



Chapter 9: Setting Up Noncompetitive Events

Think back to the basic philosophy of the BKL that was introduced in Chapter 1: *children should have the opportunity to have fun while learning how to cross country ski*. Outside of games and free play, one of the best ways to promote this is to attend or organize strictly noncompetitive events. These events should not take the place of racing—competition can be fun and extremely valuable when approached correctly—but they can be a great addition to your club's winter schedule.

Cross Country Cross (XCX)

Cross Country Cross (XCX) is a new and exciting discipline of skiing incorporating elements of a terrain park into a closed loop. In a competitive setting, XCX is essentially a sprint race with added bumps, slalom gates, sharp turns, etc. FIS defines XCX as the following:

“Cross Country Cross is a competition where competitors compete on a cross country ski course that includes both traditional and non-traditional elements such as natural and artificial terrain features, corridors, obstacles and tight turns, as well as different natural or artificial types of turns, jumps, waves and other skiing terrain features. The competition may be carried out as an individual interval start competition, or follow the finals format of an Individual Sprint Competition.”

BKL clubs have been doing this for years—you don't have to reinvent the wheel in order to make a successful XCX course and you don't have to make it competitive! A few well placed snow bumps or rollers will let children experiment with new ways of using their agility, balance, coordination, and rhythm and help develop better all around athleticism and physical literacy. If you have your own place to hold practice and you have available snow, it can be really fun to have a permanent course or loop set up near your stadium or meeting area. This gives children who are dressed and ready to go early a place to stay busy and warm while they wait for practice to start. It also provides a format for fun low key competitions such as obstacle course races or relays and jumping contests.

It's important to be safety conscious when setting up any sort of XCX or agility course. All features should be well designed and maintained to keep children as safe as possible and to limit undue stress on equipment. For younger children, be sure that there is proper adult supervision any time features are in use.

What You Need (aside from snow): You will need cones, bamboo poles, rope, an existing playground or terrain with promising features, and a sense of fun!



Options to consider:

- Set up a course where children ski up a small hill and slalom down between cones or gates
- Set up two parallel courses and children can race each other
- Groom a short course that utilizes a side hill in a pattern that requires both left and right hand lead, short sharp climbs and descents, sharp corners, etc.
- Build a snow bump
- Create an agility course that might include:
 - 360 degree turns around trees, poles, or playground apparatuses
 - Ropes, 2x4's, or plastic pipes to jump over
 - Places where children have to duck low through existing playground apparatus, a picnic table, or two poles tied together in a V
 - A section where children balance just on a left ski and then just on a right ski
 - Little jumps and/or rollers
 - Cones in slalom patterns to maneuver through
 - A place to ski backwards

BE CREATIVE. Think like a kid!

You can set up a simple course in just a few minutes. You can hold relays and organized activities in them or simply have them available as a place for children to play.



Mini-Marathons

The Mini-Marathon was the inspiration of the Stowe Nordic Club. Several local families, inspired by their skiing experiences at the Craftsbury Marathon, began hatching the idea of creating a child-oriented version. It was their experience as caregivers/parents/leaders/coaches in the Bill Koch Youth Ski League that children are capable of much more than they often realize. A long-distance, non-competitive ski event gives children an opportunity to acknowledge their own abilities and to feel good about themselves and their achievement. In 2004 the New England Nordic Ski Association presented its first “Club of the Year Award” to the Stowe Nordic Club for “pioneering the mini-marathon concept.”

Preparing for the Mini-Marathon requires the collective work of several volunteers. The final meeting is an annual gathering at an organizer’s house to make chili and finalize the trail maps. One important detail was ensuring the safety of children skiing alone, so they stated on the registration form that children under a certain age must be accompanied by an adult and all children were encouraged to ski in groups.

The Stowe Nordic Club hosted its 3rd Annual Bill Koch Youth Ski League Mini-Marathon on Saturday, January 8th, 2005. Eighty-eight people participated in the event. The course consisted of a 15K loop and a 25K loop, both originating at the Stowe Mountain Resort Cross Country Center. While the 15K loop traversed the trails at Stowe Mountain Resort, the 25K loop included a climb to the trails at Trapp Family Lodge. Participants enjoyed several food stops along both courses and a chili feast awaited them at the finish line. This was a timed classic tour, with cowbells awarded to all participating children.

“I will never forget that first marathon. Between 90 and 100 children were on the starting line. As I looked over the crowd I realized that our anticipated fear of children skiing alone had not materialized. Instead, families littered the starting area. It was then that I realized the hidden gift of this marathon. On this day families are given the opportunity to leave behind the day-to-day distractions that separate them and come together for a few hours of quality family time.” (Deb Miller, co-organizer of the Stowe Nordic Mini-Marathon)



Mini Ski Festivals: A Planning Guide

This planning guide is based on the Central Vermont Middle Level Ski Fest Series, first run in North Central Vermont the winter of 1999-2000, with modifications from the 2021 BKL Mini-Fest Guide. Partners in the pilot Middle Level Ski Fest project were: Stowe Middle School, Peoples Academy Middle Level, Craftsbury Academy, Lamoille Union Middle School, and Harwood Union/Crosset Brook Middle School.

