

La Ronge Nordic Race Team

XC Ski Race Preparation for Athletes

Hilary Johnstone, 2012

1. Pre-Race

Train to ski your race distance. Train hard enough to get tired, then rest and train again the next day or in a few days. Training should be progressive, you work up to longer distances all season and combine both long slow distance (LSD) and short, intense, fast intervals of varying lengths, (usually 3 secs to 1 minute long, repeated 5-10 times, or until you slow down too much). Do interval training at least 2 times a week, and LSD 2 x a week, with medium distances the rest of the week that include a few natural intervals. Do a time trial of your race distance a week or 2 before the race (no sooner), so you know what that distance feels like.

Read the race notice, look at the trail maps and know what to expect.

Do mainly easy training (no LSD) for about 4 days before a race, with a short, fast ski the day before. Eat, sleep and hydrate well all week, as always.

2. The day before

Hydrate, drink lots of water and eat well. Your skis should be hot waxed in advance, according to forecasted conditions. Read the race notice carefully again and know your start times, distances, and #of laps. If possible, ski the race course, or, look at race maps. Visualize yourself racing the entire course perfectly, imagine each part of the course and how you will ski it perfectly and very fast. Stay very positive about the race and plan to enjoy the whole race and to focus fully on the terrain, your technique, your speed, and your enjoyment being out there skiing. Set out all needed clothes, waxes, water bottle, snacks, ski gear, etc. and set your alarm for 4 hrs ahead of race time.

3. Race Day

Eat a good meal 3 hrs before the race start, including protein and carbs. Get to the race site at least 2 hrs in advance. Talk to coach to get any instructions and keep checking the time and check with parents and coach for any updated info. Get race bib (know your bib #) Test your kick wax is working, if it's a classic race. Wear warm up layers and keep warm. Become familiar with the stadium set-up, lap lanes, # of laps, trail signage, etc., and your race course by skiing at least some of it as time allows. Keep drinking water or sports drink and eat a light snack if necessary.

4. Pre-Race Warm-up

(starts 40 min prior to race start, 25 min for peewees and atoms) Ski in designated warm up trail, usually race trail is closed prior to race. Start easy, keep getting faster, do a few sprints and end with 2 min at race speed. You should be sweating lightly and totally warmed up. Concentrate on positive race visualization.

5. At the Start Line

Go to start area 10 min before the start time. Stay warm by jumping, jogging or skiing in that small area. Take off warm up jacket, leave that and dry mitts, granola bar at start-finish area to pick up after the race. Listen for when they call your race category and bib #. Listen to the start person, they may tell you to double pole the first 20 yards of a skate race, for example. At the start line, focus entirely on your race, and enjoy!

6. During the Race

Look ahead, watch the terrain ahead, be ready for a downhill, sharp turn, etc. and use appropriate technique (e.g. in a skate race, one skate on the flats, offset up hills). Call "track" if you are gaining on a skier and listen and move over for faster skier who calls track behind you. Pass as soon as you can and ski extra hard to get well ahead of the skier you passed. Never obstruct a skier. Concentrate fully on your technique and the terrain, and push yourself to your limit - you only get one chance to ski this race at your best today.

7. Post-Race

Thank volunteers, and organizers. Hand in your bib, put on warmer layer, perhaps a dry pair of gloves, eat a snack, take a drink.

Go ski your cool-down ski. Ski slowly for 10-20 min. If possible, ski the course for the next day's race.

Congratulate yourself on your ski race.

Put your skis, etc. away carefully, ready for travel and for the next race. Wipe snow off skis so it doesn't freeze on.

Go and cheer on the other skiers at the finish line and at the awards presentation.

Always dry your ski boots and clothing. Ski boots can be kept smelling fresh by taking out the liners, stuffing the boot with newspaper to absorb moisture, and drying them over heat registers.