

Masters Working Committee Report to USSA

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Following the National Masters Committee meetings in March 2012, a Working Committee was appointed by Walt Evans to explore ways in which USSA might help spur the growth of masters membership. We met in Park City in March, and then, through a constant dialogue spanning six weeks, identified four areas that USSA could consider to not only stem the decline in masters membership, but stimulate growth over the next few years. Although each specific proposal has an individual author, all committee members were actively involved, and we have reached a consensus on all points.

We identified the following areas for USSA to consider: Promotion, Clinics, a Temporary License subsidy program, and an experimental membership structure that we would like to see implemented in Central on a trial basis. We are confident that these initiatives could dramatically stimulate membership in masters ski racing, although the individual Divisions will play a key role in bringing these concepts to fruition.

Also included are some suggestions regarding data analysis, which detail how we can best measure progress in accomplishing our goals of expanding masters membership.

One issue that we did not specifically address is the establishment of a National Point System. We were in agreement, however, that this would be of benefit to masters racing.

1. PROMOTION – Areas in which USSA can help promote Masters Ski Racing:

BROCHURE: Extolling the virtues of USSA and Masters Ski Racing, to be handed out wherever we come into contact with skiers/potential racers (e.g. Ski Shows, Race Registrations, at social events, on chair lifts)

Discussion: A USSA brochure tailored to the Masters program, to hand out at the various regional Ski Shows and at our races, would give potential members something to hold and consider and follow up with, rather than just a memory of a nice conversation with a friendly person. It would be a quick, one stop reference to how to get started with Masters. It would include information about what USSA is, what Masters is, how to join, and a catalogue of the benefits of membership, both tangible and intangible.

- Purpose:
 - Exposure
 - To promote brand recognition
 - To help reach our market, spreading information about USSA and Masters Racing
 - To facilitate access
 - To provide something to hand to prospective racers which will look professional and exciting
 - To be used by both individual Divisions and in national out-reaches to e.g. NASTAR, college students
- Should include:
 - Information about USSA, similar to a condensed version of the text under “About” USSA and on the website, but which expressly includes Masters, combined with the text under “About” Alpine;
 - Information about Masters in particular, such as a condensed version of the text under Masters on the website;

- Identification of the benefits of being a member of USSA – could start with the intangibles (like being part of and supporting the Team and the athletes etc.) but should include the tangible benefits like discounts from sponsors; 2 for 1 ticket deals; shop discounts; additional insurance; exposure to world-class venues with FIS standard safety protection in place; nationalized scoring system. We had also talked about a few things like tickets to the Beaver Creek DH for masters.
- Logos and pictures;
- Information about how to join USSA and your local division; and
- Space for each division to add a small amount of division specific information, specifically website and contact info
- Should be circulated to the working group for comment prior to finalizing
- Ideally a national sponsor would be solicited to cover printing costs
- Should be available in digital form for divisions and national coordinator to use in digital promotional efforts

POSTER: Akin to the posters that used to be distributed in the fall to all members, to be posted in locations frequented by skiers/potential racers, e.g. clubs, ski shops, area watering holes etc.

- Purpose:
 - Exposure
 - To promote brand recognition
 - To facilitate access
- Should include:
 - A background racing photo of a Team member;
 - Each division's schedule and website/contact info;
 - Logo's
 - If no national sponsor, an object for a local sponsor, should one be found
- Ideally a national sponsor would be solicited to cover printing costs (and appear on Poster);
- If no national sponsor, to be distributed to each division in digital form to be printed locally

SMALL HANDOUTS: Pins, Patches, Stickers – To hand out to potential racers primarily at ski shows but also at other opportunities where we have significant interaction with the skiing/potential racing public, a souvenir by which to be remembered

- Purpose:
 - Exposure
 - To promote brand recognition
 - To remind the recipient about Masters
- Should include: Anything with USSA/Masters logo that can fit into a pocket

2. 2012-13 USSA Masters "GIVE IT A TRY" Race Clinics

Purpose:

- Increase awareness and recruit new participants to masters racing in the United States.
- Offer an enjoyable free or reasonably priced day (\$40 + discount life ticket) on the hill for all participants.
- Introduce participants to masters-level ski racing, e.g. types of courses, gear considerations, how to enter races, travel/training tips – in a friendly, encouraging environment.
- Promote local masters ski racing opportunities in host division, at host ski areas and with host ski clubs.

