

Interview:

Ski instructor comments on cross country's kick

by Chip Susol
Collegian Staff Writer
The winter season at Behrend presents experienced cross-country skiers with the opportunity to hone their skills as well as offering the beginner the chance to learn the rudiments of Nordic ski-

ing. Fitness consultant and Behrend cross-country ski instructor Walt Horner offers his advice and insights concerning this rewarding form of recreation and sport.

Collegian: Cross-country skiers, as a group, can be divided

into two categories; touring and competitive. How do these groups differ and what has been their relationship over recent years?

Horner: It used to be, in the early 70's when people really just started to get into cross-country

skiing, that the people who were touring skiers, I call them "granola" skiers, were really separate from performance skiers. That's not true anymore. The slower paced skier takes the same kind of technique points from the elite racer and, if you look in the 80's at cross-country with its sleeker look and more performance oriented skis being used now by the general tourers, the technique that they use is the same. It is now just a matter of rhythm speed. The racer does it faster than the Ma and Pa who ski out in the lower 40.

Collegian: How does the "glide", the forward momentum of a skier resultant from the "kick", differ between these two types of cross-country skiers?

Horner: In performance skiing the difference between the gold medal skier and the silver medalists is measured in centimeters in relation to their glide length. The people who are the fastest are the ones who can get the biggest glide out of their kick. The difference between the elite racer and the weekend skier is just a matter of glide length. You can increase your glide length by skiing at a faster pace, by being stronger bio-mechanically, or simply being able to attain better equipment.

Collegian: "Skating" is a technique that has grown in popularity as well as in controversy in performance skiing in recent years. How has this technique obtained such a dual position in competitive skiing?

Horner: Skating is the fastest way to go across the snow. Bill Koch, who won a silver medal in 1976, skated in the 1982 world championships and won it. He did it because he skated. He had seen (marathoner Olin Hassis) use this technique and was able to refine it into what is now recognized as the marathon skate; one foot in the track and the other foot outside the track and you push off with that foot and glide on the foot in the track. This technique tends to destroy any set track, thus hampering non-skating skiers. In competition, what you have now is a compromise where you have some races that ban skating in the first 100 meters, or they ban skating in the last kilometer, or they ban skating at different points during the race, or they separate what they call "the skaters" into a free-style category and the regular "kick and glide" racers into a traditional category. Cross-country has become more specialized this way.

Collegian: Do you think that the traditional, or diagonal, stride will begin to die out as more skiers opt for a faster finishing time

through skating techniques?

Horner: No. To be able to skate even five kilometers you have to do a lot of work in the weight room. It takes a lot of upper body strength. You burn probably one third more energy when you do the marathon skate.

Collegian: In terms of challenge, how would you rate Behrend's trails?

Horner: Behrend's trails, at the very least, require an intermediate skill level, except for on the flat (across from Erie Hall). The problem here is that the hills are steep. Because a lot of people who use these trails aren't cross-country skiers and they screw up whatever track there is. The surface is always hard packed, and possibly icy, with a lot of holes in it. That makes it hard for you to control your skis and do what you have to do to stay upright when your going down a hill. Plus, the trails are narrow, and in some places there is not a lot of room for run-outs (at the bottom of some hills). From this perspective the trails are at least an intermediate challenge.

Collegian: What would you tell someone who wanted to begin skiing here on Behrend's trail system?

Horner: I would say take a lesson. Take a lesson from somebody who is an instructor or go skiing with folks who have some experience who are willing to show you what to do.

Collegian: What do you feel could be done to upgrade the quality of track skiing at Behrend?

Horner: I've been skiing around Erie now since about 1972 and I've seen a great evolution (in skiing). Where you see evolution is in the tracks. Years ago, when tracks were set in the snow, say, at Elk Valley or Wilderness Lodge, after two hours they would be a mess because no one knew how to ski right. Now, because many people have upgraded their ability, and the years have added to their experience, you see a lot nicer track over a given day. I think that this could apply here at Behrend. Behrend maintenance could invest in a snowmobile and a track setter and set some tracks around here. Doing this over a period of two or three years might help skiers to ski better and then, also, make Behrend a better place to ski (for a larger amount of skiers).

Horner on Erie weather: If you are a beginning skier and you go out and spend two hundred dollars and buy equipment and get all pumped up to ski, and you only have weekends to ski and you get rain or a blizzard, if you are

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If Tony Eason, the Pats young quarterback, can remember that he is a good player, he'll complete more than three passes all game.

And if the New England defense can remain calm, utilizing the same type of opportunistic play that has been successful for them all year, maybe they can pick-off one of McMahon's passes and rattle the Bear cage.

Yeah, maybe, maybe. Maybe God himself will come down and point at the Patriot end zone. Sure. The line stands-- Bears by 14.



Walt Horner, Cross Country skiing instructor

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