

Parent's Handbook to Racing

A Guide for Families New to Cross-Country Ski Racing



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Welcome to Race Weekend

If this is your first race weekend, welcome — you are in for a treat. Youth ski racing is one of the most positive and supportive sport environments your child will ever experience. The focus at this level is on learning, skill development, and having fun. Results matter less than effort, and every athlete on the course is cheered for.

This handbook covers what to expect at a typical race weekend and how you can help things run smoothly for your athlete, the coaches, and the team. None of this is complicated — most of it just requires a little preparation.

If anything is unclear, ask a coach or a more experienced parent. Everyone was new once, and the ski community is famously welcoming.

1. Schedule of Events

Most race weekends follow a similar pattern. Below is a typical schedule. Specific times for each event will be published by the host club in the official race notice — always check that document for the actual times.

Day	Typical Time	What Happens
Friday	Morning	Wax area opens. Travel day for many families.
Friday	Late morning to afternoon	Official training day — athletes get on the course to learn the trail. Team check-in at the race office.
Friday	Late afternoon (typically 4:30 PM)	Team Captains' Meeting #1 on Zoom (coaches only). Coaches then meet with our team to share what matters.
Saturday	Morning	Wax area opens early (often 7:00 AM). Race office opens.
Saturday	About 1.5 hours before race	Bib pick-up at the race office. Only one person per club picks up bibs.
Saturday	Mid-morning	Day 1 race.
Saturday	Around noon	Fun relays — mixed teams from different clubs (a real highlight for the kids).
Saturday	Late afternoon	Team Captains' Meeting #2 on Zoom (coaches only).
Saturday	Evening	Team night out or family activity — a chance to relax.
Sunday	Morning	Wax area opens early. Bib pick-up again.

Day	Typical Time	What Happens
Sunday	Mid-morning	Day 2 race.
Sunday	After racing	Awards ceremony, then pack up and head home.

A Few Schedule Details Worth Knowing

- **Registration closes early.** Often a full week before the race, with a late penalty after that. Coaches will remind families, but it is the parent's job to register the athlete on Zone4.
- **Bibs and chips.** Bibs are picked up about 1.5 hours before the race. Only one person per club picks them up. Bibs and timing chips must be returned right after racing — a lost bib usually costs \$100 to replace.
- **Things change.** Start times, course conditions, and even race formats can shift based on weather. Watch your team's communication channel (often WhatsApp or TeamSnap) for updates.

2. Wax Policy — What Parents Need to Know

Coaches Will Wax the Skis

Our coaches and team wax technicians are responsible for waxing the skis according to the rules of the event. Many championship-level events (including Ontario Youth Championships and Ontario Winter Games) now use a Mandatory Common Wax Protocol. That means a single non-fluoro liquid glide wax is provided to every team, and everyone uses the same product. This keeps the playing field level and removes the equipment advantage that bigger or better-resourced clubs used to have. Fluorinated wax is banned in all categories.

Parents: Please Clean the Skis First

This is the most important thing for parents to understand. Before skis arrive in the wax area, they must be cleaned of old glide wax so the coaches can apply the new wax. *Cleaning is not waxing — it just means using a glide cleaner and a paper towel to strip off the old layer.*

Here is why this matters. If we show up to a race with 20 to 25 pairs of skis that all need cleaning before they can be waxed, our coaches will spend all night doing prep work that parents could have done at home. That means less rest for coaches, and a risk that some skis do not get the proper attention they need.

Please do the cleaning at home, the night before you travel, or first thing on the training day. Coaches are happy to show you how if you have not done it before — it takes about two minutes per pair once you know the routine.

Label the Grip Zone on the Classic Skis

Clearly defining the grip zone on your athlete's classic skis ensures that coaches aren't left guessing where to apply grip wax. Grip zones should be retested and marked clearly every year as kids grow (and old marks should be wiped off). This can be done at a local ski shop or can be tested at the club in the fall using a "paper test". You can ask a coach in November or December to test the grip zones.

