



From USA
**The 2022/23
 Season Re-cap**

Written by AXCS National Director J.D. Downing

Every year AXCS tries to offer a summary of the past winter's events in this re-cap. But this spring I'm going to shake things up a bit by also peeking ahead as to proposed changes with the AXCS National Masters and the overall American Ski Marathon Series potentially effective with the 23/24 season.

NM2023: Return To The Great White North

A picture perfect Tour of Anchorage weekend with plenty of snow on the ground provided an ideal setting for what might prove to be the final AXCS National Masters.

On Friday, March 3 a field of 60 skiers enjoyed an afternoon 10km classic jaunt around the Dick Mize trails at world-famous Kincaid Park to kick things off at the NM2023.

Then on Sunday, March 5 the Tour of Anchorage skate events took center stage with the NM2023 overlaid on normal Tour events with specific "official" distances assigned to each age/gender category.

Perfect ski conditions were enjoyed by all and AXCS extends a big thank you to the Nordic Ski Association of Anchorage for once again playing host to the AXCS National Masters.

A New "Nationals" Direction In the Future?

Since AXCS was founded in 1998, the question of what to do with the National Masters has been a perennial issue. Stand alone AXCS National Masters events from 1999-2007 were a mixed bag with some notable high points -- St Paul, Minnesota NM2000 being arguably the highest of the highs. But no matter how much energy, money, or fresh ideas went into stand alone NM events, the bottom line numbers were not pointing to a sustainable future.

The AXCS Board agreed effective with the NM2009 (2008 being a year with the NM automatically combined with the McCall, Idaho MWC2008 event) to use a new

format where an existing American Ski Marathon Series event would be the distance race and local organizers would then only be asked to put on one additional short race to comprise a NM long weekend.

From 2009 until 2023 we've used this format with modest success -- at least in terms of buy-in from marathon organizers (who is going to refuse free promotion to a national audience?). But the buy-in from skiers has honestly gone from tepid to barely a ripple over the years.

In the eyes of the AXCS Office, the time has come to accept that -- with the exception of North American-hosted Masters World Cup events -- it is always going to be futile trying to gather a truly representative cross-section of age group skiers from across the nation to gather in one spot for a legitimate "National Masters".

Why for? Simply because the XC nation is far too big geographically-speaking and we have far too many spotlight events on a regional level with captivated audiences.

The NM overlay format tried to leverage the fact that

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the true "National Masters" events have always been our biggest ski marathons. Sure the Birkie is the top of the heap with the deepest fields, but there will always be regional audiences that (cover your ears folks in the Midwest) literally could care less about the Birkie. For these folks, events like the Tour of Anchorage are the biggest show of the year.

But what we've seen since 2009 is that even overlaying on the most popular existing races isn't enough to really push a lot of folks out the door on the given overlay NM year. The promotional focus for sure can be helpful for the races long term. But we've not once been able to prove that an overlay NM has been the reason that hundreds of skiers traveled to a particular ASM event just because it was the AXCS National Masters host that year.

So what the AXCS Office will be preparing for the AXCS Board this spring is a proposal to retire the one event National Masters and instead create an annual system of shining a spotlight on a different trio of major event weekends every year -- one each in three mega-regions (West, Central, East).

This would not be intended as a series. If we can't get hundreds of skiers to travel for one long weekend each year, we certainly aren't going to have better luck with three weekends. The idea henceforth would be pure promotion for our most outstanding events and encouraging skiers spread your wings once and awhile to go try out something new.

We'll need a catchy name for this concept if the Board approves the change. So if anyone has an idea pop into your head, please send AXCS an email this spring.

ASM Series evolving to be American Ski Odyssey?

The 2023 ASM Series winter was outstanding with a perfect track record of events held even though a few (Traverse City and City of Lakes) faced some tricky conditions along the way.

Similar to a notion of a traditional National Masters format, the ASM Series may also need a reboot in 23/24 to better fit the realities of the coming decades.

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2023 U.S. Masters XC Team

The honorary 2023 U.S. Masters XC Ski Team was announced following the MWC2022 based on the results of top USA overall age/gender category performances in the best 2 of 2 races at the 2023 AXCS National Masters held in conjunction with the 2023 Tour of Anchorage weekend.

