

2008: The Best Season Yet

Four ways to get your slalom skiing off to a great start in 2008

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It always astonishes me to find out how many skiers come into a new season with little or no preparation. A long time ago, slalom coach Steve Schnitzer asked me a poignant question that I think you should ask yourselves. "What's the definition of insanity?" The first thought that passed through my head was, why is he asking me this? Does he think I'm insane? But, knowing Steve, I knew he was going somewhere with it. I replied, "No, Steve. Why don't you tell me?" "Doing the same action repeatedly," he said, "expecting a different result!" His answer changed the way I think about everything, and I hope it changes the way you think, too!

Now, take a second and digest Steve's statement. Think about your last three seasons and what you've done differently to reach new heights in each of them. If you are being honest with yourself, I would be willing to bet that by Steve's definition, you are insane. In water ski terms, that is.

Here are four ways to make the 2008 season your best yet.

Set 2008 Performance Goals

Setting goals is not as easy as you would first think. This is the single most important thing you can do for your skiing. I'm not talking spatial goals either, like "I want to ski better this season." Start with five obtainable goals for 2008, five dream goals for 2008, and five long-term goals for 2010. By setting goals, you have more motivation and, better yet, more meaning to your season. Obtainable goals are standards that you set for yourself that not only are within your means, but that you can expect to accomplish. They help you to stay focused for all of your passes, whether in practice or in tourna-

ments. Your dream goals are just that, if everything works out for you this season, what would be the result. These goals are key because they give meaning and direction to your season. They help to keep you motivated on bad weather days when the couch and a cold beverage are calling your name. Long-term 2010 goals are where you want to be at the end of three years. As long as you have short-term goals, it is healthy and productive to project into the future. Take some time and write down your goals. I cannot express the importance of writing them down, not just thinking of them. Then, put the list someplace where you will see it everyday. I have it listed in my journal, but I suggest someplace more visible like your bathroom mirror. That way, everyday starts with a reminder of your goals.

Get Healthy

At the beginning of the 1998 season, I was 200 pounds and stuck in a three-year rut of 3 buoys at 38 feet off. I needed to be stronger and logic told me it was much easier to lose 15 pounds than to gain the strength to support my 200 pounds. I set a goal of 185 pounds and worked at it everyday similar to how I train for water skiing. I would get up in the morning and weigh myself. That put me in check and brought my goal to my attention at the start of each day. Forty minutes of cardio, four to five days per week, is a great starting point. To go along with the cardio, I made the decision to cut out all fast food and hydrogenated foods like chips. I'm not suggesting that you go on a diet, just commit to a healthier way of living. Ask yourself, will this food provide me good energy for the upcoming day or is it just filler food that makes me feel slow and tired? The next time you grab for

that bag of chips, go for the apple with peanut butter instead. It tastes better and will offer you a lot more in the long run.

The winter is a long season, so you have plenty of time to come into next season in the best shape of your life. Good examples of cardio workouts are playing tennis with your spouse, shooting hoops with your kids, taking the family alpine or cross country skiing, going to the gym and using a step machine or elliptical runner, riding your bike around the neighborhood, and so on. Most people complain that 40 minutes of cardio, four to five days a week takes up too much of their free time. That is why I used examples that the entire family can enjoy. That way the family is getting to spend more quality time together *and* everyone is leading a healthier life.

Keep A Journal

A journal is used for logging your sets. You can list the passes that you ran, the conditions in which you skied, what you were focusing on, the comments your coach had about that set, and so forth. I also use my journal for keeping track of my ski settings. It is amazing how fast we forget. Your journal is your record from year to year. You will know how many days per year you skied, how many sets you skied, how many 22 off passes you ran, and so on. You also can record vital information on tournament sites for the next season. I often change settings for different sites. When I return to the same location, it is extremely helpful to know that I prefer one extra degree of wing here. The journal also is the place where you would put in your ski thoughts so when you are at a tournament, you can flip open your journal and find your focus points. All in all, the journal is an effective way of compiling data for

this and upcoming seasons; a must for any tournament skier.

Utilize A Professional Coach

Your ski partners offer you some great advice, but in the end, they are not professional coaches – and most likely are skiing with the same bad habits. A professional coach is just that, and starting your season with some instruction from a pro can go a long way toward achieving your goals. They will take a vested interest in your needs and help you work through your weakest links. There are plenty of coaches to choose from, so make sure to do your homework before choosing one.

One of the best ways to find a coach is through referral. Friends and co-skiers who have had great experiences with professional coaches will be the first to tell you. Once you have a few places in mind, visit their Web site and call or e-mail them. Do this early in the year, even if you have not started skiing at home. If you live in

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Virginia, go in February. For someone in Vermont, I would wait until around April. I know what you're thinking, "Why would I go to ski with a professional coach when I have not even started skiing at home?" Because spring is the best time to get help. You have let all your habits rest for winter. By going to a coach to start the season, you will be starting with the right thoughts and technique. You will be building muscle by using the correct techniques. All of which leads to better muscle memory and in the end, better technique. I dedicate the first month of my season to integrating new ideas into my skiing style. After that, I work on making those ideas part of my daily routine.

To recap, if you want to lay the foundation for the best water ski season of your life, make the commitment to it. Set goals, live a healthier life, keep a ski journal, and seek out a professional coach to start the season. Add these items into your already dedicated routine and you are almost certain to have success!

Professional slalom skier Chris Rossi is sponsored by Radar Skis, Tige Boats, O'Neill and Performance Ski & Surf. For more information, visit skitek.net or slashslalom.com.



2008 Goals Example

Obtainable Goals

1. Run 28 off 50 times in practice this year
2. Enter 7 tournaments
3. Run 28 off 2 of 3 rounds in every tournament entered
4. Ski in the State Championships
5. Lose 10 pounds

Dream Goals

1. Run 32 off 20 times in practice this year
2. Set new personal best of 2 @ 35 off in a tournament
3. Finish Top-3 at the State Championships
4. Win a local tournament
5. Qualify for the Regional Championships

Long Term 2010 Goals

1. Set new personal best of 1 @ 38 off
2. Win State Championships
3. Finish Top-5 at Regional Championships
4. Qualify for National Championships
5. Reach optimum weight

