



A Parent's Guide to Racing for Under 10 and U12s

Some dos, don'ts, etiquette and general tidbits, in no particular order.

Race information

Competitions are usually initiated with the publication of the **Race Invitation**. This typically is published on-line and covers: competition dates and order of races; eligibility; how to enter and pay; contact details of race organisers.

In the run up to the competition the race organisers' will typically publish the **Race Bulletin(s)**. These provide important information on the race and typically include: acceptance list of competitors; availability of start lists; volunteers, start times, etc.

For most Scottish run races race invitations and bulletins are posted on <http://www.britski.org/> or <http://www.snowsportscotland.org/competitions-calendar> or on the organising club's own website.

Race Day Schedule

The following is a sample schedule for a typical race but bear in mind that there are many factors that affect race schedules. Some factors which will affect the schedule are: number of competitors, race course conditions, weather conditions, equipment and/or timing problems, difficulty and type of course, and lift access issues. Plan ahead/be prepared, and of course, be flexible.

7:00 Arrival at ski station
7:30 Registration and bib collection
8:45 Race course open for 1st run inspection (a bib is needed to inspect)
9:30 Forerunners (these are non-competing athletes who test the course and that the timing is working)
9:30 First run
11:00 First run completed

lunch & race course reset (sometimes the ski runs start immediately after the end of the 1st run and there is no set lunch break. This will be known in advance and lunch may have to be taken on the hill)

12:30 Course open for 2nd run inspection
13:15 Second run start
14.45 Second run completed (hand back bib)
16:00 Results & awards
17:30 Departure

General points

- It's very complicated to put on a good race so please try and be patient.

- Ski races are excellent learning experiences for both parents and athletes. For athletes, it's not just about how well they ski, it's about participating in an organized event, peer recognition, being individually prepared and organized and executing a game plan with their coach. For parents, it's an opportunity to support your club, your child and learn more about ski racing. There is a lot of reward in it.
- What can go wrong often does and that's one of the great learning experiences for the young athlete. How do we as adults, parents and coaches respond to the problems? Do we cry, fuss, whine, complain, or do we roll with the punches and do what we can to either improve or deal with the situation.
- Please bear in mind that a race organisation, the race officials, juries, and coaching staff, etc are largely comprised of volunteers. They are doing the best job they can, sometimes under trying circumstances.
- Please show your support for all the effort that it takes to put on a race, even if there are occasional problems. A simple sarcastic comment overheard by the wrong person can ensure that a volunteer never gives their time again. A simple thanks to a host volunteer, an official or a gatekeeper can go even farther.
- Of course, if you want to learn more about your child's ski racing, then offering to volunteer is a great way of getting involved and watching the action from close up.

Arrival, Registration and getting to the Race Start

Before you get in the car to travel to the race, check for the following mission-critical items:

- Helmet + goggles
- Skis
- Boots
- Poles
- Ski clothing
- Club membership card (in the UK this is your proof of competitor insurance).

These are the bare minimum items to race.

Plan to arrive at the hill 2-2.5 hours before the scheduled start. If it's not dark when you get in the car or when you get there you're probably late.

Ski racing involves a lot of hurry up and wait, then wait some more, but unfortunately if you're late there are often no second chances. If you are late arriving and miss meeting the club's coaches, you will need to get your child up the mountain and to the start of the race.

- Lifts typically open 1-1.5 hours before the start.
- 1 hour is need for breakfast (if it didn't happen at home), getting dressed into race gear, and race registration. Going to the loo!
- 1 hour is needed for course inspection and athlete warm up.
- If you have a daughter she needs to be especially mindful of her time usage. More so if she is Under 10, as this age group often races first.
- If you have a son, he will have more time before he races as the girls race first. Under 10s usually race immediately after the U10 girls.

Food – before, during and after the race

Do make sure your child gets a decent balanced breakfast with the emphasis on a complex carbohydrate-rich breakfast.

During a day out in the snow and cold it's not uncommon for a ski racer to burn through 3-4k calories. You probably burn around 2k calories in a typical day at the office. Athletes need a decent dinner the day before and a breakfast meal that will provide their muscles with fuel, not just for the ski race, but for everything else they are doing that day.

