

Professional Practice



Written by Chris Rossi • Photography by Marie Bolusset at Swiss Ski School

Let's face it, slalom is a physically demanding sport. That is one of the reasons we are so ridiculously addicted to it, so much so that we average a paltry 35 to 50 turns per set. Compare this to a day of snow skiing where a skier could easily rip off 1,000 direction changes, and one can see why it is so much more difficult to improve. Putting more focus on every turn that we make can add up over the course of a season. Going to the lake is fun, and we should never lose track of this fact. It is the reason we are skiers, but changing how we view practice will lead to enhanced tournament scores, and let's face it, setting a new PB feels awfully good! Here are a few pointers that will help you get there.

1. Ski every practice set like it's a tournament. Ever wonder why your tournament performances consistently lag behind your practice scores? The sites and conditions do factor in, but consistently the main reason for this gap in performance lies in unfocused practice techniques. This means that you need to start implementing your pre-ski tournament routine every day. For me, I use a run 15 to 30 minutes before I ski to clear my head and get my body moving. I'm not suggesting that this be

everyone's routine; that is something that is highly personal to the individual. But the next time you are at a tournament, take a look around at the skiers who are preparing to ski. You'll see one skier doing push ups, another doing sprints, another one gently stretching while wearing headphones, another one doing dry land visualization with a handle. All of these are great ways to prepare for a set. The main point is not what they are doing, but that it is part of their routine. I stated that I use a run as my

pre-ski routine. I can remember the first pre-ski run I tried, my legs were cramping while on the run and then felt like Jell-O while I skied. I doubted whether it was a positive addition to my training. The key is trying it for an extended period of time. After my fifth day, the legs stopped cramping, the sensation of Jell-O legs while skiing went away, and my practice scores got more consistent. Find a pre-ski routine and make sure to implement it every day.

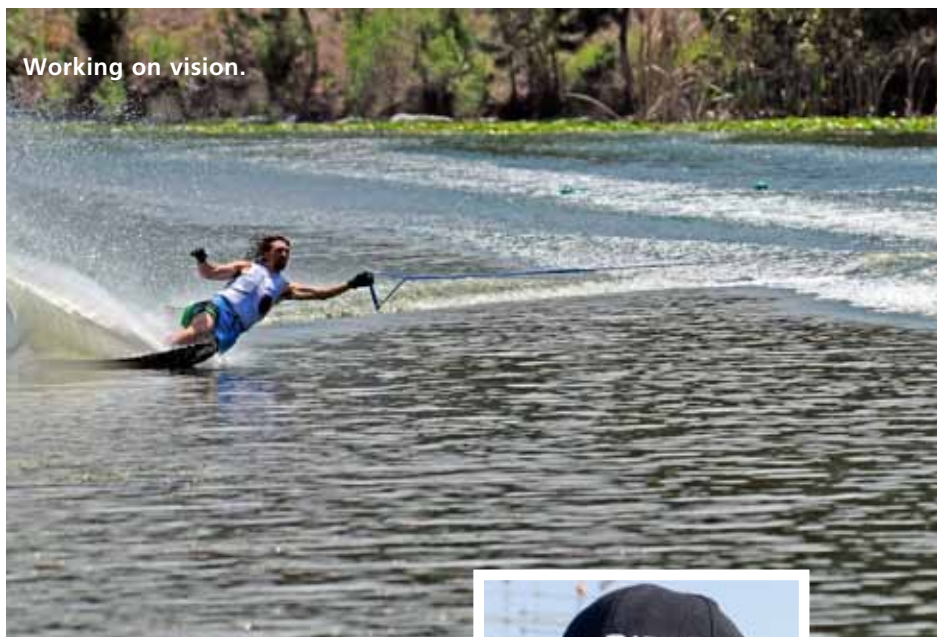
2. Set focus points you wish to accomplish on each set. Again, don't forget that skiing is fun, but by setting focus points for each set you give purpose or meaning to your practice. I always have something I am thinking about before a set. I like to then go ski and put as much of my focus on that thought as I can and still perform up to my expectations. Early in the season my focus point tends to be "trusting



Early season emphasis on trailing arm.

my trailing arm out of the turn and into the wakes." Another example of my focus points is "vision." I like to go ski and focus on where I am looking at all points of the course. This helps develop my overall course vision, essential for running short lines. At the end of the set, I take a moment to evaluate how well I accomplished my focus point. I don't get emotional about the results. If I have a less than spectacular set, I spend more time thinking about the focus point and work on my visualization. Make sure to log each session in your ski journal so you can learn from each set. Find the keys or focus points that work for you and put them to work.

3. Ski in all conditions. Sure, glass calm conditions are fun to ski in, but the reality is you're more likely to have it windy in a tournament than glassy. By challenging yourself to ski in every condition, you



will be more prepared to succeed in the tournament than your competitors. When I see adverse training conditions, the first thought I have is, "What if this were a tournament round?" I challenge myself to ski down the rope to see how I do. There is a point where safety needs to be addressed. I'm not saying to put yourself at risk by skiing massive tailwind whitecaps, but if the conditions are less than ideal, take a go at it. After adding this to my skiing habits, I found myself smiling when conditions go bad at tournaments.

4. Switch up your routine every once in a while. It is easy to get into a routine where you take tournament practice sets on every set. This is good practice, don't get me wrong. But by changing things up, you will keep the game fresh. Some examples of other practice routines are to run each of your speeds or line lengths twice; opt up to turn the wind to your advantage; ski down the rope to your max then ski back up the rope to your starting pass; take a "run off" set where you start at your last completed



pass from your first set; spin each of your passes so you have to run the course

twice without stopping before continuing on; see how many of your opening passes you can complete without stopping the boat; and see how far down the rope you can ski at 30 mph. These are just a few of the ways you can switch it up to keep it fun and productive. While doing these other challenges, you still want to have your focus points and will be learning from the results of the set. This also will help keep the dreaded slumps to a minimum.

Radar Skis, Tige Boats, Performance Ski & Surf, Billabong, and pumpRockr sponsor Chris Rossi. Follow Chris on Twitter @ SlalomGuru and through his Web site, slalomguru.com.