Congratulations to all these athletes on earning this special designation!

2023 U.S. Masters Women's Team

- F1 -- Christina Turman**
- F2 -- Krista Heeringa**
- F3 -- Lindsey Bengtson**
- F5 -- Kari Fritzel**
- F6 -- Germaine Thomas**
- F7 -- Karin Gillis**
- F8 -- Karen Loeffler**
- F9 -- Kathleen Todd**
- F10 -- Berit Flora**

2023 U.S. Masters Men's Team

- M3 -- Gavin Kentch**
- M4 -- Jeremy Littell**
- M5 -- Max Kaufman**
- M6 -- Jan Buron**
- M7 -- Richard Suddock**
- M8 -- Randal Bladel**
- M9 -- Guy Thibodeau**
- M10 -- John Wood**
- M11 -- Bob Gray**



Photo: MWC2016

Founded one year prior to AXCS out of the ashes of the former Great American Ski Chase, the ASM Series has always featured a who's-who of the USA's biggest and best ski marathons. But it has been many years since the ASM has really functioned as a "series" in any meaningful way. Really once organized factory teams slowly disappeared from the national XC ski scene a decade or so ago, interest amongst skiers, events, and sponsors for a nationwide marathon title chase evaporated as well.

As the longtime administrative sponsor of the ASM Series, AXCS continues to have a vested interest in cultivating a relationship with major distance events nationwide (afterall, there are still many thousands of skiers annually doing our biggest distance races that are not AXCS members!). But the ASM Series has been for many years growing stale as a marketing vehicle for both the major events and driving AXCS membership.

What the AXCS Office will be proposing to the AXCS Board this spring is that AXCS change the name of the ASM Series to the American Ski Odyssey -- and seek to expand the events that are invited to the party.

There are potentially a dozen or so events nationwide that we can add to the existing 16 ASM events to form a new Odyssey collection. Freed of any former notion of a "series" design, the new focus would be encouraging skiers nationwide to do as many Odyssey member events as possible over your lifetime (yes, identical to the Worldloppet passport program).

AXCS members are encouraged to put in your two cents with the AXCS Office on larger distance events nationwide that we should look at to be part of a potential American Ski Odyssey.

MWC2023: Seefeld Spring Spectacular

The 2023 Masters World Cup in Seefeld, Austria this past March will long be remembered for many distinctive features as well as meaningful achievements.

Proving that the real world most certainly can (and will continue to) impact masters athletics just as much as any other part of life, the MWC2023 marked the first European-hosted Worlds since 2019. This was also the longest pause between MWC events in Europe ever in the 44 year history of the Masters World Cup, due en-

tirely because of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was also only the second MWC event (following MWC2022) where two nations were banned from participating due to the war in Ukraine.

But the biggest real world impact of all related to the MWC2023 was all about colors. As in, the amount of green and brown one saw as you arrived in Seefeld as opposed to white. The large AXCS contingent had been tracking snow/weather patterns for months prior to arrival, so we all knew that much of Central Europe was struggling through a historically lean snow winter. But it's still a shock to the system to travel thousands of miles to a bucket list ski destination with gobs of recreational skiing normally available — and be limited to semi-glaciated manmade snow exclusively on just a few competition trails.

Now the ramifications of climate chaos are unfortunately nothing new to the global ski sport. The MWC2018 in Minneapolis was actually designed to be a "proof of concept" that the Masters World Cup can be (when needed) successfully held on relatively short loops of manmade snow with increased lap counts. Given an Opening Ceremony held just 36 hours from the official beginning of spring, the competition plan for the MWC2023 had been long-designed to be as snow resilient as possible.

But it's one thing to lay out a "bullet proof" event plan for low snow conditions. Yet something completely different to see the reality of what "low snow" can really mean when there's zero natural stuff around, average daytime high temperatures hit the 50s and 60s — but the MWC show must go on.

All that said, there was an awful lot to celebrate and/or admire about the MWC2023 completed-in-full against all the odds.

