

CU Ski Team Debuts New Dual Slalom Format



University of Colorado photo

The University of Colorado ski team made history January 11th, 2019 when the Buffs introduce a new race format during their annual Colorado NCAA Invitational, held at Eldora.

The event was a prelude to what CU coach Richard Rokos hopes will become an addition to the format of the NCAA Championships. For years, NCAA competition has included only two alpine events (slalom and giant slalom).

"It exciting," Rokos says. "Throughout the whole training and practicing process, I realized this was one of the best development tools for junior skiers. It requires good technique. The biggest problem with young skiers these days is they go too early to single gates. They start cross blocking and get rotating, and this format eliminates that because cross blocking is not allowed."

Dual slaloms are contested throughout most of the competitive ski world, but the proposed NCAA format will have one significant difference — it will not be an "elimination" format. Instead, every racer will get four guaranteed runs, thereby making it possible to include each competitor in the scoring format.

The format can be easily adapted for club and high school races. The number of heats (1 - 4) can vary based on the number of athletes, the allotted time available, or both. Each heat consists of 2 runs by each athlete (a run on the red course and a run on the blue course). In the final analysis, the sum total of the 1-2-3-4 heats (two, four, six, eight runs) the skier with the fastest composite time of all runs will then be the individual winner.

Racers who don't finish or have an otherwise incomplete run incur a two-second penalty added to their opponent's time and are able to remain in the competition. You can stay in the race and be part of it instead of sitting down and just watching.

The format is especially exciting for fans. They are able to watch every run from beginning to end in a "stadium" setting on a 200-meter course. The format provides non-stop action as the shorter course can allow four racers to start in the span of roughly a minute.

The whole thing is fun because it's two people skiing next to each other and the turnaround is very quick. There will always be something going on. Parents and fans love it because it's much closer and the kids are doing something they can see from top to bottom. You have a full view of the action and you are not missing a thing." It's an appealing format. You see who is getting ahead, who is taking the lead the whole way."

The format encourages good technique as well. As mentioned before, cross blocking — a slalom technique in which a skier takes such a tight line that he is able to simply block the slalom gate with their outside hand — is not allowed.

Growing up in Norway and skiing in events throughout Europe, Colorado senior Nora Christensen is no stranger to dual slalom competitions.

"I've been a part of dual slalom events before and it's super fun because it's more fun for the people that come to watch," Christensen said. "You can actually see the whole course. There's two skiers racing against each other, so it's more excitement throughout the race. It's super fun."



University of Colorado senior Nora Christensen

It's an exciting format for the skiers, too, Christensen said, adding that the adrenaline is ramped up with another skier on the course. "It's completely different from a normal race," she said. "That's such a different mindset when you go out at the start gate because you have to focus yourself and at the same time there is another person skiing next to you." "At the same time, it's also taking down the pressure a little bit. It's more about having fun and binging out the fun in ski racing. That's the really positive aspect of this type of racing."

References:

Neill Woelk

Brian Howell, BuffZone