HOW DRY SLOPES CAN EFFECT YOUR SKIING

Reading this article you may be surprised to see that my participation in a BASI course features strongly rather than one of the excellent courses that ESC provides to its members. However my efforts at trying to pass is probably similar to many peoples experiences of ESC courses and the problems I have had in ensuring my technique is up to the grade for snow is common to many, predominantly dry slope skiers.

I am currently attempting to pass my BASI Grade 1 Technical. This is a bit of a challenge for me as I spend most of my time skiing and coaching on dry slopes for ESC.

BASI talk about their performance threads: technical, tactical, physical and psychological. For me in my attempts to pass grade 1 these four, and a further fifth of my own - which for the sake of this article I will call goalposts help guide the way.

1. Technical - do I have the skills necessary, can I train those that I don't have on the dry slope and are their any specific factors of the dry slope that can adversely affect my performance?

2. Tactical - what skis and equipment should I use, should I question a lot, where should I go in the group?

3. Physical - am I fit for it, how do I prepare for the altitude and sheer physicality of skiing high speed, variable, steeps and bumps, and can I stay free from injury?

4. Psychological - am I mentally prepared/strong enough. Will I be intimidated by the others

5. Goalposts - will they change them yet again? Since passing my grade two it has become harder and harder to pass as more modules are added and the standard is raised.

I'm well aware that I'm well short of the technical grade needed to pass but nothing that a season on snow won't put right. I have now failed the technical course twice. Each of my final reports highlighted the same faults which I see in many dry slope skiers. Part of my problem is probably laziness or arrogance on my part. As coaches or instructors we tend to spend all our time helping other people, seldom focussing on ourselves. I have now vowed to put aside time for myself - I need to be more selfish. Arrogance comes from me not wanting others to train me because I perceive their qualification isn't high enough or I perceive them to be not worthy. These are of course fey and stupid reasons. A good technical coach is a good technical coach whether they have reams of paper with their names on or not. My own self importance is getting in the way of real improvement. Of course as a coach I see this in athletes I train, however you forget it can also rear it's ugly head in oneself. Laziness in that I will pootle up and down the slope whilst coaching with seldom a thought of my own performance. I need to ensure each of my runs is memorable, focused, disciplined and contribute to technical improvement.

Technically I need to improve the important areas before I can move forward. Ironically one of these is an area in which I have been very keen to improve amongst athletes.

My first problem is the width of my stance, for one reason or another I ski with my feet 3 or 4 inches apart. I could blame this on the fact that I train freestyle, however I have always had quite a close stance even in my Alpine racing days. I am now desperately working on widening and lowering my stance and of course simultaneously flexing all of the appropriate joints whilst retaining a balanced position. I think variability of terrain, the speed you can ski on a dry slope and the amount of grip you can create is an issue here.

Variability - most of the time we are skiing on a flat unchanging surface (although the occasional seam can catch you out). Changes in snow texture, lumps, death cookies, piles of powder etc are

not there to unbalance. So I can perform repeated movements with exactly the same predicted effort and no surprises. I can easily get away with a narrower platform as I don't need the same core stability as I would need on snow - when conditions get difficult we all tend to widen the stance a little. Additionally the dry slope surface will only provide so much of a platform before the skis break away. We therefore tend to keep our feet under the body rather than use lateral body movements (appropriate) and leg lean. To generate effective leg lean a wider stance is required to allow the joints and legs to move. We can generate good lateral leg lean on the dry slope however it is obviously more difficult than on snow - it is an extremely important factor in influencing the shape of the ski (pressure) and the angle it makes on the snow (edge) thus the radius of turn whilst still carving effectively.

To ski with a wider stance effectively all the joints in the legs need to be flexed appropriately (with of course correct upper body posture - hope I don't have to draw pictures). If we were to try and ski a wide stance with long stretched unflexing legs we would create an "A" shape with our legs, so we need to make like the ubiquitous tennis keeper or goalkeeper positions loved by all instructors and coaches. We do this for a reason, biomechanically it makes for effective movements and balancing. We can then stretch and flex, apply pressure, change the edge. I suggest standing in the living room with various widths of stances and stretched and flexed legs to see how much movement you have in the hips and other joints. This will give you an idea of the different positions you can adopt.

Back onto one of my biggest bug bears on the dry slope. Because its uniform, and a lot of us have restricted lateral movement and lower speed - we are very static on our skis and have a limited range of movement.

But how can speed affect range of movement? Speed is great when skiing, not only for the fun factor but the forces we can create when moving our skis across our line of momentum (i.e. across the pathway of all the energy we have when skiing down a hill). As we go faster and move our skis across our pathway we can use these forces to drop into the turn more and so move our feet further away from the body laterally. Of course on a dry slope, taking the amount of grip we can get out of the equation, we are limited in the speed we can achieve by the length, steepness and material of the slope. The further the feet are away from the body, and the wider the stance the more the inside leg has to bend (try it by leaning against a wall - try different widths and see how far you can lean over). So speed can help achieve range of movement.

So on dry slopes we need to work on increasing movement in the legs. I prefer to do this in two ways.

1. I like to use exercises to increase movement whether the legs are moving laterally away from the body or working under the body. I would actually advocate increasing the range of movement over and above what is required for any task. This ensures we have the adaptability required for snow and can be done through numerous exercises and drills, Not that I am going to give you any there are loads out there and anything goes as long as it's safe. Variety is the spice of life especially on dry slopes.

2. Use of variability of terrain - use any bumps, waves, halfpipe etc you have. Mountains are intrinsically variable places and anything blue or above will get bumped up some time during the season so prepare for it. Get those legs working it will pay dividends later on. The best freestylers can cuff the majority of the Alpine racers because they are good all round skiers and funnily enough have been through classic race training programmes. And would you believe the best Alpine racers can beat the majority of freestylers in a bumps field. In both cases they are good all round, adaptable skiers. Similar basic skills are needed for both including excellent ranges of movement.

So in conclusion I am going to be selfish and working hard to improve my skiing. I want to prove everyone wrong and that a part time dry slope skier can attain the most difficult technical

qualification. You may ask why I put myself through this and the answer would be "because it's there".