Target:

- Adults, age 18+, with previous USSA and/or college-level ski racing experience, who are interested in returning to competition after a hiatus.
- Adults, age 18+, with previous ski racing experience at a NASTAR or "town league" level who are interested in expanding their opportunities for competition and improving their ability in the sport.
- Adults, age 18+, with no previous ski racing experience, who are interested in learning to race for the fun and challenge of competition, to help them better understand the sport, and/or to improve their overall skiing ability.

Program Description:

- One-day event hosted and co-coordinated by 4X Masters World Champion, 72X U.S. Alpine Masters Champion and former US Ski Team Member Lisa Densmore.
- Additional staff includes one recent US Ski Team alumnus/ae and local USSCA-certified coaches familiar with masters ski racing. Recommended coach-racer ratio is 1:8.
- Participants are divided into training groups based on ability level. Lisa and the US Ski Team alum rotate from group to group during the on-snow portion of the event.
- Each participating USSA division appoints a program coordinator. The division coordinator and Lisa act as liaisons for the program with the host ski area(s), ski club(s), and other program partners. Clinics should be sited where there is active beer or corporate leagues and near masters core population areas. Central and/or Eastern divisions would be recommended.
- Participants can sign up through the division's program coordinator or through the host ski club.

- The program includes indoor presentations on basic ski racing tactics and strategies, gear, ski tuning(?), and USSA masters membership benefits; morning and afternoon instruction; ski demos if a ski partner is available; and an apres-ski party with door prizes from even sponsors and a poster-signing by Lisa and the US Ski Team alum.
- On-snow sessions focus only on GS or split the day with GS (morning) and slalom (afternoon), depending on the interests, available gear and ability level of participants.
- Maximum of 40 participants per day.

Program Partners

- **USSA:** Provides marketing support, national sponsor recruitment, US Ski Team alumnus/ae at events; liability insurance.
- **Regional USSA masters program(s):** Provides outreach/recruitment of participants; local program coordinator; regional sponsor recruitment, site selection; food and beverage (cost would be covered by participant fee and program sponsors).
- **Ski equipment manufacturer(s) or retailer:** Provides demo skis and other ski racing gear, e.g., ski poles for GS and SL, helmets for GS and SL, speed suits, shin guards, and door prizes.
- **Host ski area(s):** Provides hill space; space in base lodge for off-snow portion of program if no ski club building; discounted lift tickets for participants; lift tickets and lodging(?) for Lisa and US Ski Team alumnus/ae.
- **Host ski club(s):** Provides local sponsor recruitment, gates, drills, additional coaches; lodging(?) for Lisa and US Ski Team alumnus/ae.

Costs to USSA

- Coaching fees and travel expenses for Lisa Densmore and US Ski Team alumnus/ae.
- Liability insurance

Schedule:

- 8:00AM Check-in at the specified meeting area.
- 8:30AM "Basic Ski Racing" presentation by Lisa.
- 9:00AM Break into groups. Proceed to demo area for skis.
- 9:30AM Morning on-snow: GS.
- 12:00PM Group lunch (everyone buys their own). "Ski Racing Strategies and Tactics" presentation by Lisa and US Ski Team alum.
- 1:00PM Afternoon on-snow: More GS (add delay gate, how to start and finish faster) or slalom. Video of afternoon session.
- 3:30PM All demo skis returned to demo area. End of ski day.
- 4:00PM "Get Involved with USSA Masters" presentation by Lisa or division coordinator. Apres-ski party. Afternoon video played casual analysis and for entertainment. Door prizes. Poster-signing.
- 5:00PM Departure.

3. Proposal for USSA and local divisions to subsidize Temp Licenses

Why?

To attract new racers to masters racing. There are several cost related barriers to getting started in Masters racing. Some of these represent extra costs vs. NASTAR or beer leagues.

Analysis of which costs are similar and which are unique in NASTAR / beer leagues vs. Masters racing.

- SIMILAR COSTS: *Equipment costs.*
 - For NASTAR and beer league racers, racers have already come to grips with some equipment costs. They may not have all the specialized equipment to compete in all events, but at least they have skis that will work for GS as an entry event.
- SIMILAR COSTS: *Race fees / lift ticket.*
 - Our race fees alone (\$25-\$40/race) are higher than daily NASTAR (\$10) or beer league (\$10-20/race), but include access to a discount lift pass, usually 40-50% off regular lift ticket prices. Therefore it puts our costs on par with NASTAR/beer leagues.
 - Please note that for season pass holders, our race fees will turn into a unique cost since they are higher than NASTAR/beer leagues.
- UNIQUE COSTS: *USSA license.*
 - The USSA license is an extra fee that is not present in NASTAR or beer leagues.
 - Temp licenses are \$25 / weekend, regular license is \$110.

