GrassRoots – The Evolution Of A Ski League

The Metroplex Ski Club added fun to its 2012 season with the addition of a weekly ski league for skiers of all abilities

Story and Photography by **Mark Cohen**

Spring 2012. It was the start of a new season – my 10th season with The Metroplex Ski Club of Fort Worth, Texas, and my second year serving as president. It was shaping up to be a busy year with a jump restoration project in addition to our standard yearly events. I thought to myself that we had not put on a ski league in several seasons, why not try it again?

In early March I sent an e-mail to the general membership gauging interest for a ski league – eight weeks worth of a clinic/league night in which slalom skiers come try their hand at a slalom course for the first time, or get coached to an improved personal best. Skiers from all abilities were welcome.

Plan

When: Wednesday Evenings, June 13-Aug. 8
Time: Immediately after work (5 p.m.)
Place: Marine Creek Lake
Boats: '91 Prostar 190 with Stargazer, '93 Prostar 205 with PP 6.3
Participants: 6+
Cost: $160 for 2 sets x 8 weeks
Boat Rotation: Mark Cohen 4 weeks, Scott Smith 4 weeks
Coach: Kyle Mayer
Scorekeeper/Safety Coordinator: Tacey Virgoe

Once the club approved a mid-week night for the ski league, we had exclusive use of the lake for that night for eight weeks. Next, we had to figure out cost structure, boat schedule and scoring.

Scorecard: A scorecard was kept for all eight weeks, making note of the best pass per set. Our structure was relaxed, not running the league in an official tournament style. Skiers were guaranteed six passes through the course, limited to two falls, for time sake. Once a pass was completed, the boat speed increased 2 miles per hour. Once a pass was run at maximum speed, we shortened the rope. We also had green buoys placed to mark the mini course for those beginners not able to run the red buoys of the regular course.

Communication: Communication was the key to our success. Results were posted each week, adding hype and fun to it for the entire club. I would use different subject lines to draw the reader. I posted positive things about each skier's progress, and an occasional recommendation as to where they could improve and referring to them by the given nicknames. By the end of the fourth week of e-mails, results postings, story line, trash talking and ski league coaching videos, the interest was at an all-time high. One member e-mailed to let me know "Wade Cox" was coming to town to challenge his friend in the league, who became known as "Andy Mapple." One member began calling himself "Chris Parrish" and I dubbed another member "the Young Jedi." Week five's e-mail with scorecard sealed the deal and we had skiers join us week-to-week. Three new ski leaguers joined us by week seven and we were not even able to provide two sets per person as we ran out of daylight.

Ski league staff included Kyle Mayer (coach), Mark Cohen (club president), **Scott Smith** (club vice president) **and Tacey Virgoe** (safety coordinator).

Coaching: We also provided real-time on-site coaching with video. Each week, club member Kyle Mayer, who has been a national competitor, rode in the boat as the rope handler and coach. His observations and recommended changes improved skiers from one pass to another. Additionally, another unexpected surprise, one of our members brought out an iPad loaded with freeze frame and slow-motion applications, which served up to analyze ski form mistakes frame-by-frame. The response to both forms of coaching was great.

Cost Structure: I set up the cost structure to make it worthwhile for a boat owner to come out with their boat, not incurring any gas expenses and to give something back to the club as far as a small profit. For eight weeks, skiers paid $160 for two sets per week, or $10/set. Any skiers showing up to the ski league that had not paid for all eight weeks would be pulled with time allowing after the prepaid skiers got their two sets. Out of each set I decided to give the boat owner $7 to cover the gasoline, and I decided to give $3 to the club as its profit. The accounting became a small headache because I offered make-up sets for excused absences. Unused

All ski league members received a flex-fit custom embroidered and personalized MSC ski league ball cap.

Ron "Wade Cox" Reiling works his way through the slalom course.

set monies were donated back to the club at $10 per set. At the end of the day, with detailed record keeping and the scorecard, approximately 106 sets were skied, and we took in a total of just over $1,100. After paying out roughly $700 for gas, we still managed to provide about $400 to the club.

Added Secret Bonus: As a special show of appreciation to the dedicated (prepaid) leaguers, Kyle and I worked on a side project to design what I called the "exclusive 2012 limited edition flex-fit custom embroidered and personalized MSC ski league ball cap." We wanted to stay with the basic tribal logo that we had on the 2010-2011 T-shirts, but make it specific to Ski League 2012, and then add the classic touch of the person's name on the back of the cap. I contacted several design shops, many had minimum orders, and the cost didn't seem like it was going to work. I finally found a company who would do it all with no minimum orders – Quackerbox Creations in Dallas, Texas. I was prepared to pay for these caps out of my own pocket, which was geared toward building the interest for 2013, but at the end of the day, I came out slightly ahead on the gas and managed to offset a portion of the cost. The participants were very happy with the caps.

At the beginning of the eight weeks, we had four skiers drop out. By the end of the eight weeks, we had daily trash-talking e-mails for the week leading up to ski league night; we had people wanting to be coached; and we had a waiting list of skiers ready to ski with us and compete against themselves and others – even head-to-head.

We had skiers that had never shortened the rope from 15 feet off, and with the practice, the coaching, and competitive environment, were able to flourish into running a personal best of 3-1/2 buoys at 32 feet off and wanting to enter Class C tournaments. We bonded as friends, as skiers and competitors, and there was not one person at the end of eight weeks that was not sad that it was over for the year. This is how we shaped it, and it was a great success in my opinion – we all have the SL 2012 ball caps and improved PBs to prove it.

The Metroplex Ski Club, based in Fort Worth, Texas, is a social and family-oriented club whose goal is to promote and build further interest in all disciplines of water sports for all ages and abilities; with an emphasis on water safety and good sportsmanship through social, community and charitable events. For membership information, please visit *metroplexskiclub.com.*