

# Slalom



There are six basic alterations that are helping today's slalom racers to carve rounder lines and achieve faster times than ever before: wider stance; greater inclination; improved centering on the skis; less steering and more arcing; improved ski-snow contact; and a longer path by applying a rounder turn shape with the outside ski. Understanding these concepts can help you incorporate the latest slalom techniques into your racing program.

## 1. **Wider stance**

- a. Enables a skier to build pressure more efficiently throughout a turn and decrease it more easily through the transition.
- b. Improves a skier's side-to-side base of support and compensates for decreased tip-to-tail support.

c. Allows a skier to increase the incline of the lower limbs, which creates the greater edge angle required to carve tight slalom arcs.

Coaching point:

When training gates, focus on gaining space for the outside ski at gate contact by keeping your skis at a constant width and applying pressure on the outside ski at the rise line above the gate. (A common error skiers make is to close their stance at gate contact, bringing the outside foot in tight to the gate. This usually creates late pressure, which makes the skier turn across the hill more than necessary and is associated with premature turn initiation.)

## **2. Greater inclination**

Modern slalom skis hold an edge better and arc more than the previous generations of skis, and as a result, athletes can increase their inclination (i.e., move their bodies farther into the inside of a turn). This allows the skier's center of mass to take a straighter line through the gates and down the hill.

Coaching point:

Practice extended free skiing work doing edging drills and carved slalom-radius turns. Practice edging skills by doing "Railroad Track Turns." Find some flat terrain and execute shallow turns, leaving linked, clean tracks in the snow. Progress to steeper terrain and execute complete turns with linked tracks. To accomplish this task you will need to incorporate a good deal of inclination. Once you have success with this drill, you can place more attention on and refine your inclination.

## **3. Improved centering on the skis (using less fore/aft movement)**

Using today's short slalom skis, a skier can no longer use excessive movement to make a quick, short direction

change. It's not necessary with a rounder carving line, and the short skis won't support it. If a skier attempts this on today's slalom skis, chances are, he or she will fall over backwards.

Coaching point:

Maintaining ankle flexion and control the movement of the upper body and arms for proper balance. Control fore/aft movement and ski with a quiet upper body.

#### **4. Less steering and more arcing**

The common practice in the early 1990s, on 200 to 205 cm slalom skis, was to steer or pivot the skis through the top third of the turn and then apply a quick and forceful edge set to complete the turn. Today you see very little steering into the turn as top-level skiers roll their skis up onto edge early in the turn and bend the skis into and through a rounder fuller arc.

#### **5. Improved ski-snow contact**

It was also typical in the mid-'90s for slalom skiers to lift the inside ski while redirecting the skis into the fall line. This dramatic loss of ski-snow contact was associated with a tighter stance and aggressive fore-aft movement. Today it's more common to see skiers keeping both skis on the snow and carving smaller radius turns: contact is desirable because loss of contact tends to delay turn initiation and promote excess redirection. It also maintains momentum and allows for more flow and linked movement patterns.

Coaching point:

Learn to apply movement of the center of mass correctly throughout the turn by using this mini progression:

a. Perform outside-ski turns where at the completion of each turn, skiers shift their weight to the inside -- or uphill -- ski, rise and moving forward lifting the old outside ski tail and

roll the new ski into the turn. Once the turn is established, they can place the inside ski down on the snow at the turn apex.

b. Perform turns initiated on the inside ski with the outside off the snow until turn apex.

c. Perform linked carved turns (both skis firmly planted on the snow) focusing on the movements established in the earlier drills.

6. Apply a rounder turn shape with the outside ski.

Proper turn shape takes many hours of practice free skiing, in the gates, training situations, and drills. Examine carefully your tracks in the snow. Look for arc and shape coming into and exiting the turn with the majority of the pressure and bend coming to the ski in the fall line.

Remember, immersion in solid technical skills will bring positive results only if the athlete is able to negotiate gates and terrain with fluidity and rhythm of movement. A large portion of this flow and rhythm results when skiers learn to project and move their center of mass forward and down the hill throughout the turn. Because slalom, like all skiing, is a progression, skiers can master this concept only after they've mastered all skills prior to this point. The next step is to orchestrate movement control, timing, and anticipation in a perfect blend of skills. Technology is always changing and the best in the world will continue to adapt and evolve to capitalize on these innovations. It is our job to stay grounded in the basics while constantly learning and adapting our methodology to keep pace and be the best we can be.