

Nordic Skiing: Am I Ready to Race?

A Nordic race means many different things to different people. Some go expecting to compete at the highest level, others go because their friends will be there but most go to enjoy skiing at a nice venue with lots of like-minded skiers. Nuts like being with other nuts right! Racing is what you make of it and having some goals established ahead of time can help you meet your expectations.

You might consider adopting one or more of the following goals:

1. Being competitive, such as place in the top ten of my age group.
2. Helping the team place as high as it can.
3. To learn about my body and what it is capable of doing when I push the limits.
4. The reward of doing something I didn't think I could previously.
5. Using competition to improve skiing skills under pressure. Being challenged tells you a lot about how your skills are improving.

You may have other goals in mind, or maybe you don't have any specific goals, other than giving it a try, having fun, being part of an exciting atmosphere, and having a few good stories to tell as you eat like crazy afterwards. Your goals may change race to race as well. You may decide that competing hard isn't for you, or you may go from just doing it for fun to being competitive.

As you reassess after each race, consider:

Time can be an indicator of how your stamina and technique is doing. However, don't live and die by time alone because there are many other factors to consider, such as having really slow skis on that day.

How did you handle the hills and corners, did you relax or did you feel worried and concerned? Is this something worth focusing on in practice?

Did you use all three techniques during the race when appropriate? What were your weak areas that you could work on in practice?

How was your respiratory and muscle function? Did you go out too hard and over tax your system? Did you go out too easy and have too much left? How can you change the first part of your next race for the better?

Feel free to discuss with RNST coaches about any of the points above for advice and tips about how to improve aspects of your racing.

Ultimately you make the decision to participate in a race or not and your goals are the only ones that really matter. Whatever your goal, have fun during the event and cheer your teammates and competitors on, there is always enough excitement to share with everyone.

A few more thoughts and FAQ's about preparing for a race.

Q: How long are the races?

A: Most HS races are 5K in length. The top skiers will ski in around 13 minutes or less depending on the conditions, the slower skiers will take 30 minutes or more, but there isn't a time limit.

Q: What are the courses like?

A: Races are held on different courses, some are flatter but most are hilly. Eastwood is a good example of the typical course. To ski well you will want to be comfortable in downhill situations, around fast turns at speed and passing or being passed on the trail by other skiers.

You don't need to be proficient to participate in a race, but if you're fairly shaky on skis, keep that in mind when setting your expectations. Continued practice doing corners and passing during our practice sessions will help you get more comfortable in the race setting.

Q: I only know how to V1, is that enough?

A: Yes, you can still race and you can still race well. Other techniques such as V2 and V2 alternate help make you more efficient, but it's not necessary to know all three.

Q: Can I be disqualified?

A: Only if you cut the course or intentionally cut someone else off during the race. Ski with respect to others and you won't have any problems.

Q: What should I eat before the race and when?

A: One rule of thumb is to have a healthy, smallish to medium sized meal about 3 to 4 hours before the race. For an afternoon race, your typical school lunch would likely be just great. It helps to have a snack on hand in the time leading up to the race. A few pretzels or something light can help stop hunger pangs without filling you up and hurting your race.

Q: How do most races start?

A: There are mass start races and time trail format. Most HS races are time trial format with one or two persons starting at 30-second intervals. Your bib number will give you some idea how to line up, pay attention to the announcements. You won't know what place you got until the race is over and all of the results are calculated. However, if you are passing people who started in front of you, that is a good sign. On the other hand, if you get passed, don't get discouraged as you can still place high even if a few speedsters go by you.

Q: When should I arrive at the race?

A: You need at least 45 minutes to get dressed and warm up thoroughly before racing. Be at the race an hour ahead of time if you don't want to be stressed for time. Warm up for 15 minutes minimally.

Q: What should I wear?

A: Temperature and conditions vary, but when actually racing, light athletic wear is usually good choice. You want enough to shield you from the elements, but not so much that you over heat. How you dress may be impacted by how long you think you'll be on the course.

Having a winter coat or blanket draped over your shoulders at the start is a great way to stay warm while waiting to begin. You can toss the blanket or coat to a coach or parent when you are about to start.

After the race get dry and warm. If you can quickly slip out of your sweaty shirt and replace it with something dry, you'll get the shivers a lot less quickly. Have a winter coat to wear and put it on before you get cold.