

Summer Alpine Ski Training At Mount Hood – Q & A With Coaches

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It's been a summer tradition in the United States since 1956 – ski racers heading west to the Palmer Glacier on Mount Hood for summer ski training. Thousands of skiers this summer will choose from over one hundred camp options. Erich Sailer was one of the first coaches to lead summer training at Hood, follow this link to hear his summer training philosophy <http://www.dartfish.tv/Player.aspx?CR=p1490c3372m136557>. Here is advice from other experienced summer camp coaches for athletes and coaches to get the most from summer skiing at Hood.

EXCELLENCE: What is the best thing about Mt. Hood training camps?

Jon Nolting (USSA Sport Education): *There are no races coming up for a long time, so athletes and coaches have time to really break down their skiing and work on fundamental changes that will result in a better foundation for the coming winter. The extended blocks of training allow for good repetition, so there is a better chance the skills learned can become automatic. The other great thing is the melting pot of skiers from all over the country; the kids often make great new life-long friends at summer camps.*

Sam Damon (Burke Mountain Academy): *The training that is available on the lower, less steep slopes provides a good venue to get back to the fundamentals.*

Jake Fisher (Burke Mountain Academy): *The consistency of terrain and how things are set up to get a lot of repetitions. It is a great environment to bring it back to the basics.*

EXCELLENCE: What advice would you give coaches for setting up a productive summer training environment at Mount Hood?

Ron Kipp (USSA Sport Education): *Have a goal for the overall training. Develop daily plans to achieve that goal. Stick to the goal and be flexible in the plans.*

Thad McGowan (Park City Ski Team): *Work on skills and fundamentals. Basics like stance and balance, building a good foundation. Save the tactics for winter. Learn training habits, like how to get the most from a video session. This is a great time to learn these sorts of things that we could tend to take for granted in the winter.*

Damon: *I would go back to or stress the "big picture" skiing, the holistic approach to skiing and how you can dial in on the fundamentals the things that are the building blocks of good technique. I wouldn't necessarily do too much tactically although it is a good place to work on technique, especially if you are down [flatter] on the lower part of Palmer or the Mile [chairlifts]. Make sure the kids are having fun after skiing.*

Andy Leroy (University of Denver Ski Team): *This is time to work on athlete deficiencies. It is a left brain type of hill that doesn't change. The coach should take the [USSA] Level I CD and work on all the drills. It is a good template. This applies from entry level up to the FIS champion.*

Nolting: *Even our national team racers use their summer training to start with the most basic elements of their skiing, from very simple drills and slowly working into gates only as they're ready. Many coaches feel pressured to move into gate environments too early at Hood. Use drills, training aids, and drill courses to work on the technical fundamentals. The upper lanes are deceptively steep and can be quite difficult for most skiers to execute proper technique. If on an upper lane, generally you'll want to do short sections (4-6 GS turns) for the athletes to focus on repetition of proper movements. If we're not careful, we can inadvertently train a lot of pressuring in the lower part of the turn on the upper lanes at Hood, this is not what we want.*

EXCELLENCE: Can athletes get meaningful information about equipment through testing at Mount Hood?

Kipp: *At the sub-elite level, yes. Especially the athlete entering their FIS years. Ski length, flex patterns, side-cut, etc. will create new sensations for the athlete. Athletes need to be aware that "ease" of skiing may not equal "speed" of skiing. The new ski may be difficult to handle, but once learned will be faster. We would all have trouble if we went from the family car to an F1 race car... but the F1 would be faster once learned.*

Patrick Rice (Park City): *Yes, although the training session has to be specifically set-up. Timing has to be available, and several skis to test. Comparisons between skis have to be made with minimal feedback from coaching staff, which could taint results.*

Leroy: *It is tough for sure. There is a small window that can closely simulate winter. It depends on what you are looking for. If you are looking for the response of the ski and it is late in the day, no way. The morning when the snow is hard is the best.*

Nolting: *Yes, but coaches and athletes need to be careful. When testing boots, it is important to realize that the boot will be much more flexible in the warm temperatures at Hood than they will be in the winter. Athletes may ski well in a stiff boot at Hood, then struggle with that same boot during the winter season. It is also difficult when a coach has not worked with an athlete in the previous season tries to make boot stiffness recommendations for an athlete at a camp, for the reasons mentioned above. It can be a good time to try different cant, ramp angles, or other boot modifications. High level ski testing can be difficult as the snow usually breaks down as the day goes on, and timed ski testing may detract from the technical fundamental work going on at the camp. Ski testing, if done, should be done with a purpose and as part of the plan the coach puts forward so it doesn't detract from the overall camp goals.*

EXCELLENCE: What factors should be taken into account when summer training at Mount Hood as opposed to a regular season training block?

Leroy: *The winter has been spent preparing for races. Mt. Hood offers time to get back to fundamentals. On upper Palmer it is extra steep, and we can make this work for fundamental like working on pole plants and overall body position. The way it is set up it lends itself to work on repetition.*

Rice: *The summer training day is one long day. During the winter season it is a much shorter daily session. This makes the pacing during summer very important. Dryland activity also has to be factored into the training plan. During the summer this is usually coach run, as opposed to sending the athlete to the dryland coach or their self program.*

Kipp: *Summer training is a part of the regular season. It is just another block of training, and must be treated as such. Many times you see coaches trying to cram too much into this summer block. Treat it like any other training block and stay reasonable with the expectations.*

McGowan: *I coach J4's and this is a fantastic time for them to learn about being an athlete. The camp atmosphere creates a total immersion situation for the athlete, there are no distractions. This is a great time to teach things like hydration and nutrition. The little things that are important to being a good athlete, not just ski stuff. The jump to J3 will be big enough, if we can teach some of the other aspects this jump will not be so big.*

Nolting: *Look at the full day schedule. What is your camp goal? Is the on-snow performance most important? How will hard dryland sessions impact the ski learning? The coach needs to consider a lot of factors in making their plan. Unlike the winter season, you have the whole day to schedule for the athletes. Make a good plan to maximize the important aspects for you and your athletes.*