

Confused about YOUR Skating Technique?

Why not become your own coach?

By LEE BOROWSKI

Lee Borowski was the USSA Nordic Coach of the Year in 1989. He has coached different skiers who were national Skiers-of-the-Year in Junior, Senior and Collegiate categories. In addition, he has coached Masters skiers who have won both National and World Championships. Lee's most famous pupil, ex-Olympian Luke Bodensteiner, has now retired from racing and is the Nordic Director for the United States ski Team.

Lee is the author of the book *Ski Faster, Easier* (U.S. Ski Team Sports Medicine Series), *The Simple Secrets of Skating* (booklet and video), *The Basics of Modern Cross Country Skiing* (booklet), *The Secrets of Dynamic Ski-Skating* (video), and several hundred magazine articles.

His latest book, *Optimal Cross Country Ski Training* (Update your skiing for the 21st century), brought the latest tools of scientific training, previously the exclusive domain of the elite, into the hands of the every day skier. This article is partially based on that book.

Lee has also just rewritten his original *The Simple Secrets of Skating*. *The New Simple Secrets of Skating* is now available from Eagle River Nordic, as are his videos.

There's one thing about the written word: At times it's pretty inadequate, but often it's the only thing we have. Take ski technique for example. Often when you read a ski technique article, the author has discovered something "new" and everything that was written in the past is "all wrong." So if the experts can't agree, how can you relate what's written to your skiing needs?

Then factor in that often the same word means different things to different people. It would be hard enough to interpret the words if everyone said nearly the same thing, as each of us attaches a slightly different meaning to what we read.

But we're not through. There's one more big complication: All skiers do not need the same "tip." For example: "Straight ahead travel" is great advice for someone who does too much side-to-side wandering. Yet it is an absolute technique killer to someone who already is a straddler, who doesn't completely shift their weight from ski to ski.



Both the "Tick-Tock" Drill and the illustration of Bjorn Daehlie demonstrate the first checkpoint for the Open Field Skate; the action of the whole body and the alignment of the nose knees-toes.

STILL PICTURES

So what is the solution? Without a doubt, it is a clear mental picture of efficient skiing. The cliché states that one picture is worth a thousand words, and a photograph taken at just the right moment is surely a step up from the written word. But back in the old days (don't moan here) when I was a kid . . . the written word was about all there was. I loved baseball and wanted to be a great hitter. So I read everything I could and memorized the photographs of action sequences, emulating Joe Dimaggio as best I could. There wasn't much else in the 1940's.

USING VIDEO

But in this modern age of technology there is so much more. And the handiest tool is the video. Now anyone can see for themselves what the best in the world are doing. All you have to do is record a show off TV or buy one of the many videos featuring World Cup skiers. No longer are you captive to the written word; now you can easily check out what the world champions are really doing.

Then if you have access to a camcorder, simply have someone tape you and match yourself against the best in the world. (Or you and a friend can act as each

other's eyeballs/coaches.) But I'll admit that many skiers still wouldn't know where to start, and need a jump start to pick out some reference points. For example in the Open Field (V-2 Alternate) Skate, the simple checkpoints in order of importance would be:

1. The body should rock from side-to-side completely from ski to ski. That means the



"whole body" and the checkpoint is that the outside shoulder actually dips towards the snow and the body itself does little side-to-side bending at the waist. And in this skate, because it is used in faster conditions, the "nose, knee, and toe" should line up at

the beginning of the glide phase and remain there until the body rocks over to skate-off. 2. The timing of the Open Field Skate is glide, pole plant, pole and skate to the other ski. Then skate (without poling) back to the original side. (Poling occurs only one side in this stroke.)

3. When viewed from the side the elite skier is not completely vertical, but has forward lean. This lean originates at the ankles.

4. The skier drops his weight onto the poles and initiates the poling with a curling at the waist while driving the elbows to the rear. The body compresses/drops slightly.

5. Make sure that the poling is complete before the skate-off. The body should still be flexed/coiled when poling is completed. 6. Finally, check for aesthetics. Is your rhythm pleasant looking? Do you look like a floating pendulum as you skate from ski to ski?

Sound like hard work? It's not if you just isolate one thing at a time, in the order of importance. Once comfortable, move onto the next item.



Bjorn Daehlie at skate-off during the Open Field Skate demonstrating the 5th checkpoint; his hands have reached his waist, indicating that poling has been completed, before skate-off to the weak-side ski.

PROGRESSIVE DRILLS

Finally, there is another way to learn and that is to do a series of progressive drills that take you step-by-step through the process. But where can you find these drills? I thought you'd never ask. In my new video, "The NEW Simple Secrets of Skating," I develop a series of drills for each type of skate and illustrate each with sequences of the top skiers in the world.

In addition, I also have integrated the sequence of checkpoints, like the ones above for the Open Field Skate, with the drills to develop those checkpoints. That way you can truly become your own coach. If you don't

have access to a camcorder, just do the drills and/or work with a friend.

If you can tape yourself, all the better. You can slow down the tape and compare yourself to the best.

If you follow the above steps, the confusion of the written word and who's right and who's wrong will disappear. You can see for yourself and become convinced as you see the Olympic champions take you on the path to "world class" technique.