

First a thank you for all that came to the event both to speak and to listen. Next thank you to Matt Whitcomb who organized and ran the event with local assistance from Reid Lutter. Thanks all.

Here I will type up a personal summation of the event. These are my notes and so are biased toward what I took away from the conference. The details will be in the video of the conference and I don't want to put too many words in the mouth of the presenters or claim that I have summarized their words or ideas adequately.

I also asked some of the other USST coaches what they thought a highlight was and so I'll start with those. First though I should say that a video of the conference will be available within the next 3 weeks from CXC and the USST so keep your eyes open for that to come out.

My notes are oriented mostly toward coaches, but athletes please dig in as well. I think you'll especially like the Dan Jansen section toward the end.

Chris Grover noted that he has seen a philosophy similar to the one held by Dan Jansen across many sports: I don't try to do better than anyone else. I just try to do better than myself.

Chris was also taken by Tor Arne Hetland's quote shared by Erik Flora of APU: You become what you do everyday. According to Chris This speaks to two things: the importance of working hard and the importance of patience - that is having the patience to find out just what you really can become.

Pat Casey enjoyed hearing from Sverre Caldwell, especially as he spoke about skiing cradle to grave.

Matt Whitcomb who ran the whole thing was most inspired by the near 100 participants commitment to maximally develop their athletes.

Justin Wadsworth who presented some technique ideas enjoyed being inspired to think in new ways about his own coaching. He was especially inspired in this way by HC Holmberg.

The theme that I was very happy to take away from the conference was the amount of day-to-day training and coaching our top programs are doing. I need to emphasize that this is what I found important and it might not have been what the presenters themselves wanted to emphasize.

For myself I was very happy to hear Sverre Caldwell talk about the sort of training volume his skiers are doing at a fairly young age, but I was really impressed by the system of development he has set up within the Stratton Mountain School. In five bullet points he summarized the development pipeline project the USST has been working on for a few years. This pipeline was presented at the conference by Finn Gunderson who is the USSA's educational director. It'll be a great product when it is done and will be available to all USSA clubs. However, I loved that Sverre did it himself and have been putting it to work for years.

Erik Flora really echoed a lot of what Sverre said. Both guys were masters of creating opportunities to get their athletes training at or nearing world class levels. I was really impressed with their drive and I am positive that their own motivation to create opportunity, be organized and professional is picked up on by their athletes and is quite motivational. It was to me.

One thing that you heard again and again – starting with the lead-in presenter Dr. Jon Hammermeister – was the importance of goal setting. I thought it was really neat to hear the goals that Sverre Caldwell set for himself and his team. I bet that this stated goal is very inspirational for his athletes: Coach an athlete that wins an Olympic or World Championship medal.

That is powerful. It also sets the stage for a good long-term approach to the sport and to training, which is also echoed in another of his goals: cradle to grave skiing.

Just for the sake of information Sverre's kids are training up around 550 hours by the time they are about 17 years old. They are around 500 hours even as J1 skiers. That is 550 hours of quality ski training including distance/overdistance, speed, strength, intervals, racing, drills and technique games. I always thought that ski schools ran their fall class schedule differently from a normal school but they were going to class from 8:30 to 2:45, which is fairly standard. In other words this means that this sort of training is possible outside of a ski school. Everyone has to get up early a few days a week to train no matter where you live and obviously everyone has to train in the afternoon too. Oh yeah, another goal or part of his philosophy: have fun! That too was a goal of Erik who used the one word: Enjoy!

I would also like to point out the amount of coaching that Sverre and Erik are doing, which is 5 or more coached sessions a week with another several sessions that the athletes do on their own. In Park City we generally coach 2 to 3 strength sessions and 4 to 6 or more additional sessions a week.

Well I really enjoyed hearing Sverre talk and I could go on writing about it, but his final word was this: We can't get caught up in excuses and if we don't have any our athletes won't either.

That is a take away message.

Erik Flora presented an in depth report on his program and there were quite a few similarities with Sverre's approach. They set goals, assess where the athletes are, plan, put the plan in action, measure (re-assess), and repeat the process. The athletes are training hard, a lot, resting well. The programs use the resources they have available and create opportunities for their athletes to train, race and succeed.

Simple.

Do it.

HC Holmberg presented an array of information on his current work. Interestingly he did some studies with the top Norwegians. I think that HC's humble style and earnest willingness to simply learn and explore has opened many doors for him. It is refreshing to see such openness and such an ego-less approach to working, sharing and coaching.

I'll just list the breakdown of intensity on the sort of training the Norwegian sprinters HC did some work with were doing. Low intensity training made up 76.4% of total training.

Medium intensity 6.5%, High intensity 4.4%, Speed 3.7% and Strength 8.8%. A bit of description of those terms: low volume = 60 to 81% of max. Medium 82 – 87% of max. High = 88+% of max.

