club.

Choosing the Course.

Choose the cross country race course prior to race day. An ideal course is a fair test of a racer's speed and technique and, lastly, endurance. Racing is fun for kids when they go fast, when they feel fast. Courses that reward endurance above speed are discouraged.

The terrain should be smooth and undulating with no extremely sharp gradients. The course should have smooth turns that leave skiing rhythm uninterrupted. A limited number of bumps and sharper turns have their place on courses for the older, more experienced BKL racers. More difficult features such as steep, long uphill and downhill with high speeds and sharp turns may be added to courses for older junior and adult skiers— but they are not recommended for BKL skiers.

Distance and Terrain guidelines for Bill Koch Youth Ski League Races

- **Lollipoppers (age 5-7)** – No more than 500 meters. Although flat terrain might appear easier, it is actually more difficult to ski than rolling terrain, with its rests and opportunities to change techniques. If there is some terrain parents should be encouraged to help with the less capable kids - little push up the hill, or a little hand holding on the way down.

- **Grades 1&2 (age 6-7)** This race is up to 1 kilometer. Remembering that this is a transition category from the Lollipop races to the Grades 3&4.
- **Grades 3&4 (age 8-9)** – 2 kilometers with no more than 20-25 meters (65-85 feet) of total elevation gain and a maximum single climb of 10 meters (35 feet).
- **Grades 5&6 (age 10-11)** – 3 kilometers with no more than 30-40 meters (100-135 feet) of total elevation gain and a maximum single climb of 10 meters (35 feet).
- **Grades 7&8 (age 12-13)** – 4 kilometers with no more than 40-55 meters (135-180 feet) of total elevation gain and a maximum single climb of 15 meters (50 feet).

Relay Race Guidelines

Typically the race distance has not exceeded 2k for all age categories other than Grades 1&2. Grades 1&2 should not be longer than 1k.

As with every other guideline put forth by NENSA for the Bill Koch League, the objective here is to make racing fun for as many kids as possible. At this age the goal is to create converts to the sport of cross country skiing; at a later age is when we worry about creating superstars.

As more challenge is desired, it is preferable to focus on courses with technical challenge of skiing skills, i.e. compression dips, and turns rather than more climbing. Conversely, if a club or district has a lot of skiers who have never raced before a course could be laid out just for them, regardless of age, that might be only a kilometer long with no climbing.

When it comes time to put together the courses for a festival these guidelines are more important than ever. When all of the districts and clubs come together at the festival, bringing with them an incredible variety of skiing ability, they should know what to expect. Consistency is important. The less time a skier at the festival spends worrying about how long or how hard the course is, the more time they can spend focusing on going fast, or having fun, or whatever their particular goal is.

To insure course distances and climbs are within the recommendations, event directors can:

1. Use a topographic map to help estimate the high difference from known points on your course. While not 100% accurate it will give you a sense of the terrain.
2. Use an inclinometer to measure the angle and a tape to get the distance and some basic geometry to calculate the approximate rise, again this is not exact but it will get you pretty close.
3. Use a GPS watch or tracking app like Strava or MapMyRun to get a GPS track and elevation profile of your proposed course.

Course Preparation

Trails must be packed to a width which allows two skiers to pass. An eight foot width is adequate with good snow conditions. Hills and fast corners require wider packing. The course is marked clearly and at frequent intervals with flags, arrows, signs or painted snow. Trail junctions require special care; insure that markers point in a clear direction. The following color coding scheme can be used to mark courses:

CLASS COLOR

Grades 3&4 yellow

Grades 5&6 red

Grades 7&8 blue

Emergency Medical Plan

An emergency medical plan should be present in written form at all race sites. It should include:

1. Detailing the quickest and safest access and exit routes to various points on the course
2. Names of people who are on the EMP Team
3. Location of first aid equipment
4. Location of nearest available medical facility

At least one snowmobile staffed by an EMT or medical personnel should be stationed at/near the start/finish line.

