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The Road to Expert Skiing

By Jim Safianuk

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Imagine yourself cruising down a groomed run carving elegant turns with your new shaped skis. In the distance you see two symbols, a blue square for a left turn and a black diamond for a right turn. Without hesitation you steer to the right. The pitch becomes steeper, the snow is un-groomed, and there are trees, lots of trees. You stop momentarily, pick a line, push off, and tighten your turns as you begin the descent.

Many skiers would have taken the left fork with the gentle groomed slope. Some intermediates reach a plateau in their ability and find it difficult to advance to the next level. This doesn't have to be. The keys to unlocking your true potential lie in your mind and body. When you are physically fit and mentally prepared the goal of becoming an advanced level skier can be realized.

Skiing at an advanced level means being adept at handling varied terrain in different snow conditions on marked trails. The terrain may include steeps, glades, or moguls. Snow conditions might include hard pack, crud, ice, or powder. At this level you need to be able to make quick adjustments to your speed, turn radius and balance to maintain control at all times.

Ski Fitness Level

Advanced level skiing is more demanding on the knees, thighs, hips, abdomen, and back so preseason preparation is the norm. Try to begin your ski fitness program at least two to three months prior to your first day on the slopes. Your routine should include stretching for mobility, strength exercises for staying power, and cardiovascular conditioning for endurance.

The good news is that you don't need a lot of money to finance your program. All you'll need is a mat, free weights, runners, and an hour a day. One approach is to do stretches and strength exercises the first day followed by stretching and cardiovascular conditioning the next day. By alternating your workouts you can reduce the time spent each day and give the different muscle groups a chance to

The Road to Expert Skiing

recover.

Stretching

Improved mobility will do more to improve your skiing than you think and it will help protect you from injury. The areas to concentrate on are the back, calves, hamstrings, quads, and shoulders.

A good book on the subject is *Stretching* by Bob Anderson (Shelter Publications, Inc. 1988). It has specific stretches for downhill skiing, weight training, walking, and running. You may want to include the stretches for weight training in your fall routine and do the downhill stretches during the ski season.

Strength

These exercises will improve your ability to ski short-radius turns through enhanced staying power and

impact absorption while minimizing muscle fatigue and soreness. The strength session should include calf raises, partial squats for the quads, and abdominal exercises for the stomach, sides, and back. Include weight training for the arms, chest, and shoulders using dumbbells and barbells.

Rotate through the exercises working one muscle group while the other groups are in the recovery mode. Perform a leg exercise, a weight maneuver, and then an abdominal exercise.

Endurance

This is the ability to perform at a given level for greater periods of time. Endurance is important for those long mogul and glade runs that never seem to end. To improve endurance the focus is on cardiovascular conditioning. Exercise three times a week keeping your heart rate elevated for fifteen to twenty minutes. Good ways to do this are cycling, inline skating, rowing, jogging, or general aerobics. An alternative to running is a brisk, forty-five minute, non-stop walk.

Mind-Set

You won't need a treatise on the latest breakthrough in the psychological aspects of fear to conquer the steeps, glades, and moguls. The old adage, you have nothing to fear but fear itself, applies to skiing. Mental toughness and focus are essential to master your subconscious mind.

Mental Toughness

Being tough mentally will put you in control of your thoughts. You need to tell yourself over and over that you're in charge, not the ski hill. This will help develop the right attitude and keep a lid on your anxieties.

Focus

Focus allows you to break up the run into smaller tasks so you can zoom in on the next two or three

The Road to Expert Skiing

turns. The pause, approach, divide and conquer technique should help you pick a line, set the tone, and focus on the immediate.

Pause: Take a moment or two to size up the terrain and pick a line appropriate for your skill level. If you wait too long you will give your subconscious mind a chance to take control. To avoid this anxiety trap, stop, survey the terrain, pick a line, and push off with your poles. This sequence should take between five and ten seconds to complete.

Approach: Develop the correct turn radius early. This should occur within the first three or four turns. This sets the rhythm and gets your legs pumping. You want to be moving at a constant speed with good balance over your skis.

Divide and Conquer: This method will break up a difficult run into manageable tasks. After the approach always look two or three turns ahead if you are on the steeps, two or three bumps ahead if you are in a mogul field, or two or three trees ahead if you are on a glade run. Looking ahead will allow you to quickly alter your course for any unusual conditions. This technique takes practice to learn, but once mastered, will prove invaluable.

Summing Up

The mind and body have to work in unison to ski black diamond runs safely and effectively. Condition your body in the preseason for peak performance on the slopes. To ski strong, you have to be strong. In addition, strive to master the mind techniques in stages. You need to be mentally tough and focused to keep your anxieties in check.

Make an effort to ski thirty percent of all runs on more difficult terrain with an even split between steeps, glades, and moguls. You will know when you have reached an expert level because you will be the one in the descent of that forty degree, un-groomed, glade run.

Jim Safianuk is a certified ski instructor and writer of the downhill skiing lessons in the course *Skills of the Expert Skier*. Discover the oldest secrets and learn the newest skills to help you become the expert skier you always dreamed you could be. [Click here for more information:](#)

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Attention All Skiers: Try Snowboarding!

By Martin Stoleman

Do you love winter? Or, more importantly, do you love spending time in the cold winter weather? If so, and you are looking for a great new activity to try this winter, consider snowboarding.

For many people, the idea of snowboarding sounds dangerous, like it was only for crazy teenage boys. The idea of skiing down a large hill or mountain sounds scary enough and the idea of doing it with a

The Road to Expert Skiing

snowboard sounds too hard to be tried. If these are your thoughts, you should think again. Whether you have been skiing for years or if you have never made it down a winter mountain, snowboarding can be a great way to spend winter days.

If you have been a skier and are thinking of branching out into the world of snowboarding, congratulations. The best advice I can give you is to be patient. Because snowboarding is similar to skiing and yet very different, some people who ski well will find that snowboarding comes naturally and quickly while others will find the learning process grueling and frustrating. Stick with it because eventually the tricks of snowboarding can come to almost anyone.

If you have never been a skier, have no fear. Having a skiing background is not always necessary or even beneficial in learning snowboarding skills. You, a non-ski expert, may actually pick up the techniques of snowboarding much easier than your skier friends. After some time you may find that snowboarding fits you like a glove.

Allow me to offer a couple of words of advice to anyone, ski expert or not, that desires to enter the world of snowboarding. First, do not expect to jump on a board and pick up the skill all on your own. Most people will benefit greatly from taking snowboarding lessons at least to learn the basics of the sport. So do not hesitate to sign yourself up for a lesson or two before you head out to the slopes.

A second and perhaps more important piece of advice is simple: rent. Resist that temptation to run out and buy the latest board and snowboarding gear just to look like a seasoned pro on the slopes. On your first few times out you should rent equipment and take the time to learn what kinds of boards best meet your needs. By renting you can avoid making a costly mistake that will leave you frustrated later.

So, whether you have been skiing for years or not, when winter comes around again make the choice to learn a new skill. Who knows, snowboarding could fast become your favorite source of winter fun.

Martin Stoleman loves to write about all of his favorite sports and activities. He has recently fallen in love with snowboarding himself. Check out

for more details about

this great sport.

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