



Chapter 14: Setting Up Competitive Events

In this section you will learn how to integrate competitive events into your overall club program. This section will also explain the procedures for organizing and running cross country ski races for youth skiers. For organizers of multi-age events, NENSA's *Event Organizers Handbook* is another resource. Handbook available here: <https://nensa.net/event-organizers/>.

Setting Up Competitive Events: Competition is a distinct part of the overall BKL program. While not all children want to participate in races, each local BKL Club should consider providing opportunities 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 youth skiers.

Philosophy of Competition: It is the responsibility of leaders, coaches, and caregivers/parents to provide children with the skills and knowledge to pursue skiing beyond BKL should they choose to do so. As with all BKL activities, competitions are designed to teach each young person to participate to the best of their 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 caregivers/parents. Allowing or encouraging children to race two and three times a week and/or at longer distances than is best for their age will risk their long-term development and overall enjoyment of the sport. While it is true that all children develop physically and mentally at different rates, the dangers of “rushing” young athletes are well-established. Children who race several times a week may experience short-term success but at the cost of 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 jeopardizing their neuromuscular development. 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 and not because they truly want to.

Racing Opportunities: Clubs that are too small, or feel too inexperienced to hold their own competitions, can participate in races offered by 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 (www.nensa.net/bill-koch-league-club-directory/) 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 NENSA or consult the calendar on our website to find out more about these events: <https://nensa.net/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 caregivers/parents. Procedures must be thought out in advance and communicated clearly to the team of workers/volunteers. 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, technique, and, lastly, endurance. Racing is fun for kids when they go fast and when they feel fast. Courses that reward endurance above speed are discouraged. The terrain should be smooth and undulating with no extremely sharp grades. 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 youth racers. More difficult features such as steep, long uphill and downhill with high speeds and sharp turns may be added to courses for older juniors and adults but they are not recommended for youth participants.

Distance, Terrain & Timing Guidelines for Bill Koch Youth Ski League Races

- **Lollipopers (ages ~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 downhill "rests" and opportunities to change techniques. If there is some terrain, caregivers/parents should be encouraged to help the less experienced children with a little push up the hill or a hand hold on the way down. Race is not timed, results are not posted.
- **Grades 1& 2 (ages ~6-7):** 1 kilometer. Remembering that this is a transition category from Lollipop to Grades 3&4. If individual start, the race can be timed but times should not be posted (only post placement).
- **Grades 3&4 (ages ~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). If individual start, the race can be timed but times should not be posted (only post placement).
- **Grades 5&6 (ages ~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). Times and placement can be posted for results.
- **Grades 7&8 (ages ~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). Times and placement can be posted for results.



- **Relay Race Guidelines:** Grades 1&2 should be no longer than 1 kilometer while all older grades should not exceed 2 kilometers. Relays do not need to be timed as they are mass start and order of finish can be recorded.

As with every other guideline put forth by NENSA for the Bill Koch Youth Ski League, the objective here is to make racing fun for everyone. The goal is to create events that make children love skiing. As more challenge is desired, it is preferable to focus on courses with more technical challenges such as compression dips and turns rather than more climbing. If a club or district has a lot of children who have never raced before, a course can be laid out just for them, regardless of age that might be only a kilometer long with no climbing. Following the fall 2021 NENSA District Chair meeting, the District Chairs voted to only post placement for Grades 1-4 (not times) in an effort to reduce the focus on competition.

When it comes time to put together the courses for the 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 child at the Festival spends worrying about how long or how hard the course is, the more time they can spend focusing on going fast, having fun, or whatever their personal goal may be.

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

- Use a GPS watch or tracking app like Strava or MapMyRun to get a GPS track and elevation profile of your proposed course.
- Use a topographic map to help estimate the height difference from known points on the course. While not 100% accurate, it will give you a sense of the terrain.
- 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.

Course Preparation: Trails should be packed to a width which allows two people 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; ensure 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 (EMP): An emergency medical plan should be present in written form at all race sites. It should include:

1. Detailing the quickest and safest entry 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 medical facility

At least one snowmobile staffed by an EMT or medical personnel should be stationed at/near the start/finish line. See Emergency Medical Plan Recommendations and Template links under safety considerations on Page 127.

Race Equipment Checklist (compiled by Rosemary Shae-Cobb, NWVT District Chair)

- Bibs: 60 to 100 bibs will probably suffice for most club youth races
- Clipboards: at least three so there's one for the starter, one for bib recording, and one for time recording.
- Stopwatches: at least 3 with 30 minute capacity (can also use personal watches or phones although phone batteries can die in the cold).
- A big "Registration" sign that you can attach to a table
- A bag of pencils, pens, markers, and packing tape
- A folder of Bib Recording sheets
- A folder of Time Recording sheets
- Ribbons: 1st-10th place and Participant ribbons
- Lollipops for the lollipoppers!
- A bell to ring to start each race
- Bullhorn
- Emergency Medical Plan
- Course marking flags or cones
- Start and finish gates/signs.
- Shovels/rakes
- Refreshments
- Money box or bag
- Radios can be helpful if available



Race Personnel

The following personnel are essential to a smoothly run cross country ski race. One person may fill several positions, especially in smaller races, but they must be able to perform all of their duties.

