



PARENTING FOR SUCCESS

Winter Sport Parent Information

ELITE DEVELOPMENT STUDY

How many days to train on snow? What role do parents play? When is the right time to specialize? These are questions we ask about development from the early ages to the elite level. In 2015, then USSA Board Member and alpine parent Dan Leever examined the development pathways in alpine ski racing 'to identify the motives, processes, people, cultures that drive elite performance from junior levels to World Cup competition'. The goal of the resulting '*Leever Athlete Development Study*' was to deliver best-practices, themes and findings that can be used by coaches, organizations, athletes and parents for informed decision-making for athlete development.

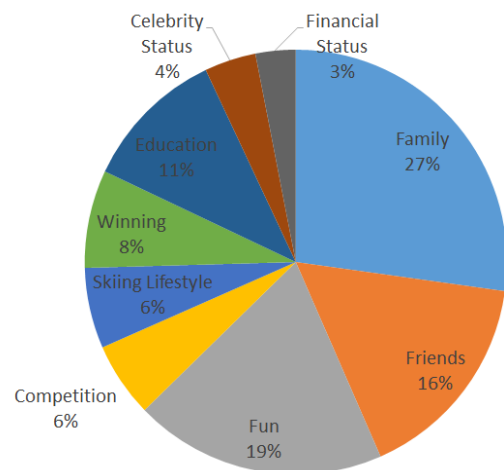
Dan interviewed current and former head coaches and sport science leaders from North America and Europe, asking the same questions and looking for commonalities in the responses. In addition, a survey was conducted among the top World Cup athletes, reaching 127 athletes in all, including 25 top 15 and 50 top 30 World Cup athletes from all four disciplines, asking 37 questions focused on factors of development from early to elite stages. The key findings of the study provide a unique insight into the developmental pathways of the world's elite ski racers; insights which are informative for parents looking for answers about the how, when and why of ski racing development. Here are the key findings of the study and a discussion of how we can implement these findings here in Steamboat.

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1. **Ski racing is an inherently rewarding sport:** The best skiers are not driven by winning, celebrity or status, but by *fun, the intrinsic value of sport and the challenge/love of competition.*

What were the most important priorities in your life prior to becoming a professional?



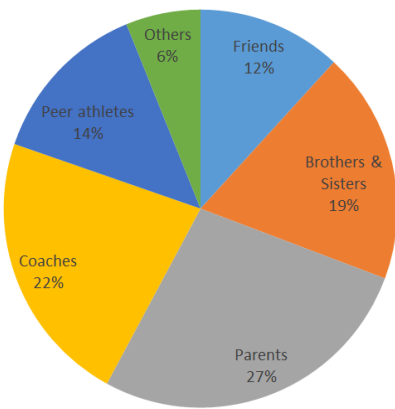
2. **Ski racing is a skill sport:**
 - 77% were skiing by age 3, 88% racing by age 8
 - The average age for achieving first World Cup points is 18 for women and 21 for men
 - Volume is critical at a young age: 79% grew up within one hour of skiing. At U10 they were skiing 90 days/year, and 150 days at U18
3. **Parents are the biggest influencers:**
 - 89% of athlete's families were fans of ski racing
 - 85% of parents were involved when athletes decided to pursue the next level
 - Parents and family members are the biggest influencers in early ski racing careers



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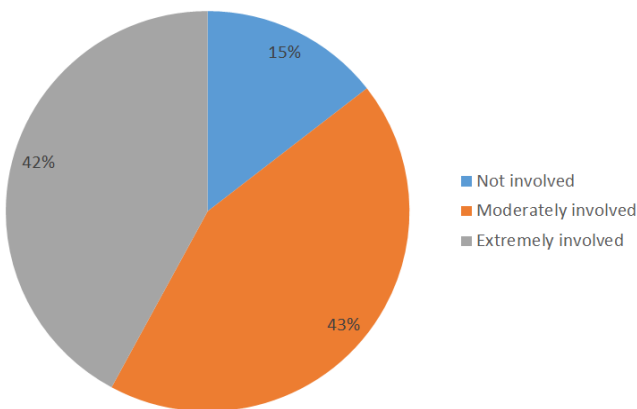
Who were the most important influencers in your early skiing career?