Rick Kapala shared a clear and in my opinion accurate vision of the direction US Skiing needs to go. One of his main points is that we need to continue the training progression for our post high school athletes. His solution is that athletes take a post graduate year or two before either delving further into full-time skiing or going to a college to continue skiing as a student-athlete.

Rick did a good job separating what we have in this country as assets to skiing versus what makes up an actual system. The idea of course is that we build a system. I hear this loud and clear.

Finn Gunderson echoed an idea Rick presented as well and that is that we have numbers in skiing, and that numbers do help, but that we have to maximize what we are doing with these athletes. I believe Rick said that our numbers are not our main challenge. Finn and Rick's talks go together well because both revolved around building a system of development. This is in the process of being built.

As a side note – we are working to build out the pipeline both from the top and bottom. Compared to the shape of the team in 2005/2006 we have made progress toward this, and will continue to push hard. We will push this effort within our branch of the USSA and within the greater organization. Details of this work are beyond the scope of this article but if people are interested I could outline this in a separate article. One organization that is picking up the pace to assist in this is NCCSEF. They'll have a new website up before to long so keep your ear to the ground on that.

One of the things HC Holmberg talked about was the importance of training in specific terrain, terrain that forces transitions and use of all the techniques. His studies have shown that in a 10km race there are at least 100 technique transitions and furthermore that the body can be trained physiologically, not just technically, to make these transitions. Erik Flora echoed this when talking about working more specifically with tempo and terrain in training, and when Tor Arne says you become what you train, so does he. In other words you have to train specifically for all aspects of the sport. I certainly agree and to this I want to add you have to prepare specifically to succeed as well. But I'll get to that later.

Dr. John Finnoff and our PT Aaron Saari both presented information on injury prevention. I highly recommend checking out the DVD, which will be released in a few weeks to get some of this information. Similar information is also available through our level 100 coaches education program. Educate yourself: your athletes count on it to become as good as they can but also to stay healthy in both the long and short term. That is an especially heavy burden so don't mess it up.

I will quote Erik Flora from Alaska Pacific University one last time: Train hard and ski a lot.

My favorite quote of many that I liked from Dan Jansen was this: You are the only one who knows if you have given everything you had. You are your own final measure.

I love this. Athletes. Dig in, you can't fake it to yourself. You know. I love that. And this: Step one to goal setting: Believe it is possible.

And this: There is no self-made success. We are all a part of a team.

This: A coach is more than a coach. A coach is a motivator that makes work not feel like work.

Final one I want to share: Train your hardest, try your best.

There was a lot more. Buy the video. Come to the event next time.

I'll wrap up by reporting what I wanted to convey in my own talk. As a nation we've come some distance from where we spent about 25 years, and we have some distance to go before we are as good as we can be. But there has not been a single piece of punctuation to mark our progress. Our eyes are stuck on the horizon. We have not accepted our current success. And worse we are not willing to be ready to succeed again right now. We are so forward oriented, so focused on building that we have come to think we can't be on the podium until every last brick is laid. Even when the evidence to the contrary is as fresh as a world championship medal last season.

It is time to change our collective attitude.

Yes, we have work to do. And we will not take that lightly. Developing our system as a nation will take up much of our days. But here is an important truth, we have it much better than most countries. And most importantly we have enough to win. By continually dwelling on our weaknesses we are not letting ourselves succeed. Even saying we will do it in the future is too pessimistic. Saying we can do it...once we have 5 more rollerski tracks, 500 thousand more dollars, and a car in every driveway is too pessimistic. These things, even if we are set to overcome them, are obstacles. Our unrelenting focus on them is demotivating. And this attitude is contagious. We bring it to practice with us. US cross country skiing carries it around like a cross.

Our athletes are our greatest assets. And we are our athletes' greatest asset. We have what we need to succeed right now. We have paved roads and running shoes, groomed snow. We are driven. We can do succeed with this. Let your athletes know that success can be theirs as much as it can be anyone's.

Too often I hear "you should" and "they should" and more obvious words like "it is hard" or "I can't" and other language of the victim. Certainly the internet is full of this, these self-made victims, but I would guess it is on all our tongues from time to time. Mine certainly. And this is our greatest weakness. This is an inferior state of mind. This gives away our power to make things happen. This postpones what we can accomplish right now. This distracts from the most important work, the most important task at hand right now: coaching.

There is science to back it up. If we are focused on the things in our way we will continually run into them. It is like mountain biking, you have to look where you want to go, not at the rock in the way. Focus on the obstacle and we are bound to stay hung up on it.

Yes, we will use much of our days seeking to create things we don't have and feel we should but the bulk of our days should be spent using the things we do have as well as we can. Our greatest asset is our athletes and our best practice is coaching them. Stop looking elsewhere. The power to succeed is in your hands. Don't give it away with language like "they should". Keep it by making it happen yourself. There is no magic. There can be no excuses. Work hard. Focus. Coach. Our success does not depend on anything else, not on me, not them. Each of us. The answer is not in other countries. The power is not there. Not in them, but in you. Here. Not tomorrow, but today.