Testing Kick Wax on Classic Race Days

On classic race days, athletes may be asked to test their skis before the start so the wax technician can fine-tune the kick wax. Useful feedback is specific: does the ski grip well on the flats, on steeper climbs, and during a hard push-off? Does it slip only occasionally, or every stride? Does it feel secure but draggy or slow when gliding? Saying "not good" does not help much. The technician needs to hear exactly *where* the ski is slipping or dragging and *how often*, so they can decide whether the wax needs to be thicker, thinner, longer, shorter, softer, or harder.

- "It slips on the big hills."
- "It grips on the flats but slips when I push hard uphill."
- "It grips well, but it feels sticky and slow on the glide."
- "It only slipped a couple of times."
- "It slips almost every stride on the steeper climbs."
- "It feels good when I ski easy, but it slips when I race hard."

What to Bring to the Wax Area

- The next race's skis (either classic or skate) labelled with the athlete's name. Depending on race, coaches may request only one pair on Friday for the Saturday race, and the second pair on Saturday afternoon to prep for the Sunday race.
- Skis cleaned of old glide and grip wax.
- Grip zone well marked on classic skis.

What NOT to Do

- Do not apply your own glide wax on top of what the coaches have applied — it can disqualify the athlete at common-wax events.
- Do not bring fluorinated wax to the venue. It is banned for all categories.
- The wax area is a work zone, not a hangout. Drop off and pick up skis, but leave the coaches space to work.

3. Team Captains' Meetings

Most race weekends include one or two Team Captains' Meetings (called TCMs). These are usually held on Zoom — typically late Friday afternoon and again late Saturday afternoon.

The TCM is where the race organizers, jury, and coaches go through the important details: start times, course conditions, weather forecast, last-minute changes, and any safety concerns. Each club sends one coach to represent the team.

What This Means for Parents

- You do not need to attend the Team Captains' Meeting. It is for coaches only.
- Your coach will attend the TCM, then schedule a short meeting with our athletes and families to share what matters — start times, course notes, and what to wear.
- Please make sure to attend the team meeting that follows. It is usually only 10 to 15 minutes, and it is where you will get the information you actually need.

4. Dress for the Temperature

This is probably the single biggest difference between new families and experienced ones: knowing how to dress for a long day in the cold.

Layering Basics

- **Base layer:** moisture-wicking long underwear, top and bottom. Wool or synthetic only — cotton traps moisture and leaves your athlete cold.
- **Mid layer:** a fleece or wool top. Sometimes two thin layers are better than one thick one.
- **Race suit:** what your athlete races in. Designed to be light and breathable — the athlete will warm up quickly once moving.
- **Warm-up jacket and pants:** to wear over the race suit before and after racing. Something windproof is ideal. Pants should have zippers so they can easily be removed with ski boots on at the start line.
- **Extras:** warm hat, neck warmer or buff, racing gloves and a warmer pair of mittens, warm winter boots for off the skis. Always pack a complete dry change of clothes for after the race.

Rule of Thumb

When the athlete is racing, they will be working hard. Dress them as if it is about 10°C warmer than the actual temperature — they will heat up fast. When they are NOT racing, dress them like they are going on a long winter hike. Going from sweaty to standing still is when kids get cold the fastest.

Temperature	What Your Athlete Will Need (in addition to base layers)
Above 0°C	Light long-sleeve top, light gloves, headband or thin hat. A race suit alone is often enough once warmed up.
0°C to -10°C	Race suit plus warm hat, neck warmer or buff, racing gloves, warm wind-blocking jacket for warm-up and cool-down.
-10°C to -20°C	All of the above plus warmer mittens or lobster gloves, face covering, heavier warm-up jacket and pants. Check for white spots on cheeks and nose. Don't stand in open, windy areas.
Below -20°C	Racing may be modified or postponed. We don't race below minus 20C. Cover all exposed skin. Plan for indoor warm-up breaks and watch carefully for signs of frostbite.

5. Bring Food and Water

Race venues are often small chalets in rural areas. Concessions may be limited — sometimes just chili and hot chocolate. Many venues do not sell bottled water. Pack like you are going on a day trip.