What is a Ski Fest?

A Ski Fest is several hours of organized fun for children on cross country skis. A Ski Fest is a largely noncompetitive series of fun events ranging from games to obstacle courses, all on cross country skis. The goal is to get children on cross country skis in an accessible, fun, entertaining, and enjoyable setting with lots of other children.

Ahead of Time:

- Set a date
- Avoid conflicts that might keep children from coming
- Coordinate with other schools or clubs
- Determine a location with enough space
- Arrange access to a warm place
- Parking
- Source of snow for building obstacle course
- Tracked/groomed trail
- Get permissions from venue if necessary
- Plan for advertising (posters; flyers; email outreach to individuals, schools, and clubs; social media; newspaper articles; etc.)
- Create an online registration, if applicable

Equipment

- Bibs (borrow or buy)
- Air horn (a great way to indicate time to switch events)
- Name tag stickers for participants, coaches, and officials
- Sign-up sheets/registration forms
- Flags to mark race courses, and other events
- Props for events (see detailed info below)

Staffing

- Registration
- Refreshments (setup and supervision)
- Clean-up volunteers



- Awards and announcements (emcee)
- Event directors and helpers (see detailed list below)
- Grooming, course set up
- Obstacle course design and construction (get kids to help with this fun project!)

Awards

- Ribbons/cowbells/medals for all participants
- Freebies from local businesses, or ski manufacturers (stickers, posters, water bottles, energy bars, etc.)

Refreshments

- During: Have water available to participants outside
- Afterwards: Hot cocoa, water, cookies/snacks (brought by caregivers/parents, supplied by a school, or donated)

Safety Considerations: The following guidelines are for official NENSA cross country ski races and also apply to Ski Fests.

- A “Search and Rescue Plan” should be present in written form at all sites. It should include:
 - Alerting the nearest medical facility of the date and time of the event
 - Alerting local medical transport service of date and time of event
 - Detailing the quickest and safest access and exit routes to various points on the course
 - Course monitors stationed at points on the course. They should be in radio contact with all other volunteers/event staff
 - At least one snowmobile staffed by an EMT or medical personnel stationed at/near the hub of activity.
 - NENSA Medical Plan Recommendations:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/oBxrL323QfH8qTDZYX3FQdExSeEE/view?resourcekey=0-EUo_V8CuWTQe_ohLWjfPQg
 - NENSA Medical Emergency Plan Template:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/oBxrL323QfH8qModSTWYzb3FaVko/view?resourcekey=0-02Ea7VeD4yK-79GcNW-tIQ>



THE AROOSTOOK YOUTH SKI FESTIVAL: A Review

Saturday March 5th, 2005, 10am-4pm

By: Northern Skiers Club, Caribou, Maine

This first annual festival was designed as a new and **COOL** way to celebrate all the ways kids can **MOVE** on a pair of cross country skis!! All skiing youth ages 5-13 were welcome to attend this unique one-day festival. The entry fee was only \$10 and included lunch, entry to all events, a certificate of individual achievements, and a water bottle.

One of the goals was to give all kinds of kids a chance to be “successful” during the day so we designed a few new types of events so everyone could shine. While some kids have good endurance for a ski race, there are many more who do not but they still enjoy skiing and become skilled in other areas.

Event Descriptions:

- **Big Air EXPO:** How much air can each child get between their skis and the ground! Three jumps of various sizes. Helmets required for the larger jumps (only open when adults were present). Great upbeat music playing for the crowd and participants.
- **XC Speed Skiing:** Measured with a radar gun for maximum speed in miles per hour. A big hit!!
- **XC Power Ski Drag:** A measure of skiing power! Special sled designed with weight added for 20 meters. A Monster Truck pull on skis!
- **Double Pole for Distance:** A show of double poling ski strength with this arms-only event. Includes a double pole section and a marked glide section.
- **XC Slalom Course:** A few gated courses on a downhill slope. Gates aren't just for alpine skiers! Experienced skiers teach the children to carve turns.
- **XC Standing Jump Turns:** Jump up and turn mid air. We had 9 children do a complete 360!
- **XC Distance Event:** Freestyle (classic track available) 2k, 1.5k, 1k, or 500m with all courses visible to caregivers/parents and spectators.
- **Barrel Sprints:** 50m barrel sprint (25m to the barrel and back to the start/finish line). Five barrels set up, but most children chose not to go together.
- **Tandem Skiing Relays:** Two children on one pair of skis! A true display of teamwork.
- **Biathlon Challenge:** Take a “shot” at the bean bag biathlon targets.
- **Obstacle Courses:** Available ALL-Day with other activities including ski-joring demos, skiing teeter totter, skiing Limbo, and ski tours.



