



# PARENTING FOR SUCCESS

Winter Sport Parent Information

## RELATIVE AGE EFFECT

Reality or myth? Your child's December birthday is a curse on their skiing or riding future.

Well, it depends whether your child has short-term or long-term aspirations. Birthdays do matter, and when we see this in sport we refer to it as the relative age effect. Consider that for ten year olds based on competition age, the athlete born January 1 has had ten percent more life experience, time to grow, and time to practice compared with the athlete born December 31. That's a significant advantage, and it should be no surprise that athletes with earlier birthdays on average would fare better. Fortunately, the impact of birthdays on results in skiing and snowboarding only shows up in the junior years. (In other sports, like hockey, the impact can go all the way to the NHL.)

Looking at alpine as an example, I examined fifteen years of results across the U.S. at the junior championships, looking at the podium finishers and their birth dates. I found that 73% of skiers who earned a medal were born in the first half of the year at the U14 age level. 68% were born January-June at the U16 level. But at the 2014 Winter Olympics, let's just say that if you were attending birthday parties for every alpine skier who finished in the top 30, you'd have two more gifts to buy in the second half of the year. If you only care to celebrate with the medalists, you'll have just as much cake before June 30 as you will after. This is consistent over other years as well and on the World Cup. The early birthday advantage has completely disappeared.

From my research into nordic, freestyle and snowboarding, similar trends exist, though not as pronounced at the junior ages.

What does this tell us? For one, it is another important example of how competition outcomes for juniors are made up of many factors – some that are out of our children's control – so be careful about making too big of a deal about our children's results. Understanding the long-term evening out of results can help children with late birthdays, who may be struggling and losing confidence in their ability when in fact they are progressing well. These children keep a positive outlook and remain focused on their own personal improvement. The resilience learned can turn into an advantage later in their career. Birthdays can have a real impact in sport, but a late birthday is not a curse. It is an opportunity to overcome a short-term challenge that will leave our children better prepared for the future.



Steamboat's own Taylor Gold hasn't let his late November birthday keep him down.

**When our children find something in common with a person they admire, it can often help motivate them to follow in their footsteps. Here are some remarkable skiers and snowboarders whose late birthdays didn't keep them from having success. Help your child see a connection with these athletes to help them realize that they can overcome any short-term challenges with their own late birthday.**

### LATE BIRTHDAY CLUB:

- Kikkan Randall (XC) – December 31
- Jaelin Kauf (Moguls) – September 26
- Lindsey Vonn (Alpine) – October 18
- Bode Miller (Alpine) – October 12
- Gus Kenworthy (Freeskiing) – October 1
- Joss Christensen (Freeskiing) – December 20
- Taylor Gold (Snowboard) – November 17
- Todd Lodwick (Nordic combined) – November 21
- Lindsay Van (Ski jumping) – November 27
- Jett Seymour (Alpine) – November 5



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