Special Olympics
British Columbia

Snowshoeing Skills Book
Updated August 2012

Coaching Principles

Special Olympics British Columbia

STEPS IN TEACHING A DRILL

1. Introduce
2. Demonstrate
3. Explain
4. Organize
5. Execute
6. Correct
7. Practice

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Drills should relate specifically to what you are teaching.
- Athletes should be made aware of how drills relate to the sport.
- Drills should only be a part of your practice.
- Drills should be introduced at a slow pace and then gradually increased
- Drills should be accommodated for fitness, age and abilities.
- Drills should move from simple to complex. First perform drills that will help keep the interest of athletes.
- Drills should relate to the system of play that the athletes will use.
- Perform a variety of drills to prevent monotony.
- As fatigue sets in, technique deteriorates so provide frequent rest periods.

EXECUTION PRINCIPLES

- Review the drill procedure before practice so you know how it works.
- When introducing a new drill, walk a group of athletes through it so others can see how it is performed.
- Avoid talking too much, get the athletes performing, they will learn by doing.
- When errors occur, the drill should be stopped momentarily to correct errors.
- Praise those athletes doing the drill well and encourage those having difficulty.
- If equipment is necessary, ensure it is set up before so that progression from one drill to the next can progress smoothly.

Snowshoe Warm Up

The purpose of a snowshoe warm up is really to get the legs warm up and to increase the distance of the stride. Follow these stretches with approximately 5-10 min of stretching.

Ideas:

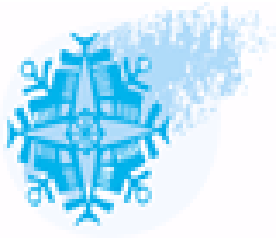
- Begin with a quick paced walk for one lap.
- Concentrate on lengthening the stride and using the large muscle groups.

- Step it up to a slow jog around one lap.
- Work on having calm breathing and keeping the chest elevated.

- Play "red light" "green light". On the "red light," athletes walk along the ground taking long strides. On the "green light", athletes jog around the track waiting to hear the words "red light".

- Have athletes jog with their knees high, emphasize keeping the chest lifted and the head forward.
- Next athletes jog with the back of the hands covering their bottoms. The goal is to try and kick the palms of their hands with their heels.

- Work with athletes through a series of stretches that will target the upper and lower legs, the back and the chest



Basic Motor Skills

Include basic motor skill development in every practice. It helps to reinforce the movements used in the sport and to improve these fundamental skills. Pick 2-3 of these ideas for each practice.

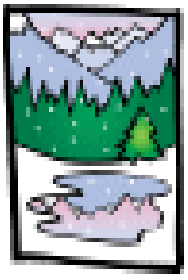
Balance:
- Balance on one foot for 10 seconds, then the other.
- Close eyes and lift one foot, lift the other.
- Shift weight back and forth between right and left foot.

Walking:
- Walking up the hill.
- Walking over mounds of snow, benches, etc….
- Walk in slow motion, walk very fast.
- Walk along a defined line, try with your eyes closed

Running:
- Forwards, sideways, uphill, downhill.

Side stepping:
- Side stepping with straight skis.
- Side stepping with skis in a "V"

Jumping:
- Jump on one foot, then the other.
- Switch back and forth.
- Jump up and spread legs out, jump and bring legs back in.



Sport Specific Skills

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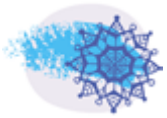
Recovering from a fall:

- If athlete is on the side, the first step is to get snowshoes parallel together.
- Push body up with arm closest to the ground and get into a kneeling position.
- With both hands in front, push up off the ground to stand on their feet.

Tackling different types of terrain/elevation:

- It's important that athletes are comfortable handling different grades and terrain.
- To negotiate a spot where there is a change from a flat surface to lower or higher surfaces, he athlete should approach the change sideways.
- Position snowshoes parallel to the change in terrain.
- Then use the snowshoe closest to the edge to step down or up.
- Position the snowshoe to leave enough room for the other snowshoe.
- Tackling uneven terrain by stepping across a gap could result in breaking the snowshoe underneath the foot as there is no support where the snowshoe bridges the gap.



Turning:

- If you are making a right turn, take smaller steps with your right foot and slightly larger steps with your left foot and start angling to the right.
- Similarly, if you are turning to the left, take smaller steps with your left foot and slightly larger steps with your right foot and start angling to the left.
- For sharper turns, use this same process yet more rapidly.
- If you have to turn on the spot, lift the foot with the heel of the snowshoe touching the ground and rotate your foot in the opposite direction.
- Lift the other foot, rotate it and carry on in the new direction.

Sport Specific Skills

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Running:

- The most important thing about snowshoe running is the idea of keeping the heels to the ground and lifting the toes up!
- Proper placement of the foot on snow is important. Feet should be slightly outwards and forward so as to not clip their ankles or step on the other foot.
- When starting a race, athletes require a fast pickup of leg movement yet not too much drive as to make them slip or fall.
- When running longer distances, athletes require lower leg action, medium strides and vigorous arms in order to conserve energy.
- During sprinting, it is vital for athletes to run with their chest up and remain tall in order to achieve the greatest distance in their strides.
- Pushing the toe downward and backwards helps propels the athlete forward.
- Strong arm movements; 90 degree angle at the elbow. Forceful arms equals forceful legs.
- Aim to improve the stride as much as possible.
    - Sprinting = stride length x stride frequency.
    - Stride length is improved with flexibility
    - Stride frequency is improved with building strength

Sport Specific Skills

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Starts:

Starts are an area that, with proper training, can provide a significant advantage to athletes. Most athletes stand erect at the start and when the race begins, the feet come out from under the body and then the body has to catch up. This does not allow for good momentum. Emphasis should be placed on having good traction off the start.

