



Cover Story

The Summer-to-Fall 2020 Pep Talk

From AXCS National Director **J.D. Downing.**

Despite all that 2020 has thrown at all of us, we've made it this far. It's been tough at times to be sure, but we are all making it.

With as downright crazy our lives have become since February, it's worth taking a few minutes once and awhile to reflect on the simple stuff. Let's face it, our XC ski goals and dreams have had to take a back seat to some more basic daily objectives for quite a spell with no clear end date as yet in sight. This fall it's going to be essential to make the time to appreciate a great view, a nice sunset, a beautiful forest, our family, our friends.

Hopefully most of you found a way to stay fit this spring and summer. It'd be even better if you found a safely distanced way to get out and about with at least a few of your fitness buddies every once and awhile. With all the trials and tribulations this year, the value of health and fitness has arguably never been so widely treasured as right here and right now. Even more so the value of being able to share the joys of an active life with others.

Ideally the paranoia and uncertainty of what was safe or prudent in terms of fitness early in this surreal journey has moved on to a more sustainable rhythm. Hopefully you now have a new array of locations, workouts, and safe fitness partners each week. Although we probably won't feel completely "back in the saddle" until the overall global equation is truly into a lasting green-for-go territory, it's not insignificant to appreciate how quickly we've all adapted.

Although XC skiing has not likely been foremost on most minds over the spring and summer, the wheels of the ski world have kept turning and will

continue to do so right until snowflakes start coming down again. This issue contains a few items to help your planning process for the next season (and hopefully the season to follow). We'll have even more help to offer in a planned AXCS Fall Digest tentatively targeted for November.

Yes, the cynic will say that 2020 is bound to offer late arriving snow on top of whatever other misadventures lie out there as the final act to this saga. But this is a pep talk, so we are going to focus on the positive and say only that snow will eventually come and we'll close out the year with at least some time out doing our favorite winter sport.

We don't yet know how our ski areas are going to operate. The conversations thus far have focused on all the topics you can imagine — and some you may not have thought of, but would instantly come to mind the first day out on the trails. But one way or another, we should believe it'll happen.

It is also valid to be looking ahead right now and wonder how or if our favorite XC ski events will take place this winter. It is absolutely certain that every XC ski event director in the world is wondering the exact same thing. There are or soon will be "A", "B", and "C" plans. Some stuff is likely going to

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Photo: Alley Loop Nordic Marathon



From Canada

Masters World Cup 2022 Canmore, Alberta -- Canada

We waited as long as possible. We planned until there were no more plans to put on the board. We surveyed skiers around the world. We had (virtual) meeting after meeting. Ultimately the most likely finally became official.

The 2021 Masters World Cup slated for Canmore, Canada is now officially postponed until March 3-11, 2022.

Those dates will precisely match the calendar position in the original 2021 plan so the MWC will again be scheduled a full week after the American Birkebeiner weekend. The race schedule remains exactly as it was for the original 2021 plan. As of right now, no changes are planned by the local Organizing Committee to the race courses. The amazing scenery and nearby attractions of Canmore will remain just as enticing and attractive. As much as anything in this bizarre moment in our lives, this is hitting a pause button for (hopefully) just a year.

The decision process to postpone or move forward originally (as of Spring 2020) hinged on the pandemic situation in Alberta and what restrictions might be in play for major events in that province — as well as what implications the pandemic would have on participation given the global design of the

MWC and the obvious travel implications for skiers near and far. As with so many areas of life, the hope was that the matrix would start to show more positive signs by now. We all know that has not happened.

In the past month or so, it also became progressively clear to everyone in the MWC Crisis Management Team that we were staring at far too much uncertainty until the end of 2020 to give organizers or participants the confidence needed to fully buy into a Worlds happening in March 2021. Not only do we still have a situation where USA skiers cannot cross the Canadian border (at least easily), but Canadians themselves are still hesitant to commit to traveling large domestic distances especially with the health unknowns this winter. With up to two thirds of the anticipated Canmore MWC field depending on North American skiers, this was not looking good.

As you can imagine, skiers overseas reported the same trepidation and uncertainty especially given they would be looking at long trans-oceanic flights. Not a single WMA National Director reported full confidence that the same number of skiers would travel in March 2021 as in a year without the threats posed by a pandemic.

So organizationally the Canmore OC was looking at an event that would likely struggle to hit several hundred skiers while also looking at Alberta health and safety requirements that would greatly change how the MWC would be allowed to happen. That is all assuming no provincial or local virus outbreak took place that could derail every plan overnight.