A breakfast meal heavy on protein and fat requires the stomach to use a lot of oxygen, oxygen that their muscles need. Ideal breakfasts are pancakes, waffles, cereal, bagel, apples, etc. If you're in a rush, cliff bars, bagels, banana, apple, orange, peanut butter & jelly sandwich, etc can help. These are good for the athlete to have in a pocket anyway for snacking during the day.

Ski resort food is rarely healthy. To the extent possible try to steer your child to a healthy lunch as well. As to food, athletes need complex carbs. Protein and fat replacement is not sufficient for fueling muscles for endurance athletes.

Ski racing is an endurance sport not because the combined race runs are 1.5 minutes but rather because the athletes are out all day working, skiing, etc and they have to have enough energy to do that AND put two solid runs together without being tired/fatigued, etc.

Rest

Your daughter or son really needs to get two quality nights of sleep for the nights preceding the race. Less than 8-10 hours of sleep on those nights will very likely lead to a loss of performance. Remember, you will all be up early for the race.

Interaction with Your Kid(s)

When your child is at the top of the course a little encouragement is great, but generally as you'll see, most of the athletes thrive when they are with their coaches and peers. Coaching experience has shown that skiing by occasionally when your son or daughter is at the top of the hill and offering a word of encouragement is a good thing, but hanging around the top of the course can be a source of pressure to the kids.

Offering advice to the kids

Please leave any and all race and course advice to the coaches.

Read through the staff bios. You'd be hard pressed to find this level of expertise at a lot of places and programs in Scotland. There are years of teaching, coaching and racing experience at high levels. The coaches want to see your children succeed, learn and grow as kids, athletes and ski racers and of course have fun. Using terms incorrectly or inconsistently can confuse athletes.

Most importantly, please, please do not emphasize anything negative either before, during or after the race.

Here's a very common example, it is heard at every single ski race below the FIS level, to the detriment of the racers.

“Johnny, there’s a huge deep rut, super icy spot, really hard turn halfway down the really steep part or the hard part and lots of people have crashed/everyone’s having trouble there.”

Having heard this, Johnny is now likely to ski defensively constantly thinking about the hard spot, looking for it, very possibly apprehensive about it, potentially even counting the gates down to it as he skis. This causes poor skiing and racing.

Ski racing is a lot like driving. You tend to go where you look and as such we want the athletes to look for the proper line, not problem spots. As it usually turns out anyway, the problem spots are almost always not in the proper racing line. The proper way to inform someone might be, Johnny, make sure you have a good line and are looking ahead. There’s a rut on the headwall. Look ahead and you’ll ski fine.

Please don't make a big deal of problems on the course or sections where some racers have had difficulty. Better yet, tell the coach and let the coach determine how and what to tell the athletes. There are ideal ways of communicating these types of issues depending on the athlete, and the coach will likely know what works for whom.

Race Hill Etiquette

Please never ski through the finish. There is an invisible beam running across and your cutting the beam can have disastrous effects on the controlled chaos that is timing. Please, never, ever cross through X's or gates (often red, blue or orange) that are obviously set to deter all traffic. They are there to prevent traffic. They often mark electronic timing lines buried less than 6 inches in the snow. The X's prevent traffic that could cut a timing line, or pull over an electric timer, causing a delay of 15 minutes to several hours in the race.

Please don't talk to gate keepers while they are doing their job, especially on the 2nd run as a gatekeeper has to see and record every single bib # while the racer is moving through his section at 20mph and also make sure that each racer doesn't miss a gate. It's a very tough job that requires focus. Do thank a gatekeeper for their service. It's one of the most critical, yet unnoticed/unthanked jobs on the race hill. They have to stand in one spot, in the cold and wind, sometimes the freezing rain, for the better part of 2 hours for each run and constantly pay attention. That's hard work, to the say the least. It deserves a thank you as you ski by.