- **MASSIVE Sharks and Minnows game:** We had about 150 children and volunteers/adults all join in for a massive game of Sharks and Minnows with live play by play on the PA system. It was a great way to end the day!

In all, we had about 150 children, 50 volunteers, and another 100 caregivers/parents/spectators come for the event from all around. The most complicated part of the festival was scoring children in six different events before we broke up into more free time. Each child had a bib with numbers corresponding to their age group for scoring purposes. The following events were SCORED or noted for participation:

- Distance Ski Race: NO Times recorded, mark only that they COMPLETED the distance
- Slalom Course: NO Times recorded, marked only that they TRIED the slalom course
- Radar Speed Skiing: Fastest speed in miles per hour was recorded (event highlight for most kids)
- Double Pole for Distance: Length of their double pole induced glide was recorded
- Barrel Sprints: Times on this standardized distance that can be reproduced in future years to note improvement.
- Jump Turns: Large circles made in the snow with degrees marked (this can be reproduced each year as well for the children to note their improvement).

Final Notes:

The Northern Skiers Club helped to provide the 50 volunteers we needed to pull this event off. They are excited to hold it again next year. There were (by design) no POSTED RESULTS, and NO AWARD ceremonies! Each child left with a certificate which highlighted their own achievements. Everyone left a winner! We would not change much for next year. A few tweaks here and there maybe, but mostly we would like to find ways to get more children there to experience this one full day of fun on skis. We may find sponsors who can pay for the buses needed from all the surrounding towns. We can get 500 kids if they all have transportation right from their hometowns, so this is where we will focus some time and effort.



CONCORD-HOLDERNESS BKL MINI-FEST: A Summary

From Peter Hendel, NENSA Treasurer

During the 2021 ski season, volunteer leaders from the Concord and Holderness BKL clubs got together and decided to organize a joint club youth skiing Mini-Festival in the absence of the full regional Festival. As this was to occur during the COVID pandemic, the goal was to keep the event simple, safe, and fun. To that end, the guiding principals were:

- Limit participation to the Concord & Holderness clubs
- Maximize the opportunity for family time and limit the number of activities (less stress and physical contact)
- Require masks and self-screening
- Include traditional racing by age group, but design this activity so as to minimize pressure on the kids.

Site: Waterville Valley hosted the event. They were awesome in dedicating their north end “Bob’s Lookout” and Osceola Campground as our stadium, and Osceola/Deer Run/Moose Run trails for racing and family skiing. In preparation, they groomed around all of the campground picnic tables so that families could safely spread out during the day. In addition, they hauled up a ton of firewood for S’mores and lunch use.

Event Schedule

9:30am – registration at Bob’s Lookout. Families needed to ski from parking lot 2k to event site

10:30am – Racing by age group

12:00pm – Graduation Ceremony for 8th graders

12:30pm – Lunch – families packed in their own lunches.

Race Format: Racing was spectacular. Each race started with a fun double figure-8 agility ski around all of the campground picnic tables, and then each youngster completed their respective 3k, 1.5k, 1k, or 0.5k course. Our course layout allowed spectators to feel a part of the race despite being very spread out, and the kids created their own fun in the woods between races. No fencing, no course marshals.

We held the four races (girls following boys) at 10:30am, 10:45am, 11:00am, and 11:30am. Before each race we gathered the children together by grade which greatly decreased the stress of ‘racing.’ There was no start list and the chief starter started kids roughly in 10 -15 sec intervals and roughly in bib order. This provided time to calm a scared child, recognize a falling off mitten, and even have the pink gorilla race a too serious child for the first 100 yards.



Race Timing: By using the Webscorer's "Individual" race format, we could easily manage children that missed their start or who were not quite ready. For example, we were easily able to insert some late arriving Grade 1-2 kids into the grade 3-4 race without a hitch. Start and finish lines were adjacent and one iPad could easily punch start bib #'s and finish bib #'s with one assistant calling out numbers.

Cost: \$5 per participant (including caregivers/parents) which went to Waterville Valley Adventure Center. All pre-organization and events were club volunteer run. We had 88 youth and 80 caregivers/parents attend.