Ultimately it's pretty easy to see where the decision process crystalized in everyone's mind and here we are.



So what's next?

Well, for starters the WMA has no plans to organize an alternative event for the 2020/2021 season. The same exact issues facing the Canmore OC are manifesting themselves around the world and there is little reason to expect any other alt.MWC event plan would be any more viable than what was considered for Canmore. This pandemic is proving to be a stubborn adversary as we all have learned the hard way. Our best path forward when it comes to the return of international athletic events ultimately lies in the parade of pending treatments and vaccines winding their way through trial phases around the world at this very moment. But the timing of the parade is (at best) going to have the biggest impact after Winter 20/21 is in the books. So WMA is simply sitting out the season.

The good news is that both the Canmore OC and WMA have been able to tap into a considerable network of global experts and the consensus out of our queries is that a much brighter outlook is very possible by exactly this time in 2021. A realistic scenario is that the pandemic has settled into a more sustainable realm by August 2021 with even better outcomes forecast for the following six months hence (out to March 2022, which will be two full years after the virus really started being recognized for what it is within the Northern Hemisphere. We'll now use September 1, 2021 as a confirmation date for the postponed Canmore MWC2022 event. The local OC and WMA hope another year will give the world enough time to have far higher confidence in winter events and international travel as of the 2021/2022 ski season.

If all looks good a year from now (or even before that point), you'll all get the "game on" signal from AXCS and everyone can get busy with hotel reservations, flights, etc..

Everything else in the original MWC2021-now-2022 plan will remain in place. AXCS will still leave travel arrangements to individual USA skiers (although will be encouraged to travel with your ski buddies

for extra fun — hopefully all vaccinated by then!). The 2022 AXCS National Masters will still be overlaid on the "home" North American-hosted MWC. So we'll again have two special USA-only award ceremonies to recognize the top three USA performances in every individual age category race.

The incredibly easy and fast access won't change (by air to Calgary, nearly every AXCS member is a short air journey away with at most 2 flights — many western skiers will be able to easily drive). Loads of lodging options are available in Canmore and you can bet post-pandemic there will be plenty of great values to be found in all types of lodging options.

Yes, it's undeniably going to be hard waiting another year for this special MWC to finally take place. But it will be well worth it to once again form up for a massive Team USA in a beautiful spot on this side of the Atlantic to celebrate (and it will indeed be a celebration folks!) good health and lifelong athletic participation.

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For MWC2022 event updates:

www.mwc2022.com

(official event info)

+

xcskiworld.com

(official Team USA info)



National Masters 2021?

Thoughts & Input Wanted

With the postponement of the 2021 Masters World Cup in Canmore/CAN to March 2022, AXCS now has a question mark on what to do about any type of National Masters for 2021. As is the traditional plan whenever the MWC is held in North America, AXCS simply overlays that year's National Masters on the MWC races so the top three Americans finishing any given MWC race automatically are considered the NM "podium" for that race.

So with the Canmore MWC postponement official, we now know that the NM2022 will be held in conjunction with the MWC2022 in Canmore — as long as all goes well with the pandemic over the coming year. But that leaves an NM hole in the calendar for Winter 2021.

Typically this would be an item brought by the AXCS Office to the AXCS Board for discussion. But there has and remains enough uncertainty over both the national and international events calendar, there really has not been a plausible chance for the AXCS Office to craft options to bring to the AXCS Board.

That's where this Digest issue comes in. AXCS would like to run some of the known and unknown items by members and hear from you if you have strong thoughts in any particular direction.

Here's some of the guiding factors and thinking as of late August on the NM topic in no particular order:

1.) Issues with a normal overlay NM on a selected ASM weekend

This is our "normal" plan for the National Masters and it generally works well for all involved. AXCS members and other masters can target a given

ASM marathon weekend with usually a couple events featured as "official" races for different age/gender categories. The ASM marathon organizers aren't asked to do anything special so it's easy to be the host with the bonus of free promotion nationwide and usually picking up as many as an extra 100 skiers that otherwise probably wouldn't do that particular marathon that year.

A big functional problem for 2021 is that AXCS has no guarantee that any given ASM Series event will happen this winter. The virus equation is very likely to remain uneven and unpredictable for months to come. So there's no way to hedge towards one section of the country over another for better odds. It'd be a true roll of the dice.