How may subsidizing a temp license help?

- Our challenge is to show the new racers what they will get for adding the unique cost identified above.
- The advantages of a USSA masters event are:
 - Race courses that are longer and more varied than a NASTAR type set
 - Post race party with food / drinks, and season-long camaraderie.
 - New event such as slalom or super-G that NASTAR or beer leagues don't offer.
- Once the similar costs are factored in, then removing the cost of the USSA license, by providing a no-cost temp license will let a prospective new racer try the product for no additional cost vs. a NASTAR day.
- This program may be particularly appealing for Season Pass holders, a group known to be avid skiers. If they have a pass at a ski area hosting a Masters race, a complimentary USSA license would allow them to try a Masters race for only the costs of race fee.

How the comp license will work?

- USSA provides up to 15 complimentary temp licenses per division.

- A new racer is eligible for only ONE temp license provided by USSA in a race season.
- The division has the option to subsidize ONE additional license for that same racer for an additional weekend by using division funds, OR if the division has used its allocation of complimentary temp licenses provided by USSA, it may provide additional temp licenses at its own cost.
- If a new racer decides to purchase a regular USSA license after using a USSA complimentary temp license, we propose that they be given a \$25 discount off the regular license fee.
 - This will create an additional incentive for the racer to purchase a USSA license after trying a free temp license.

Rules and guidelines

- Only ONE temp license per racer per race season from USSA.
 - An individual racer will not be eligible to get more than one temp license from USSA in a single race season.
- Only ONE additional temp license from host division.
 - At the end of the season, each division that has provided an additional temp licenses beyond the 15 allocated by USSA can send USSA a SINGLE check to cover the costs of the additional licenses.
 - An individual racer will not be eligible to receive more than ONE complimentary temp license provided by the host division in a single race season.

The goal of this financial incentive:

- We hope that providing up to 2 temp licenses to an individual will allow enough of a “try before you buy” opportunity that will let new racers fully experience masters racing, and learn the advantages we offer over NASTAR or beer leagues.

4. MEMBERSHIP SIMPLIFICATION (Another way of doing business. To be considered for Central Division.)

We need to make participation easier for racers, particularly as it relates to cost as this is consistently stated as a “barrier to entry”. Although Temp memberships are a great concept and work well when promoted, they rarely seem to result in a conversion to Full Members. This is because there is a cost “hump” that must be overcome at some point due to the upgrade cost. The goal, then, is to make the cost structure of being a member more “linear”, in that the transition to a full member does not incur a one-time cost which is perceived as large, nor does it result in significantly more cost in the longer term.

What is it?

The best way to describe the concept is to have a “pay as you go” and a “pay up front” pricing structure. If a member chooses to “pay as they go”, they will be paying less now, but will ultimately pay more in the long run. This method will be attractive to prospective members who are unfamiliar with the program and individuals who race less frequently. Members who know they will race often will opt for the “pay up front” option as it offers a decent discount over the other option. This is a very common membership cost model

(often called a subscription model) from health clubs to web sites (such as UniversalSports) to magazine subscriptions.

In a nutshell:

- All members are Full members, but simply pay in a different manner and have differing dates of expiration for their membership.
- “Pay up front” Membership - this membership type is completely unchanged from what it is today. If purchased by October 15, it is discounted to \$110, and is valid through the following summer (what is the exact end date? Does anyone know?)
 - Divisions could charge their own up-front Membership charge as they always have (e.g. \$30)
- “Pay as you go” Membership - a member can come to a race and sign up just as they would using a Temp license, but would fill out the standard Membership form. They would pay \$25 (?) for a 31-day “monthly” membership. The membership would expire, if not renewed, at the same amount after 31 days. They could - at any time - apply all paid monthly subscription fees to a full membership. The monthly rate should not be too low as to remove value from the up-front payment, but not too high to retain too much of a “cost hump”.
 - Divisions could optionally charge a monthly charge on top of this (e.g. \$10), or a one-time charge
 - Some races/services could optionally be excluded from monthly membership such as training, video of runs, certain races such as Nationals and Regionals, coaching, etc.
- Based on what I see from Masters schedules, there are probably 5 full months per racing season (mid-November to mid-April). If someone paid monthly, their total cost would be \$175 (assuming a \$35 monthly fee). This compares favorably to the “up-front” total membership cost of \$140, but not so much cheaper that people would feel cheated if they used a monthly membership for the whole season (with the added benefit of having the option to cancel at any time if they don’t like the racing!)

What is the Benefit?

