

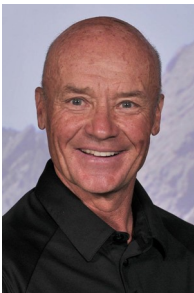
SKI RCING

Top Story

Dual Parallel Paneled Slalom



By Richard Rokos
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- Now in his 28th season as the University of Colorado's head coach and his 31st overall year at the school, Richard Rokos has guided his team to eight NCAA titles and his Buffaloes have won individual titles (42 total) in 18 different years.

Dual Paneled Slalom

University of Colorado coach Richard Rokos has pioneered a form of dual format racing that is specifically aimed at developing skills while maximizing participation, competition and fun.

This year CU hosted the first NCAA parallel racing event at Lake Eldora, with great success. He has also run several junior parallel events that are efficient and inclusive, using a format that assures equal participation and a meritocracy where the fastest racer wins. Here is what he has to say on this past season's parallel races, and his recommendations for how the format can best serve skier development. Below is his complete set of rules for junior and collegiate level Parallel Paneled Slalom

A TRIUMPHANT RETURN

It was great to see the "Dual" as a part of US Alpine Championship in Waterville Valley. It was well organized, staffed and delivered. The rule used was a combination of old Pro-Tour with some modifications to accommodate the field and conditions. Thank you and cheers to all involved!

The only question remaining is where do we go with the format and is it beneficial to athletes/parents?

The technical benefit for the development of athletes is without question. It's like going to the chiropractor for spinal and pelvis adjustments. Body position, execution of the turn and even tactical perception of the ski line promotes development as long as classical execution of the turn is used.

TO CROSS BLOCK OR NOT TO CROSS BLOCK

The majority of skiers in the round of 16 skied a classical execution without taking a stack of panels to the finish (winner Garret Driller was among them). Being equally fast or faster the "clean" technique, which promotes and reinforces solid skiing fundamentals, was a pleasure to watch. For a number of reasons (beyond the obvious of technique), we should move away from cross blocking. One reason is safety. Having panels at eye level is necessary to give cross blockers a better chance to clean the gate out of the way but at the same time there is a moment of brief blindness. It is just a matter of time before someone would wrap the face in the panel and suddenly be skiing 50 mph, blind. With cross blocking the ski line is lot straighter above the gate and low (late) below the gate, against what we preach daily. As Peter Dodge mentioned "the gate

should not be an obstacle but a guidance of the turn.” I am in full consensus with “old pro” (ski around the gate vs through it) style. The clean turn rocks. Also, cross block technique requires one gate worker per one gate. Organizers in Waterville had 50 course workers available, and the few holds for course maintenance did not disrupt the flow of the race. That said, I cannot imagine doing it with less than 50 course workers unless we force a classical execution of the turn.

THE LIMITATIONS OF ELIMINATION

The elimination race format has one big hole: the race day is very short for young and developing racers. I felt genuinely sorry for the 55 guys and 37 girls who did not qualify. Thirty-two lucky ones had blast, while the rest took one or two warm up runs, one 25-second qualification run and were out for the rest of the day. Some joined the cheering crowd in the finish line, some went indoors to play with their phones and some went back to bed. More than half of the field was bound for that destiny. It was rewarding to the winners, and brutal to the rest. Hard core fans can call that survival of fittest, but knowing ahead of the time that more than half the field would turn the athletic portion of the day into an entirely social event, is tough.

PRO FORMAT VS DEVELOPMENT FORMAT

The format used in Waterville was the classic Pro-Tour blueprint— a different animal created for older, world class, sponsored athletes with motivation in the form of prize money and sponsorship match-ups. In fact the sponsors were supporting everyone and some of those guys became a very rich. It was a fantastic show and made a great way of living for the reasonable group of skiers. I just hope we could resurrect it to the same level again. Alpine skiing deserves it and thank you to Ed Rogers, John Jacobs, Kevin Clark and the rest of those involved in resurrection process.

It is obvious the current format serves elite competition well, like Olympics and Championships where a full scale of events use a venue where the spectators sponsors and media gather, and a lot of money flows. At these events you can

have an army of course workers and option for extra perks like snowmobile shuttles to the top, etc.

THE COLLEGE DUAL PROPOSAL

To be more efficient, affordable and maintain the excitement and benefit for races below the Championship level, I would propose a use of “Collegiate Dual slalom rules” with an equal opportunity for all in the race to the very end. No DQ’s and DNF’s and a full field of 120 racers can make eight race runs in 4 hours. In this format, there is no strategy other than be fastest time between the start and the finish. Each new heat ranking gives you the opponent closest to your ability, so, unlike the Pro Format you can not accidentally come against a weak opponent. The winner is the fastest athlete, and even if your opponent goes down, you cannot relax because you are racing against the clock.

Fundamentally, it is what ski racing is about. You against the clock. However, having an opponent next to you gives you instant (on course) feedback, which is not bad motivation to move faster.

PENALTIES AND REDEMPTION

In this format, racers that DNF or DSQ on a run will still have a chance to win the race, with an applicable penalty based on his/her opponent’s time. Two seconds is a lot on a 25 second run but can and has been done. In a four heat (8 run) race the best racer can gap .15sec/run. If you get more than one penalty you can still measure yourself against the “victims” of the same handicap. The last pair in the race would be the two fastest athletes.

LOGISTICS

There are also no gate keepers, a small crew of course workers (6-8), and no need for a snowmobile shuttle, because having the whole field of racers in the race for the whole day eliminates the fast delivery to the start needed in elimination format. Slow or long lifts serve just fine.

START GATES ARE NO BARRIER TO ENTRY

There is even an affordable way to make start gates. The most primitive and accessible system is two Browers, or one with the dual option. Each start is assembled with two 4x4s and one 2x4, a spring-loaded door hinge, a piece of wire and a switch and—the most expensive piece—a 12 volt electro magnet available on Amazon for \$20 a pair (an old motorcycle battery laying in every garage would also do.) In total, the set- up costs \$31.50. You Velcro the wand to 2x4 and go! It is not a drop down or horse gate but it installs in minutes serves the purpose and satisfies the rule requirement of “anything guaranteeing a simultaneous opening.” Obviously with slightly higher budget you can make a “Cadillac”. The sky is the limit.

WRAP UP

The bottom line is that Dual made a huge leap this season and it is clear the racers, spectators and coaches love it. Let’s make sure the opportunity is there for a broad field where all racers and parents feel equally rewarded.

Source:

[Ski Racing](#)