For certain what AXCS does not want to do is encourage even a few dozen members to make travel plans for such-and-such ASM weekend and then have to unwind those plans months later. We'd just be adding noise to what is already a really confusing and chaotic winter.

Finally, arguably the biggest issue is whether it would be appropriate for AXCS to encourage nationwide winter travel if the pandemic does not take a remarkable turn for the better by the end of the year. It cannot be ignored that a large percentage of our demographic would be a higher risk group with COVID-19. It is also undeniable that the normal cold/flu season that is coming on top of the pandemic leaves a ton of questions up in the air (literally).

2.) Issues with going virtual

It has already been brought up to the AXCS Office that we could do a virtual NM. This would obviously

eliminate the travel conundrum and also removes the issue of skiers making travel plans only to have to pull back as the pandemic twists and turns.

The big snag with going virtual with something like an NM is how do we compare performances? A side concern is that some skiers may not be interested in any virtual racing.

The easiest part would be for AXCS to “name” a given ASM race as the NM host for 2021. For sake of argument, let’s use the Birkie since it’s the biggest fish out there and it’d be awfully hard for AXCS to use the Birkie as a normal NM due to its massive size.

If any race in America is motivated to make it happen somehow in the middle of the pandemic it’s going to be the Birkie. Right now the organizers have plans from A to Z prepared. But reality says that no one knows — organizers, AXCS, the state of Wisconsin, skiers, you name it — what’s going to prove viable come late February. We’ve seen this play out for half a year thus far. The best laid plans are only worth what happens with the pandemic.

So going in to the winter we wouldn’t know if many hundreds or thousands of masters were actually going to be able to ski on the Birkie course in late February or if everyone (whether in the midwest or across the country) were going to truly have to mimic skiing the Birkie with a full virtual race. That complicates the NM equation quite a bit.



Photo: Alley Loop Nordic Marathon

The other part of the equation is that skiing isn’t an easily comparable activity especially on a long distance route. If I live near a frozen lake and I can groom or get lucky with wind-packed snow, I can absolutely fly through a 50km skate or 55km classic compared to the normal roller coaster Birkie route. A western skier on a long snowmobile road with 1000 feet or more of net vertical loss could also crush a time not feasible doing the real deal. On the flip side, high altitude would be a direct disincentive for many skiers to join a virtual party as it just won’t be plausible to ski 50/55km as fast on rolling terrain.

3.) What about a virtual NM competition using a couple standardized 10km’s?

One potentially interesting idea is to designate a 10-14 day mid-winter period and say that the NM2021 is going to consist of skiers going out and self-timing themselves on either a 10km skate and/or 10km classic route and posting times on-line.

In many ways this would be similar to the annual Concept Two double pole challenge. But here you would lay out your route, go ski it, post the time in your age group, and see how it holds up.

The 10km distance is short enough that it’s plausible for a standard to be set for how much vertical is required on the “race course” used for each submission. That would take away the frozen lake option. We could also require that skiers use the same start and finish location so there is no way to game things with a net downhill course. Given the proliferation of GPS options out there, we could say that each submission needs to have some kind of map attached (Strava, Garmin, etc). Or we could just depend on everyone playing nice and keep it simple.

10km is better at mitigating high altitude impacts, but we could also have a way to mark times when done at certain elevations so everyone’s efforts were appreciated.

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American XC Skiers: Your Association Annual Summary

submitted by National Director J.D. Downing

Your nationwide masters XC ski association had a good membership year despite an awful end to the season.

2019/20 AXCS membership was generally flat by the end of the fiscal year (May 31). We were down a net 12 members from the same time in 2019 for a total of 705 entering Summer 2020. The key is now how many of our members (looking at YOU) needing to renew this fall will stick around for the coming years!

Financially the association is in a stable position. The summary (right column) shows a positive net on the year, the result of multiple factors converging the last fiscal year. The number of membership renewals completed in any given year dramatically impacts net inflows as does the success of the MWC trips. Although the MWC2020 trip ultimately was cancelled, AXCS was able to recover all costs on the year (as well as the vast majority of funds collected from our skiers that were then reimbursed to all of them!).

For the coming year, the Board has approved a typically conservative financial plan. The budget is built on 700 members as of May 31, 2021. The hope is that skiers will value membership information services even with events uncertain or postponed this season.

The internal fund dedicated to World Masters Association and future Masters World Cup expenses continues to be in excellent shape. This is important as there will be no input and only costs in this area until 2022.