To determine which leg is the starting leg, have athletes stand on a line with both feet together.

Things to remember:

- Come from behind and gently push the athlete forward….whichever leg they put out first is their starting leg!
- Feel like you are "falling" forward so that the first steps are being taken with momentum.
- Think powerful drive from the front leg, fast first stride, active arm movement and a forward lean.
- Place stronger leg in the front, toes behind the starting line.
- Back leg is 1 to 1 ½ foot length behind the front leg.
- Weight on the front leg, the knee bent nearly 90 degrees.
- At the takeoff, keep feet in line with the body, do not fly out from underneath.
- The first 3 steps of a takeoff are crucial as they depict the pace of the race and can allow athletes to gain proper momentum.

Sport Specific Skills

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Racing:
Depending on the length of the race, athletes will run at different paces.
Very much like in track, the shorter the race, the more athletes will sprint causing the tail of the snowshoe to come up high and hit his/her bottom.
If the race is longer (800 meters), the athlete will run at a slower pace and keep the snowshoe low and parallel to the ground.

Uphill:
Although athletes will not race uphill, during training and in practices, it's helpful (and fun) to expose athletes to as many different types of situations as possible.

There are two ways of travelling up a hill:
Kick Stepping: (for light and fluffy snow)

- Push the toe of the shoe vertically into the snowpack.
- Press down to pack it enough to support body weight.
- Shift all weight to that foot and then repeat the process with the next foot.

Herringbone: (for harder packed snow)

- Place snowshoe at a 45 degree angle.
- This provides more surface to push from.
- Use the edge of the snowshoe to propel forward.
- Place all body weight to that foot and lift the other snowshoe up.
- Repeat process moving up the hill.

Fitness and Games

There are a variety of games that can be used to help increase the fitness levels of the athletes as well as teach the different skills used in cross-country skiing. Spend 10 min at the end of each practice having fun!

Relay ideas: With two teams of racers.

- Run an outlined loop.
- Run a distance, fall, recover and run back to send off next team member.
- Run for 20 steps, get down on all fours for 10 steps, get back up and run for 20 steps.
- Bring items like balls, bean bags etc… and incorporate them into the relay race.
- Zigzags across terrain. Do touch downs half way, continue running.

Shark and Fish:

- Have athletes (fish) line up on the edge of field/open area
- One athlete (shark) in the middle of the area.
- All the fish have to try and cross the ocean without being tagged by the shark.
- When fish is tagged, they join and become a shark.
- Continue until there is only one fish left.

Snow Write:

- Write names in the snow using the snowshoes.

Stomp:

- Each athlete gets a designated equal area.
- On "go", athletes race to try and stomp down all the snow in that space.

Human Slalom:

- Line everyone up.
- First snowshoer runs out about 10 m and stops.
- Next athlete runs around the first and stops 10 m further down.
- Continue this until the whole group has gone.
- See how far you can travel like this.

Practice Plan

Unstructured Free Play (10 min)

Prior to the practice athletes who have arrived early should be encouraged to participate in free play activities.

Warm Up (10-12 min)

Warm up should start with a light jog to get the athletes' heart pumping. Athletes should then gather to stretch, starting slowly and gradually involving all the muscles and body parts to be utilized in the exercise related instruction phase of the practice.

Basic Motor Skills (15-20 min)

Basic Motor Skills are defined as the very simplest movement skills (i.e. running, kicking, jumping, throwing, catching, etc). This phase starts with known content and progresses to the application of skill(s) resembling the game/competition, allowing athletes to fine-tune these basic skills to enhance the acquisition of sport skills. It should focus on one specific skill at a time. The combination of 2 or more skills will be encompassed in the next section.

Sport Specific Skills (15-20 min)

During this phase the athletes will combine several basic motor skills and practice the skills as demonstrated during the instruction. Emphasis should be placed on creating competition-like conditions (through game-like drills) during this phase.

Fitness (12-20 min)

This phase involved physical conditioning activities that are specific to the fitness needs of your sport. This is done by setting continual work/pause ratios (through circuits) for your athletes that stress the correct energy system(s). Fitness encompasses cardio, muscular strength, muscular endurance and flexibility.

Simulated Game (10-15 min; for team sports only)

During this phase athletes will compete in a competition-like setting to incorporate all the skills they have learned as well as the rules of the sport. Infractions should be called so that the athletes learn all aspects of the sport.

Cool Down (5-8 min)

Don't forget this portion. Cool downs are a vital part of a practice as they allow the heart rate to return to normal. Stretching should also be included at this time to prevent sore muscles the next day.

Evaluation/Tips (5-10 min)

Evaluation is used to assess the effectiveness of specific activities or the total practice. It is helpful to spend a few minutes with your athletes at the end of a practice to get some feedback on the practice session. It can take the form of a 5 minute wrap session about things that went well and things that the athletes and/or coaches need to work on. The topics discussed can be built into the next week's practice. All around training should also encompass nutrition and/or mental training so it is important to discuss these items with your athletes as well.

NOTE: for additional resources, go to www.specialolympics.bc.ca and click on Resources