Race Equipment Checklist

- Collect all equipment in advance:
- Start Lists (eg. p.149) Start and Finish gates Bibs
- Clipboards (at least 3) Shovels/rakes Refreshments
- Pencils Snowmobile Trail markers
- Magic Markers Track setting sled Money box
- Three stopwatches Bullhorn First Aid supplies
- Trophies, ribbon BKL Manual Emergency Medical Plan
- A minimum of three clipboards is necessary: one is used to record registration information, including bib numbers; a second is used to record finishing times; the third is a spare in case of precipitation. Stopwatches must have a 30 minute capacity.

Race Personnel

The following personnel are essential to the smooth running of a cross country race. One person may fill several positions, especially in smaller races, but he/she must be able to perform all of his/her duties.

Chief of Competition is responsible for preparing the race; supervises the race; assigns duties to the other race personnel.

Technical Delegate is responsible for enforcing the rules and ensuring a safe and fair competition. All personnel are under the T. D.'s control. T.D.'s may be FIS Officials.

Chief of Course prepares the race course and marks the courses so that racers can follow the courses easily; sets track, positions the checkers and closes the courses as needed.

Race Secretary registers racers, distributes bibs; posts results, prints results and distributes awards.

Chief Timer times the race accurately and records the times of each racer; calculates results and team scorings.

Starter starts racers at a determined interval; operates the start clock and insures that the racers are at the starting line in their proper order.

Finisher is responsible for reading aloud for the finish recorder the finish time and bib number of each finishing racer; operates the finish clock/watch.

Finish Recorder is responsible for recording the finish time of each finishing racer; repeats the time back to the finish timer.

Bib Recorder is responsible for recording the bib order of finish of the racers; records their finish times as a double check on the first finish recorder; repeats bib number of finishing racer back to the finish timer and the first finish recorder.

Pre-Caller announces the bib number of each finishing racer; equipped with a loud voice or a bull horn.

Back-up Timer operates back-up watch for either the starter or the finish timer.

Controllers/Stewards direct racers on the course; check off racers on check sheet if laps are involved.

Bib Collector is responsible for collecting bibs from each racer crossing the finish line.

Aid Station Attendants serve hydration fluids/refreshments at finish line

Forerunners ski the course before the first racer starts in order to improve the track; forerunners should check the course for fallen branches, obstructions, and windblown sections of the course and make quick repairs if possible or communicate problems to the Chief of Course.

Post Runners ski the course behind the last racer; check to see that all the racers are safely off the course; closes the course by taking down all signs and flags.

Wax Consultants post a suggested wax for the race in the registration area for racers and coaches to consider in choosing their wax; this person should be proficient in the art of waxing. They should have the temperatures, both at start/finish and on course, posted with the times taken prior to the race and at start time.

Race Jury includes the T.D., Chief of Competition, Chief of Course, and two (2) coaches/leaders. They answer rule issues and decide on issues of safety or trail configuration.

Race Procedures

The following tasks are arranged more or less chronologically, although some of them will be going on in different places simultaneously.

Pre-Race:

- Race Secretary registers the racers by class
- Establish a registration area to record registrants by name, club, sex and class
- Assign bibs in racing order by appropriate group
- Seeding the racers in each class is the decision of the host club.
- The Chief of Course inspects the course to insure that the track is in good condition and the markings are accurate
- The Chief of Course stations responsible Checkers at strategic points on the course, eg, turns, junctions and road crossings
- Checkers should be equipped with appropriate materials: paper and pencil for checking off racers, shovel/rake for patch work where the snow is thin, radio, etc

Race Start:

- Forerunners should ski out two to five minutes ahead of the rest of the field.
- Racers are briefed on often violated rules (see Reminder to Racers).