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Photo Credit: AXCS/MWC2023

Seven-for-seven races into the history books

Normally completing the full MWC race slate is an automatic thing. Since AXCS took over organizing MWC trips in 2004, there has never been a MWC race that was cancelled from a given year's schedule. But given the somewhat dire snow and weather scenario when we arrived in Seefeld, hitting the 7-for-7 mark in 2023 was darn near miraculous. Case in point — literally as USA's Sherry Dixon was completing her distance classic race on the last day of competition a peal of thunder signaled her arrival to the line. Within a couple hours rain began with the evening pour strong enough that any skiing the morning of our departure would have been highly questionable. Talk about your close calls!

Charley French redefines the words Master. Skier.

Any ski event that starts off with a really-for-real world record has something going on. At 96-years young, Charley French completed the 5km classic race on Day One of the MWC2023 and skied into the history books as the oldest ski competitor (any discipline) at a world championship event ever. Better still, Charley does all this while consistently flashing his trademark smile and good humor (habits every one of us should live, love, and learn!).

Team USA performed exceptionally well

We certainly had a big USA team with several "big names" in the mix, but Team USA saw quality result after result throughout the contingent which was great to see after a sizable gap in time since most folks had last competed in Europe. Also impressive was how the majority of Team USA was able to shrug off less-than-optimal ski conditions. There are a few folks that really

enjoy skiing classic or skate on the "edges" of melt/thaw mornings. Those edges being either the very hard snow (aka "icy") early morning or the slushy to very slushy late morning. But most of us will find only the "sweet spot" truly comfortable in spring conditions starting where just the top layer of the overnight firm early freeze softens and up to the point that the sun/temp rise softens enough that skis lose their fun running speed. Regardless of where Team USA folks raced (firm, sweet spot, slushy) over the week, there was an overall positive vibe that was fantastic to see.

Unrelenting Organizing Committee determination, & International cooperation.

With a 2-3 foot manmade base in place over all three competition loops, the MWC2023 had a distinctive advantage over many other events (domestic and international) that struggle with snow/weather woes. But no one should ever minimize the can-do attitude and determination of the Hirschau Organizing Committee and the local Seefeld venue staff.

WMA tends to be a pretty flexible organization in crisis situations, but pulling off the MWC2023 in the conditions Mother Nature dictated meant next-level flexibility. Given your's truly has the extra hat of WMA President to wear, it was wonderful to see the international community come together and ride things out as schedules were adjusted and races shuffled to optimize the best spring conditions. It would be truly lovely to think about the world cooperating so well away from skiing!

Another illness dragon to dance around

An unquestionable reality of international ski competition travel is the risk of illness derailing our fun and performance. Health realities are, quite honestly, the least enjoyable aspect of leading Team USA contingents simply because how powerless I feel as your National Director (aka temporary coach) after someone comes down with something.

AXCS has created robust good health protocols that are promoted for every trip and we actually had (based on percentages of total people we had in Seefeld) a relatively normal amount of illness at the MWC2023 itself (although the post-event numbers were higher than we'd like). But the new illness dragon in town is Covid and despite what we think is a wonderfully high percentage of skiers vaccinated/boosted, the "new bug"

Photo Credit: AXCS/MWC2023



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From Norway *It's All About Strength*

*The following is a translated and summarized version of an article from **Norwegian Ski Masters magazine**, No 2/2009.*

Translation and summary by Inge Scheve exclusively for the XC World Digest.

Former World-Cup and Norwegian national team racer turned ski marathon pro **Øystein Pettersen**, explains the hows and the whys about strength training, and shares his training tips for getting the most return on the time invested.

Why strength training?

Cross-country skiing is an endurance sport, and most skiers prefer to be outside. But if you want to ski fast or just stay fit, strength training does pay off. Strength training contributes to prevent injuries and helps you generate more power.

"How much strength training do I put in? Not a ton. I used to do very little, because I did so many hours of double-poling. But now that I'm training less, I will be doing more of that. And the older you get, the more important it is, because the strength sessions help maintain the neurological paths in your muscles, which al-

lows you to utilize more of your muscle fibers, and that's useful when you are double-poling.

So bottom line: How important is strength training for cross-country skiers? "It's not the MOST important part of the training program, but general strength workouts are efficient, and without some of it, I don't think you will reach your goals," Pettersen says.

