

Tools for Beginners

What every new “Ski Team Parent” needs to know!

Updated November, 2017

1. The Great Divide Ski Team has a long and proud tradition of competing in the United States Ski and Snowboard Association’s (USSA) Northern Division. The Northern Division of the USSA includes ski racing programs located at ski areas in Montana and South Dakota. The board members of the Great Divide Ski Team are all volunteers. Our coaching staff includes those that have coached athletes at the US Ski Team level, as well as athletes in National and Regional competitions and throughout the Northern Division. They all have been and are involved in skill development camps and bring that knowledge to their work and passion for the sport of skiing and to the Great Divide programs. There is always a shortage of hands to make the race programs run smoothly. Consider being a parent volunteer or board member and helping with fund-raising events.
2. Ski races depend on what level your child skis and do not occur at the same hills on the same weekends: Levels are driven by birth year.
 - a. The Youth Ski League (YSL) events are low-key competitive races for racers ages 8 through 14 (USSA age classes U8 to U14). These races usually host over 100 competitors and each competitor can race twice each day.
 - b. USSA age class U16 (16 years if age and above): These races are scored by a somewhat complicated handicap points system where the value of a race depends on the skill of the field. Big picture - the lower the points profile (think golf handicap) the more skilled and competitive the skier. Points are adjusted at every competition and are compiled, tracked, and adjusted throughout the competition season.
3. Introduction to Great Divide Ski Team’s Devo Program: After participating in the Great Divide Ski Team’s All-Mountain program, a coach may approach your child and suggest s/he move to the Devo Team. Devo is short for “Development” and this is a bridge program between All Mountain and the One and Two Day Race Team programs. There is no particular age at which this happens. Your child may join the ski team as young as 7-8 years old or much older. The goal of the Devo team is to continue to enhance all mountain skiing skills, while at the same time introducing the skier to limited gate training and more focused and advanced skiing skills.
4. Entering ski races and competing involves travelling to various ski areas in the Northern Division. Here are few FYIs.
 - a. Your child has joined a ski “team,” but for the most part alpine ski racing is an individual sport. The team does not travel as a team – you will be responsible for transporting your child to all racing events, but coordinating travel and lodging with other families is encouraged.
 - b. The team tries to stay at the same hotel when traveling because it's fun and they

- can get together in the evenings to sharpen edges and wax skis, and view videos from the races. This is not mandatory.
- c. You will be responsible for booking your own hotel room. However, the Head Coach will try to “secure” lodging in advance for most events if you want to stay at the team hotel. Any special rates attained by the Head Coach may be limited as to time, so it is best to plan early to attend the race. It is important to communicate early on with coaches to know which races the team will attend.
5. One of the most useful websites is the Northern Division's USSA web page. You can find up-to-date season information, race schedules, race results, links to race flyers, fees, lost & found lists, and more there. Bookmark the page and visit it often throughout the race season: <http://www.northernussa.org/>.
 6. The Devo racers are encouraged to participate in one race during the season. Great Divide is hosting a race this year, but some years we target a different race for Devo depending upon the schedule in a given year. A few general race tips for first time Devo racers:
 - a. First, your child will need to join the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association (USSA). Every racer should have a valid USSA card to participate in a race. Students have the option to purchase a two-event membership if they plan to participate in more than one race. You can contact the coaching staff about that opportunity.
 - b. If your child is in U8, U10, U12, or U14 they will be registering as a Youth Member at USSA (not a competitor), which is less expensive. Check with the head coach as some U14s will want to get a competitor license so they can start to enter scored races toward the end of their second U14 year.
 - i. You can register for your USSA license and all race events at the USSA web site. (<http://my.ussa.org>). There is not a separate license for the Northern Division; your USSA license will identify your child as a member of the Northern Division USSA.
 - ii. Membership is per ski season, not per calendar year. Regardless of when you register your skier, the membership will expire on June 30th. Renew by October 15th to avoid paying late fees. First time membership applications filed after the Fall deadline do not incur a late fee.
 7. Most of the race weekends are three days – Friday, Saturday and Sunday.
 - a. Your skier is not required to participate in any race, and can pick and choose those in which s/he will enter.
 - b. You might want to talk with your child’s coach, and ask his/her advice on which days/events would be best for your child’s skill level and goals.
 - c. There is an entry fee for each race, for each child, and that each child will be responsible for his/her entry fee. As mentioned above, all registration is through the USSA web site.