The key challenges in coming years remain. We need help recruiting new and "younger" masters (ages 30-50 years). We also face an annual challenge in remaining relevant on a grassroots level with local clubs, events, and training groups.

As always, the very best recruiters...the very best advertisements...and the very best incentives to get more masters excited about AXCS are current members like you! Point folks to xcskiworld.com where they can join on-line in less than 5 minutes (with no added fees!).

Thank you for your help and see you out there!

19/20 AXCS Financial Summary

Inflows

Interest Earned	763.49
Membership Dues	28,868.50
Total MWC Trip Incoming	366,662.20
Public Contributions	4,082.34

Total Inflows	400,376.53
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Outflows

Administrative Services	(14,000.00)
Event Travel:	
Admin-Office	(61.50)
Admin-Services	(10,000.00)
Air Tickets	(59.33)
Entry Fees	(227.94)
Misc. Expenses	(674.83)
Lodging	(128,004.72)
MWC Trip Returns	(223,787.00)
Trip Insurance	(67.16)

Total Event Travel	(362,882.48)
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Internet Expenses	(830.34)
Office	(315.21)
Postage	(1,828.17)
Printing	(4,888.55)
Services	(2,167.65)
Taxes & Government Fees	(265.00)

Total Outflows	(387,177.40)
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Net Inflows/Outflows	+13,199.13
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Total MWC Trip Incoming inflows are significantly inflated due to roughly \$129,000 coming back to AXCS after the event cancellation that the association then refunded directly back to members.

4.) **The out-of-the-box idea: NM as a nationwide "ski across a state" challenge**

This idea ditches any virtual or in-person attempt to compare skiers in 2021 and instead takes the NM concept and encourages as many AXCS members as possible to take on the challenge of skiing the equivalent distance of crossing your entire state. So the "nationals" would be the geographic link for all of cross-country skiing across the USA.

Now since the dimensions of many states are huge, selection of the state you are aiming to "ski across" would make a huge difference. Skiing across the width equivalent of the island of Kauai, Hawaii is just 40km. But to do the state challenge in Oregon would involve either 580km or 640km of skiing. So depending on your goal, this could be a single day -- or a season-long aspirational challenge.

A big upside here is that it would give purpose and motivation to a season where so many uncertainties swirl. All with the upside of keeping variables within skier control. Even the reliability of snow wouldn't necessarily have to be a governing factor since folks could substitute roller skiing or other dryland activities to keep piling up the kilometers if snow dries up or is slow to arrive.

AXCS would be able to post the names and routes of those that accomplish the challenge on xcski-world.com. The association would have a hard time coming up with the budget for a really nice "prize", but it's entirely possible we could create at-cost rewards for those that want a memento. Otherwise there would be no need for any type of registration or fee other than being an AXCS member.

OK, those are the ideas kicking around the AXCS Office at this point. If any members have input, please feel free to email << jd@xcskiworld.com >> at your earliest convenience. Any type of NM plan would need to be put into motion by mid-October and announced in the Fall Digest issue so time is relatively short if we are going to do anything.

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work, other stuff may not. If there ever was a moment in time that every single skier needed to be flexible, creative, and supportive of the people and organizations willing to manage our XC ski fun and games — this is that moment.

We can also take comfort in a welcome surge of new skiers coming our way. Every outdoor retail and activity projection has XC skiing seeing the same boom as summer recreational activities have seen. Our sport has a lot of safe distance to offer. It is no bad thing that we are going to joined out in the woods by a whole heck of a lot of folks we have not seen before (or at least in a long while). The future of our sport has a tremendous opportunity if we can actually get some of these new folks out on groomed trails, get them in lessons (pretty much safely distanced by default most would say), and just put a little fire in their belly for more XC ski fun in years ahead.

The energy and excitement of new skiers may very well prove to be a key element in staying happy and sane amidst whatever is to come in our sport this winter. It is very possible that we are going to have to deal with interruptions to what we want to do on snow and with what we consider a normal winter. We can whine about it and throw ski wax at the wall. Or we can appreciate each day on snow, appreciate health, appreciate family/friends, appreciate life. And we can make a commitment to investing some time in sharing our love of XC skiing with others.

This fall is almost certainly going to be just as weird and wild as everything else in 2020. But we've all got some time to get fitter (or fit) in some of the best training weather of the year. We have limited control of all the things in the greater world that create stress and worry. But we can create moments of bliss getting outside and celebrating health. Make that your focus for right now.

-- End --