There are countless benefits:

- The cost structure is much more linear for the “pay as you go” members. Currently, to be able to race in a second weekend after already utilizing a Temp, a member must pay \$85 on top of other race fees. Even with adding a 2nd Temp, this cost is still \$60 on top of race fees on the 3rd weekend to upgrade.
- Much easier for prospective members to understand - there is no confusion about precisely what a Temp license covers.
- Prospective members have comfort knowing that if they don’t like racing with us, they can cancel at any time
- There is no limit to the number of races one can attend as long as their membership is active
- It could potentially result in more net revenue for USSA, but this is unknown as we do not currently track Temp license usage in a detailed enough manner

What is the Cost?

- If USSA was on board with this idea, there would need to be significant changes to USSA online registration and other processes and procedures. Because of this, it is unlikely that USSA will change, at least in the near-term. The burden would therefore be

on the Divisions to play the intermediary and submit forms and payment to USSA via the existing method, yet take in revenue via this new method. Although the current process is already complex, this could add a bit more complexity to it in terms of bookkeeping.

- Divisions would need to track expiration dates for its monthly members, rather than simply tracking who has used a temp and if they can't use one again.
- Since it is unknown how changing this model could affect participation, Divisions could be "stuck with the bill" in the event that the new model results in a net loss of membership revenue. I think this is unlikely, but still worth mentioning as a risk.

How would we recommend doing it?

Assuming USSA does not wish to change its model, Divisions would need to take on the responsibility to convert as stated above.

- We at the Divisional level would eliminate the concept of a "Temp" member entirely.
- Any existing proposals to USSA headquarters for changes to the Temp license structure could still be implemented
- SkiRaceReg, as the member registration system for most Divisions, could be modified with existing capability to allow for these two pricing plans.
 - Optionally, we could consult with SkiRaceReg to develop a method for the monthly membership option to automatically renew on the 32nd day unless the member cancels. This cost could be shared across participating Divisions.
- Divisions would then perform their own accounting when generating Results Packets and provide documentation, a manifest and payment in-line with USSA's expectations.
- Divisions would be responsible for tracking activity relative to the two pricing models to allow us to analyze if it is generating increased recruitment and utilization
 - An increase in # Starts per Member, tracked year-over-year, would indicate increased Utilization
 - Positive growth (# Members gained - # Members lost) could indicate success with recruitment especially if these new members are using the monthly model
- If, over time, the Divisions can prove this pricing model is effective, we could perhaps convince USSA to change its process. We would need to back this up with data.
- We could optionally have a Division prototype the idea, then report back to USSA. However, it may take several seasons to generate enough data to evaluate the effectiveness of the model. Central may be applying this cost structure in 2013.

5. STANDARD METRICS (Standards for evaluation)

Currently at each National Committee meeting, we look at a trend of membership year-over-year by Age Class and Division. If our ultimate goal is to increase participation, we should elaborate on this to help us understand where we are succeeding and not succeeding. A prerequisite for this, however, is that we change the paradigm to focus on "participants", not just full members. This would include racers who participate using Temp licenses. A "participant" has a License Type defined as follows and is applied at

the end of the season:

- Full: they signed up as a Full member; they never used a Temp
- Temp: they only used a Temp license to race
- Upgrade: they started as a Temp but Upgraded to a Full license

Existing metrics:

- Number of Full Members by Division
- Number of Full Members by Age Class

New metrics:

- Number of Participants by Division
- Number of Participants by Age Class
- Number of Participants by License Type

With the addition of License Type, we can now measure:

- # of Returning Participants by License Type - (e.g. Renewing Full members, Renewing Temp members, etc)
 - Are participants constantly using Temps to race with us? How many actually do this?
 - Do previous year upgrades or temps actually turn into Full members?
- # of Lost Participants by License Type - this can help us answer lots of questions including:
 - What % of Temps do not return?
 - How many Full members did we lose?
- # New Participants by License Type - a distinct count of members new to Masters ("new" could be defined as any person not having raced with the Division for 3 years or more)

These metrics will be very helpful in helping us to understand what strategies we are employing are actually working. Other metrics could also be applied and could be intersected with License Type:

- Number of Starts by Discipline
- Average # Starts per Participant
- Average # Starts by License Type

From this, we can also measure the level of "utilization" which is a measure of how often participants race with Masters. If we can successfully recruit more members, we need to make sure they utilize us as well. This may not be needed today, but it is likely the next question to ask once we successfully "stop the bleeding" in terms of recruitment.

How would we implement this?

We would require each Division, in an annual report, to report on specific above metrics and present at the National Committee meeting. They could add narrative regarding reasons for increases and decreases, and future plans to capitalize on - or reverse - certain trends.