Please don't take 2nd run start orders unless you know there are copies for parents. 2nd run is based on results of the first run and as such it isn't in bib order. Coaches need these lists to gather athletes for the 2nd run. Very often coaches end up having to share because parents grab copies of the 2nd run start lists. It's too much printing for the local club to have copies for everyone, although it does sometimes happen. Your best bet is to borrow a copy and write down the start number of your son or daughter and the 10 preceding bib numbers.

Please do not side slip, snowplow or otherwise enter the race course unless you are specifically asked to do so by the race course officials (generally the Chief of Course). Your good intentions of moving snow around the course can create unfair and potentially even unsafe conditions for the racers. While side slipping looks obvious and easy, experienced course officials are absolutely attentive to slipping piles of snow in certain spots. As an example, if you sideslip the course and create piles of snow outside the race track, a racer can lose control if he exits the main race line. If you're asked to lend a hand with a slip or course maintenance you should be constantly swiveling your head up hill looking for oncoming skiers. Don't wait till the last minute to get out of the course. Anytime you hear the shout "COURSE!" it means you should exit the course/track immediately.

Please do not ski through the race course if there is another way to get where you need to or would like to be.

Please don't stand around where you can't be seen from above on the trail.

Please do not ski next to the course while the race is running. The motion is extremely distracting to ski racers.

If the snow is very soft be gentle so as not to create a rut. Racers come down the hill at intervals of 20-30 seconds and if you're not paying attention there can be severe consequences. At the worst end of spectrum there are collisions. These can even happen and have happened on the World Cup with disastrous consequences. At the more mild end of the spectrum you can cause an athlete to be irreparably distracted, causing her to ski out of the course, crash, miss a gate or simply lose the line and sense of timing.

Please be very courteous to ski resort employees. Racers and parents are guests on the mountain, no different than anyone else. Hosting races requires mountains to go out of their way and make sacrifices (often financial) by closing pistes and sometimes allowing special lift access, etc. All clubs have a responsibility to represent a good, clean-cut image for the sport and ourselves.

Other Responsibilities

A coach will group athletes to go up and inspect or mention what time he'd like everyone to be at the top of the course for inspection. It's your responsibility to make sure your son or daughter connects with the coach before the team leaves for inspection and that your son or daughter is at the top of the course for his/her race run. It is not the responsibility of the coach to find your son or daughter or to keep tabs on them. Coaches are routinely out on the hill during lunch helping to reset the course of assisting the race staff in other ways. If you need to find the coach this is a good place to look.

Jackets, gloves and other clothing, etc.

Coaches have their hands full on race day and at the top of a course.

One of the traditional ways (no it's not glamorous) a parent can be involved is to bring the athletes' jackets down the hill- that is if they are not being worn!

Common techniques include grabbing your kids' stuff and maybe some teammates and carrying it half way down, watching your son or daughter ski down, and then meeting them at the bottom so they can get warm and receive words of encouragement regardless of the run's time. With older athletes we like to encourage them to help take care of each other. It's common to see them after they have run their run, to come back up top talk to their teammates about the course and offer to take down clothing as well. You and your child are responsible for all your own equipment. The coach may help do some last minute ski prep like a brushing, but he/she is not there to tune or make sure things don't disappear. Generally, the U10 & U12 coaches will try to keep all the Cairngorm Ski Club athletes and their gear in one spot.

End of the Day

Don't forget to turn in the bibs. They're only souvenirs if they are paper numbers.

Prize giving

After a long day that could very well have begun at 4AM we all want to get back in the car and get home. It's very nice, though to check and see if other teammates have landed a spot on the podium. Receiving a trophy and hearing teammate hoot in support is a wonderful feeling for an athlete and contributes greatly to their desire to succeed and can be a pivotal moment in their development. That said, if teammates have medaled and if you can delay your departure for an hour or two (sometimes running the results takes a while) after last run it's really a nice thing to do. Aside from showing respect for the athletes that do well it contributes to a positive sense of team cohesion.

Development

If you would like further information on fostering athletic development in your child, please feel free to speak to the coaches. Also, download a copy of the Cairngorm Ski Club ['Long Term Athlete Development Part 1 Information'](#). It's an excellent resource that transfers into all types of child development.

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