Food to Bring

- Granola bars, energy bars, trail mix.
- Sandwiches — peanut butter, turkey, or whatever your athlete likes.
- Fruit: bananas, apples, oranges, dried fruit.
- Cookies and other treats — race day is not the day for new diet rules.
- A thermos of hot soup, broth, or hot chocolate is a game-changer when it is cold.

Hydration

- Refillable water bottles — most venues let you fill them from the tap.
- Drinks at room temperature or warm. Ice-cold water in winter is unappealing and gets ignored.
- Athletes should drink water consistently throughout the day, not just during racing.

Race-Day Eating

- Breakfast 2 to 3 hours before the first race. Something familiar — oatmeal, toast, eggs, fruit. Avoid heavy or greasy food.
- Light snack 30 to 60 minutes before racing if needed (banana, energy bar).

- Something to eat within 30 minutes of finishing each race — recovery starts right away. A banana is great for this.

6. Spending the Day Outside

Most ski venues have one small chalet that has to serve hundreds of athletes, coaches, parents, and spectators. It will be crowded, warm, wet from melting snow, and not somewhere you can settle in for the day. Plan to be outside most of the time and set yourself up so that being outside is comfortable. You may also need to park a long way away, so don't plan on that being an option either.

Gear That Makes a Long Day Easier

- Hand warmers and toe warmers (chemical packets or reusable HotPocs). Bring more than you think you need — athletes love them between races.
- A warm blanket or sleeping bag for kids to wrap up in between races.
- Sunglasses. Snow glare is brutal.
- Sunscreen and lip balm. Yes, even in winter — the snow reflects UV right back up at you.
- A small backpack to carry warmers, snacks, and a change of mitts when moving around the course.

Tips for Staying Comfortable

- Keep your phone in an inside pocket close to your body. Cold drains batteries fast.
- Move around. Standing still in the cold is the surest way to feel miserable. Walk over to the course, cheer, walk back.
- Athletes between races: warm-up jacket on immediately, snacks, water, then rest. Do not let them sit in a wet race suit.

Spectating

- Spectators usually do not need a day pass — access to the stadium is free. But if you want to ski the trails outside of race hours, family members need to buy a day pass.
- During race events, trails are closed to recreational skiing.
- Cheer for every athlete, not just your own. The kids who are last across the line need it the most, and our team gets cheered the same way by other parents.
- Position yourself where you can see athletes more than once — a loop or a tough hill is more fun than the finish line.
- Cowbells are popular noisemakers and easy to use with heavy mitts on.

Mindset

- Things sometimes run a little late. Start times shift, schedules adjust, courses get modified for conditions. Be flexible.
- Your athlete may have a rough race, get cold, lose a glove, or have a wax issue. It happens to everyone. Stay calm and they will too.
- Take photos and enjoy the day. Years from now, the kids will remember the camaraderie, the snacks, the cheering, and the team night out — not their finish position.

7. Equipment Choices Beyond the Basics

As athletes stay in the sport, families quickly discover that “ski gear” can mean many different things. You do not need to buy everything at once, and younger athletes can often make do with a simpler setup. But it helps to understand what each piece of equipment is for, what can be shared across disciplines, and which extra items become more useful as kids get older and race more often.

Classic vs. Skate Gear

Classic and skate skiing use different skis, poles, and usually different boots. Classic skis are generally longer and have a grip zone under the foot; skate skis are shorter, stiffer, and have no grip zone. Classic skis can either be wax skis (still the best for racing), or waxless (there are either scales or material in the kick zone). Classic poles are shorter, while skate poles are longer. For families looking for a simple rule of thumb, classic poles should usually come up to about shoulder height, while skate poles should usually reach somewhere between the chin and the nose. For skis, classic skis are usually noticeably longer than the athlete's body, while skate skis are usually closer to body height and only a little longer.