Final Notes and Organizer Takeaways:

"This was my 16th BKL Festival in a row and the simplicity of it was magical as both an organizer of the day and I think for those in attendance. The sense of community and lack of structure created friendships and an enhanced love of Nordic skiing in the great outdoors." - Molly Whitcomb, Holderness BKL

"In reflecting on lessons learned this season, it is clear that neither of our clubs has ever had this kind of turnout for the New England Festival. Clearly this local event was accessible to a great many people who would not normally make the trip for a N.E. festival. Also, another big difference is that the little kids all knew the big kids and vice versa." - Peter Hendel, NENSA Treasurer



Ski Touring

Some of your club's most memorable and enjoyable practices can involve ski touring. Exploration, discovery, fitness, skill-building, and fellowship all come together on ski tours. Have caregivers/parents and/or additional coaches along to assist you. If your group is too large, break up into smaller groups. Don't allow children to race off at top speed. This activity is about going steady for a long period of time.

The Bill Kocher's Backpack: On a tour lasting one to two hours, each child should carry the following in a small backpack or waist belt:

- Snacks with a nutritional value that will fuel them through a longer tour such as dried fruits, nuts, granola bars, or but butter sandwiches.
- Consider packing a hot drink in a thermos such as warm apple cider; hot chocolate; a mixture of apple and orange juice; or a mixture of honey or maple syrup, lemon juice, and hot water. Cold drinks in small cartons are also very handy.
- A cork and a couple tins of wax selected to cover the temperature range of the day.
- A few extra pieces of clothing such dry mittens, dry socks, and a windbreaker shell to ensure comfort in an unforeseen event.
- Large plastic trash bags are good to wear in wet weather or sit on during a break.

The Leader's Backpack: For any outing lasting more than an hour, the key is to be prepared. Beautiful weather can quickly and unexpectedly change. You should carry a repair kit, a first-aid kit, and a map. It is also advisable for the helper in your group to carry a spare repair and first-aid kit because you may not be available to help out in every situation. These safety measures ensure that there are always two kits on a ski tour.

The **repair kit** should contain:

- Spare ski tips
- Tape, laces, or string
- Wax and cork
- Old pair of wool socks (large enough to fit over a ski boot)
- Penknife
- A lighter

The **first aid** kit should contain:

- Emergency blanket or tarp
- Foam pad
- Moleskin
- Shears
- Ace bandage



- Cravats
- Assorted gauze
- Hot/cold packs
- Handwarmers
- Ambu pocket mask
- Whistle
- Medical tape
- Safety pins
- Band-aids
- Alcohol and iodine wipes
- Triple antibiotic ointment
- Gloves
- Pen
- SOAP note and incident report form
- Penlight
- Biohazard bag
- Advil, aspirin, tylenol, benadryl, glucose

Be sure to carry a map of the ski trails where you will be skiing, and make sure that *all* leaders and helpers have a copy. Mark the trails to be skied on the map. Do not change the route planned unless *everyone* knows the new route.

Terrain and Trails: Be aware of where trails will take you. Check for lake and river crossings, increases in elevation, sharp corners, and other potentially hazardous terrain. It is best to stick to trails that you know well. If you are not familiar with the trails, make a reconnaissance trip or get first-hand information from a local person or a ski club. Remember that beginners should not have to ski on difficult terrain.

Trail Etiquette and Safety: These are the “rules of the road” that make skiing with others more fun:

- Leave a safe trail behind you. Fill in divots in the trail from falling, clear obstructions from the trail, and warn others of hazards.
- When overcoming a slower person, say “On your left or right!” and leave enough time for them to react before you pass them.
- When faster people call “Track” or “On your left or right!” immediately step to the side of the track to allow them to pass. Remember that those skiing downhill always have the right of way!
- On double tracks, move to the right to let faster people pass. On a single track, move out of the track to let faster people pass.



- Keep your poles tight to your body when passing or being passed.
- Get off the trail when taking a break. Don't stop for a chat in the middle of the trail.
- Don't litter!
- Observe all posted signs. Ski in the correct direction on one-way trails

Safety Measures for Children

- Never ski alone
- Know where you are; use a map!
- Keep to well-marked trails (unless you are on a planned backcountry or off-trail tour)
- Ski terrain or distances that all members of your group can handle.
- Ski under control.
- Advise others of your intended route and plans.
- Be prepared for bad weather or changing conditions. Carry extra layers of clothing in a backpack.
- Wear proper clothing; you need it to stay dry and warm!
- Be prepared for accidents, emergencies, or damaged equipment. Carry a repair kit, ski tip, and a first aid kit.
- Check your group's condition frequently; be on the lookout for frostbite.
- Regroup at intersections.
- Don't ski too close together; it is annoying and could cause an accident. Keep a good distance from other people on downhill sections.
- On blind descents, call a warning to people who might be ascending or who might have fallen. Alert waiting people when the trail is clear.
- Roll off the track as soon as possible after a fall and then fill in your divot so that the next person won't fall in the same place.
- Always ski with caution, and always beware of open streams, fallen trees, and snow-covered lakes.
- If you are skiing for more than a couple of hours, ski with a daypack, and carry food and drink.
- Know the location of snowmobile trails and show courtesy toward snowmobilers.