- d. Entry fees differ for each race, and each ski hill. Check the website given above.
8. On the day of the race, you will be expected to have your child at the appointed meeting place (a specific location in the main lodge, usually) by 8:00 am.
 - a. Racers gather together with their coaches.
 - b. Coaches go to a meeting with all the other coaches.
 - c. Coaches return to skiers with race bibs, race rosters, etc.
 - d. At this point, you, the parent, are free to buy your own lift tickets and ski – your racer is in good hands with his/her coach for the day, but you will need to provide your child lunch and snacks.
 - e. You can sign up as a volunteer for Gate-Keeping. Gate-keepers watch the gates on the race course and mark whether the skier faults or not. It is very critical work, and often the races are short gate-keepers. Only parents who can ski can gate-keep. Most ski hills will give the volunteer a lift ticket for another day. You are given a lift ticket for the race day as well, but you may not have much time to use it if there are a lot of racers. You will be provided a sack lunch.
 - f. Remember to ask the coaches what time your skier’s event begins, or pick up/view a race start list – there are separate ones for boys and girls, for morning and afternoon. Different ski hills have different rules about viewing the race event. This information will be on the race flyer that can be obtained on the Northern Division's website (<http://www.northernussa.org/>).
 - g. Most often, the racers and families are free to ski anywhere on the mountain until they are expected at the starting gates (before their event begins). They simply keep checking back in with their coaches every few runs.
 9. If your skier is on the Ski Team for the first time, please consult the Head Coach or any of the staff about what events are appropriate and how many events he/she should compete in. Attending each race is exhausting for parents and racers, as well as financially draining; choose your races carefully, and be sure your child can recover between race weekends.
 10. Summary of expenses you may expect (they will include, but are not limited to.....)
 - a. Ski Team (training fees depend on specific program)
 - b. Gear: skis, boots, poles, speed suit (if necessary). All ski racers are required to have a hard- shelled helmet which meets strict guidelines. Capital Sports may have them or you can check with Skier’s Edge in Great Falls. Most racers will want specific skis for specific races. The team has gear to borrow, check with coaches. There are specific rules regarding ski specifications for a given event for a given age range. Check with the head coach for advice on this matter.
 - c. Lift ticket for each time your child skis. If you choose to purchase a season pass, this will only be valid at your home hill, and you will still need lift tickets for away races. Lift tickets for racers are invoiced to you through your GDST account.
 - d. Your own lift tickets and/or rentals if you and your family choose to ski when your child is racing at other mountains.
 - e. Travel expenses, hotels, meals, including entry fees for the races.

11. Other fun events:

- a. End-of-Season Banquet (awards, etc.). This is usually a potluck, low-key family event, and really fun. This is great way to honor our young skiers, recognize their specific achievements, and enjoy getting to know each other.
- b. Ski-A-Thon Fund-Raising Event to raise money for the team. This takes place at Great Divide at the end of the All-Mountain season. Kids take pledges for how many runs they can make in two hours. Local sponsors donate items to be given away as prizes for the skier who raises the most money, who skis the most runs. Skiers can use 30% of what they earn toward their own ski team fees.

12. As a ski team family, please help out with fund-raising events.

- a. The Annual Not-A-Golf Tournament occurs in the summer and involves selling advertising sign spot to local businesses for placement on the golf course during a busy summer weekend.
- b. Dinner at On Broadway occurs in the spring and a percentage of proceeds go to the ski team. Look for announcements through email and on the team's Facebook page.
- c. Ale nights at Blackfoot River Brewery and Lewis & Clark benefit the team. Look for news through email and on the team's Facebook page.
- d. We WELCOME other ideas for fund raising.