Boot Options: Classic, Skate, and Kombi

Classic boots are softer and more flexible through the sole, which makes striding and kick-and-glide easier. Skate boots are stiffer and have ankle support for better control and power transfer. Kombi boots sit in the middle: they have some ankle support like a skate boot, but a more flexible sole than a true skate boot. For younger or fast-growing athletes, kombi boots can be a practical way to cover both disciplines with one pair of boots. As athletes get older, stronger, and more technical, separate classic and skate boots usually work better, especially for athletes who race often or want the best performance in both techniques. Whatever the style, comfort matters: boots should feel snug and supportive, but not painfully tight, and kids should still be able to wiggle their toes.

Roller Ski Gear

Roller skiing is one of the main dryland training tools for older athletes. At minimum, athletes need roller skis, boots, bindings, poles with roller ski tips, and a properly fitted helmet. Gloves are strongly recommended because even a low-speed fall on pavement can shred hands quickly. Some families use the same boots for snow and roller skiing, which is common and works fine, although summer use wears boots out faster because of grit, heat, and pavement. If your athlete starts roller skiing regularly, it is worth checking equipment often for loose bolts, worn wheels, and dull pole tips.

Changing Pole Baskets to Roller Ski Tips at Home

Many poles can be switched from snow baskets to roller ski ferrules at home. Some systems are quick-change or screw-on, while others are glued on. For glue-on tips, the usual process is to gently heat the old basket or ferrule, twist it off, clean the shaft, warm the new tip if needed, add the correct hot-melt pole glue, and install the new tip so it points forward in line with the handle. For quick-change systems, the basket or ferrule usually unscrews or unclips and the new one goes on in seconds. The important part is not to overheat the shaft and not to force the wrong size tip onto the pole. If you are unsure, a ski shop can swap them quickly.

Ski-Walking Poles

Ski walking, bounding, and running with poles are common dryland training options, especially for athletes who are not yet roller skiing much or who need variety in the fall. In many cases, athletes simply use their ski poles with appropriate tips. These workouts help athletes build coordination, timing, and upper-body engagement in a way that is more ski-specific than ordinary running. Ski walking poles should be chest height, shorter than classic poles. Any old pair of poles will do.

Rock Skis and Warm-up Skis

Rock skis are older or lower-value skis used when conditions are thin, icy, dirty, or full of hidden debris. They protect your better skis from unnecessary damage and are worth keeping if they still fit reasonably well. Warm-up skis are a second pair used before races so the athlete does not put extra wear on their race skis during easy skiing, drills, and warm-up laps. Families do not usually need to rush into this for younger racers, but it is sensible to start thinking about warm-up skis around U14, especially if the athlete races often. By U16, a separate pair of warm-up skis becomes much more useful and, for many athletes, close to necessary.

Simple Equipment Checklist by Age/Stage

This is a rough guide only. Every athlete develops at a different pace, and families do not need to buy everything at once. Coaches can help you decide what is worth adding now and what can wait until the next season.

Stage	What Families Usually Need
Younger / new racers (often Jackrabbit, U10, some U12)	One good pair of skis that matches the main technique they use most, one set of poles, one comfortable pair of boots, warm-up clothing, winter boots, gloves or mitts, and a ski bag or boot bag. A kombi boot is often a practical choice at this stage.
Developing racers (often U12 to U14)	Usually, two pairs of skis if racing both techniques regularly: one classic pair and one skate pair. This is also when separate classic and skate poles start to make more sense. Some athletes still use kombi boots, but many begin moving toward discipline-specific boots. Families may also start keeping an older pair of skis as rock skis.
Older / more committed racers (often U14 to U16+)	Classic race skis, skate race skis, separate classic and skate boots, separate classic and skate poles, warm-up clothing, and often an older pair of rock skis. If roller skiing regularly, add roller skis, helmet, gloves, and roller tips for poles. Around U14, families may start thinking about warm-up skis; by U16, they are often very worthwhile.

Final Word

The most important things you can do as a race-weekend parent are simple: get your athlete and their gear ready, clean those skis, dress for the day, pack the snacks, and bring your enthusiasm. The coaches will handle the rest.

Welcome to the team. We are glad you are here.