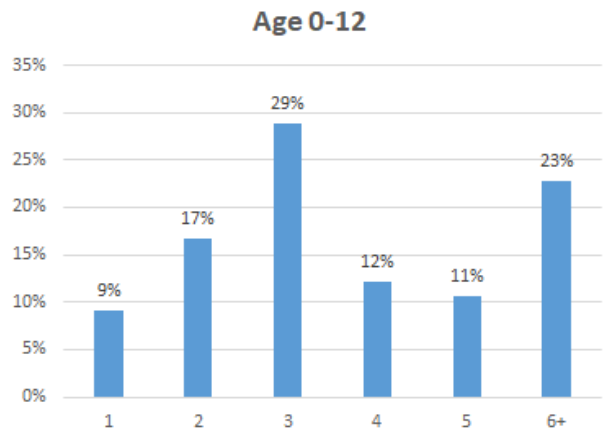
4. Concentration, not specialization:

- A high volume of specific training is necessary to reach the highest levels of the sport
- Concentrate: *When there is snow on the ground, ski. During the off season, play multiple sports*
- 83% responded that their families encouraged multiple sports
- 70% played 2-4 sports at age 13-15
- By age 16, 83% identified as a ski racer above all else
- No mindless skiing. Focused, concentrated skiing

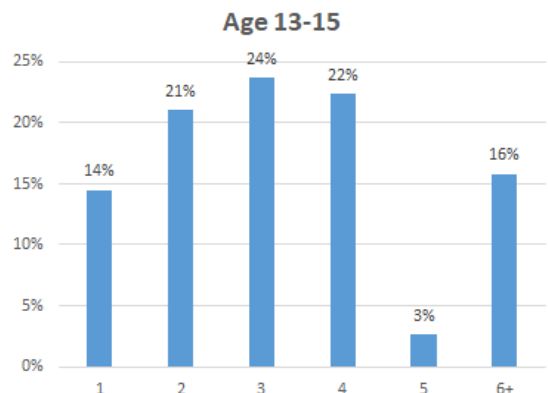
How involved were your parents?



Number of sports regularly practiced at younger ages



Number of sports regularly practiced at younger ages...



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How can we implement the lessons of the Leever Study here at the SSWSC? I spoke with Dan Leever this fall and asked him for additional thoughts from the three years since this study was completed and what he felt the most important lessons for Steamboat are for parents of all snowsport athletes, not just alpine.

1. Develop the Steamboat 'Micro Culture'. An advantage that European countries have over the US is the strength of their snowsport cultures, giving athletes tremendous support to pursue their dreams. But when Dan thinks about Steamboat, he emphasized to me that Steamboat 'has to be way up there' on the list of best places in the world to develop as a snowsport athlete and that we don't need to look outside the Steamboat community to achieve success. Our engaged community that cares about snowsports, the flexibility and cooperation of our school system and the way we celebrate our snowsport heroes, and the development of quality training environments are all examples of our strong micro culture. Looking ahead, we can preserve and enhance our micro culture by educating and engaging our parents, implementing best practices among our coaching staff, developing creative collaboration with our schools, and recruiting the resources in our community in support of our kids. Hosting World Cup watch parties for parents, athletes and coaches would be a fun way to advance our culture this season.

2. Steamboat's long season and easy access to training provide world class opportunities for a high volume of on snow training. Howelsen Hill and Steamboat Resort, both with night skiing and reliable snow (by international standards), give athletes quick access to high quality training environments. In-town skiing, a flexible school schedule and reliable snow create a unique combination few places in the world can match. Could we do more to leverage our advantages? Perhaps by taking advantage of our long spring season to continue to train here in Colorado after the competitive season has ended?

3. Structured Programming. One of the primary learnings of the Leever Study is the importance of structured, high quality coaching beginning at a young age and continuing to the elite level. The SSWSC today provides committed, high quality coaching beginning at U6 and across a range of disciplines that cannot be matched anywhere in the US. Our crossover programs combining multiple disciplines, such as U10 Ski Meisters, bring best practices for athlete development into action and provide a range of foundational ski skills necessary for progression to the elite level. A focus on disciplined practice, with lots of variety, including skiing and riding in poor conditions and free skiing/riding with a purpose are areas we can emphasize and build upon. The study also stresses that while structured on snow training for developing athletes during the winter should be emphasized, today's best skiers continued to play multiple sports through their teenage years. Are we making the most of our opportunities to provide these varied multisport opportunities?

Overall, Dan emphasized that the US will succeed in snowsports *community by community*, not through a national initiative or top-down approach. Our goals at the SSWSC are multi-faceted and not limited to international success, but leveraging the strengths of our local environment, sports culture and community to provide the best developmental opportunities for our kids is at the core of our mission.

To read the Leever Athlete Development Study for yourself, check it out [HERE](#).