Suspension training

Elite and full-time skiers spent hours on double-poling, both on roller skis and on snow, which is great as it provides both max strength and endurance strength. But most of us don't have that kind of time to put into training. So what are the most efficient alternatives? Pettersen spends a good chunk of his strength training using ropes and cords.

"Now that I don't train full time anymore, I don't double-pole nearly enough. But I make up for that by doing suspension training with ropes and straps quite a bit. Suspension training is a really good workout that targets all of your body, and it's super honest: If you lack strength in the small, stabilizing muscles, you won't be able to utilize the large, strong muscles you have. And that's why this kind of strength training is so important," Pettersen says.

These are Pettersen's top five suspension/TRX exercises. He says, "I do these a lot. There are tons of other ones out there too, but these are great to start with."

1. Superman: 1-minute effort, 4 sets
2. Side plank: 1-minute effort, 4 sets
3. Chest press: 1-minute effort, 4 sets
4. Stair climber: 1-minute effort, 4 sets
5. Back plank: 1-minute effort, 4 sets



Photo: Craftsbury Ski Marathon

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Core strength

"Power and strength is more and more important in modern cross-country skiing, and that's great. But having a really strong upper body is of no use unless you have the core strength required to resist the power you generate. Accordingly, you need to put in some time on core strength. These sessions are maybe not the most exciting ones you'll do in a week, but they are really important," Pettersen says.

These are Pettersen's top six core strength exercises.

1. Sit-ups with medicine ball: 15-45 repetitions, 3 sets
2. Hip thrusts with medicine ball: 10-20 repetitions, 3 sets
3. Pushups with medicine ball: 10-45 repetitions, 3 sets
4. Reverse plank with medicine ball on Bosu ball: 15-45 repetitions, 3 sets
5. Twist with medicine ball on Bosu ball: 15-45 repetitions, 3 sets
6. Kill the ball: 15-45 repetitions, 3 sets

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was present in Seefeld (mixed with more routine colds) just as it will likely be in all future travel any of us take winter or summer. The bad news about Covid is that it creates more of a dilemma versus a common cold in terms of when/how/where/why it's safe to race, be around others, travel home, etc.. But ironically, since we actually can test for and identify Covid, there is an upside (if looked at from an epidemiological perspective) in forcing people to be much more careful around others and make more prudent decisions about exposure. Someone fighting off a "normal head cold" often won't be as careful despite the fact that passing on a common cold can in theory derail ski plans for other athletes just as much as Covid.

In sum — it was yet another MWC adventure and we'll look forward to coming MWC years hoping for a lot more white, plus perfect health to go around — but the same type of outstanding race results!

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Recharge Your Batteries

*The following is a translated and summarized version of an article by **Odd Snerthammer**, P.T. for the Norwegian Biathlon team originally appearing in **Norsk SkiSport**, No. 4, 2006.*

*Translation and summary by **Inge Scheve** exclusively for the XC World Digest.*

There are several similarities between the body and a battery, which is important to consider at the start of a new season. The art is to retain the capacity of your batteries.

Optimal battery life depends on complete and regular charging. Sometimes you allow the battery to drain completely before recharging, but then it takes a little longer to reach full again. However, it's easy to say "I'll recharge later," but then you never do. Partially charged batteries have a tendency to drain on their own, and the body is a lot like that. Fully charged batteries depend on well-planned, solid and varied training over time. This will result in improved capacity.

A lot of master skiers take a long break after the season in April/May, then train a little during June and July, only to hit August with little or no base left. Avoid this trap, and use the summer to build a solid foundation for the tough fall training. Aim for high volume, varied activities and low intensity. Add more ski-specific activities toward the late summer and fall. German cross-country skiers have a ten-day training camp on bikes during the summer during which they build endurance and mentally recharge by doing something entirely different.

Training and companionship with athletes from other sports also add a new dimension to skiing. There is always something to learn from how other athletes train, and the diversity increases motivation and morale.

Utilize the longer days to build a solid foundation for more ski-specific training in the fall. There is no time to lose. The point is that the best always do a great job all the time. You need to do the same. Get the most out of each workout. Focus on the task at hand and see each workout as a possibility to improve.

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