- The Start Recorder lines up racers by class in racing order behind the starting gate. A typical procedure is to start the racers singly or in pairs every 30 seconds or one minute.
- An “Attention. 5-4-3-2-1-go” countdown is usually used
- At “go” the stop watches are started or the start watch time is recorded. Note: the clocks will run continuously for the duration of the race. They are not stopped as a racer finishes. A back-up watch is used in case the first one fails.
- Late starters’ starting procedure is determined by the starter. Racers who miss their starts may be run at the end of their classes, and their actual start and finish time recorded; or they may be started, without interfering with the regular start order, and their start time remains that on the start list. Usually an interval of 5 minutes is left between classes.
- The starting procedure is continued until all racers are on course. Please note that prior to starting the last racers, the first racers may be finishing. Be prepared to record finish times as they happen.

Race Finish

- A separate finish team of recorders is important.
- Finish team of three people can record finish times effectively. The Finish Timer, reading the watch calls out the time (i.e., 30 minutes, 25 seconds...26 seconds..27 seconds...) as the racer approaches the finish line. The two Finish Recorders record bib numbers and finish times on clipboards. The First Finish Recorder repeats the time and the Second Finish Recorder repeats the bib number. A cool head and a quick pencil is needed because several racers can finish together.
- Station a pre-caller 20 to 30 meters from the finish line with a bull horn or loud speaker to call out the numbers of approaching racers.
- A post-runner should ski the course and close it after the start of the last racer.
- The finish times are posted from clipboards #1 and #3 to clipboard #1. The Chief Timer computes elapsed times for each racer and places are recorded for each racer by class. All results should then be double-checked. Unofficial results are often posted immediately for coaches/leaders to review.
- Post the official results and let them be observed so that any protests can be made. Award all ribbons and medals in a public ceremony. Communicate the outstanding efforts of all participants. Acknowledge the sponsors and thank the site, coaches, and volunteers.
- Official results should be sent to all district teams, as well as the local news media.

A Reminder to Racers and Coaches

- 1) Be prompt in registering. Don't forget your entry fee (if there is one).
- 2) Tour the course before any races begin.
- 3) Be waxed and ready at the start of the race. Take care of and secure your own equipment.
- 4) Line up according to your number. Don't be late.
- 5) Stay warm while waiting to start.
- 6) Listen to the starter's instructions.
- 7) Wait for the go signal.
- 8) Track with courtesy.
- 9) Yield track to overtaking racers at the first command. Keep your poles clear of the track.
- 10) Follow the course markings or the checkers' instructions while on the course.
- 11) Move out of the way when you finish.
- 12) Give your bib to the bib collector.
- 13) Dress in warm clothes right away.
- 14) Don't ask the timing officials questions.
- 15) Don't pace any racers. Pacing is skiing alongside, behind, or in front of a racer for more than 25 meters.
- 16) Keep clear of the tracks when not racing.
- 17) Give racers equipment (wax, poles and one ski) but you don't help them physically, eg, apply wax or put on their poles or skis.
- 18) Cheer for everybody.
- 19) Have fun!

The New England BKL Festival

One of the largest nordic events in New England is the New England Bill Koch League Festival. It is a two-day celebration of youth cross country skiing that annually features over 400 skiers, most of whom are accompanied by their families. The Bill Koch Festival rotates to a different state each year and features a "theme" that emphasizes the fun of participating in cross country skiing. There is an opening ceremony, complete with a parade of all the athletes representing their Districts, a graduation ceremony for the 8th graders, a pasta dinner, games, and any possible event that can be done on skis or snow. For many BKL skiers, the Festival is the culmination of their season, a chance to see ski friends from far away, a chance to ski at a new venue and make new ski friends. Each NEBKL Club sends a contingent of skiers and families to the Festival. Information on the New England BKL Festival can be obtained on the NENSA website.

Summary

The competitive side to cross country skiing can be challenging, exciting, and rewarding to many or all of your club members. Adequate preparation is the key to running races smoothly and safely. Attending and working on races held by other clubs will give you the confidence and expertise to hold your own competitive events. Consult your District Chair for more information about racing programs in your area.