Chief of Competition: Responsible for preparing the race, supervising the race, and assigning duties to the other race personnel.

Chief of Course: Prepares the race courses and marks the courses so that racers can follow the courses easily. They also position the course marshalls and close 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. They also calculate results and run team scoring, if applicable.

Starter: Starts racers at the determined interval, operates the start clock, and ensures racers are at the start line in the proper order.

Start Wrangler: Lines up racers by class in bib order behind the starting gate.

Finish Timer: Responsible for communicating to the Finish Recorder (below) the finish time and bib number of each finishing racer. They also operate the finish clock/watch.

Finish Recorder: Responsible for recording the finish time of each finishing racer and repeating the time back to the Chief Timer.

Bib Recorder: Responsible for recording the bib order of finish, recording finish times as a double check on the Finish Recorder, and repeating the bib number of finishing racer back to the Chief Timer and the Finish Recorder.

Pre-Caller: Announces the bib number of each finishing racer. Must be equipped with a loud voice or a bull horn.

Back-up Timer: operates a back-up watch.

Controllers/Stewards/Marshalls: Direct racers on the course and checks off racers on a checklist if laps are involved.



Bib Collector: Responsible for collecting bibs from each racer crossing the finish line.

Aid Station Attendants: Serve hydration fluids/refreshments at the finish line. Hands out lollipops to lollipoppers.

Forerunners: skis the course before the first racer starts in order to clear the track and guide the racers. 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/Sweepers: Ski the course behind the last racer to check that all the racers are safely off the course. They also close the course by taking down all signs and flags.

Wax Consultant: Posts a suggested wax for the race and the temperature in the registration area for racers and coaches to consider when choosing their wax. This person should be proficient in waxing.

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, and class
- Assign bibs in racing order by appropriate class
- Seed the racers in each class (how this is done is up to 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 Course Marshalls at strategic points on the course such as turns, junctions, and road crossings
- Equip Marshalls with appropriate materials including paper and a pencil for checking off racers, shovel/rake for patch work where the snow is thin, radio, etc.

Race Start:

- Forerunners should ski the course two to five minutes ahead of the rest of the field.
- Racers are briefed on often violated rules (see Reminder to Racers and Coaches on page 158 below).



- The Start Wrangler lines up racers by age class in bib order behind the starting gate. A typical procedure is to start the racers individually or in pairs every 30 or 60 seconds.
- A “5-4-3-2-1-go” countdown is usually used.
- At “go” 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 primary watch fails.
- The late starters’ starting procedure is determined by the Starter. Racers who miss their start may be run at the end of their age class (with their actual start and finish time recorded) or they may be started midway through without interfering with the regular start order (with their start time remaining the same as on the start list). Usually an interval of five minutes is left between age groups.
- The starting procedure continues 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:

- Using a separate finish recording team is important.
- A finish team of three people can record finish times effectively. The Finish Timer, looking at the watch, calls out the time (i.e., 30 minutes, 25 seconds...26 seconds..27 seconds...) as the racer approaches the finish line. The Finish Recorder and Bib Recorder record finish times and bib numbers on clipboards. The Finish Recorder repeats the time and the Bib 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 loud voice or a bull horn to call out the numbers of approaching racers.
- A Post-Runner/Sweeper should ski the course and close it after the last racer starts.
- The Chief Timer computes elapsed times for each racer and places are recorded for each racer by age 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, volunteers, and caregivers/parents.
- Official results should be sent to all team leaders

A Reminder to Racers and Coaches

- Be prompt in registering. Don’t forget your entry fee (if there is one).
- Tour the course before any races begin.
- Be waxed and ready at the start of the race. Take care of and secure your own equipment.



- Line up according to your number. Don't be late.
- Stay warm while waiting to start.
- Listen to the starter's instructions.
- Wait for the "go" signal.
- Overtake/track other racers with courtesy.
- Yield the track to overtaking racers at their first request. Keep your poles out of the way.
- Follow the course markings and any Course Marshall instructions while on the course.
- Move out of the way when you finish.
- Give your bib to the Bib Collector.
- Put on warm clothes right after finishing.
- Don't ask questions of the timing officials.
- Don't pace any racers. Pacing is skiing alongside, behind, or in front of a racer for more than 25 meters. Please note that caregivers/parents can do this in lollipop and Grade 1&2 races where children are less experienced and may be intimidated by racing or worried about following the course.
- Keep clear of the tracks when not racing.
- Cheer for everybody.
- Have fun!

The New England BKL Festival

One of the largest cross country ski events in New England is the New England Bill Koch League Festival. It is a two-day celebration of youth cross country skiing with over 400 participants annually, 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 children 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 children, the Festival is the culmination of their season, a chance to see ski friends from far away, an opportunity to ski at a new venue, and fun way make new ski friends. Each BKL clubs sends a contingent of children and families to the Festival. Information on the New England BKL Festival can be obtained on the NENSA website: www.nensa.net/bkl-festival.



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 at 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:
<https://nensa.net/bill-koch-league-club-directory/>.