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My favorite blog this week is a good read for parents and coaches!

from

VARA's Youth Coordinator Alex Krebs

Hello VARA Members!

After starting our season with hard work on skill development, many athletes are now heading in to the competition period. I have been traveling the state of Vermont visiting programs, attending numerous VARA Skill Assessment days, giving parent/coaches education presentations and working with numerous athletes. It is extremely exciting for me to watch our VARA athletes participating in the skills days and the level of skiing our athletes are displaying while performing these important fundamental building blocks. I have been rewarded by the experience of watching these athletes develop their skills over the past several years and it is evident their hard work and the VARA clubs' participation on skill focus is why VARA continues in our mission to "keep ski racing 1st in Vermont...and Vermont ski racers 1st in the world".



Below is an article written by a good friend of mine and former U.S. Ski Team member Edie Thys Morgan. Edie's perspective is one of the best voices in grounding all of us in our sport of ski racing. Whether it is in her book "Shut up and Ski" or on her blog www.racerex.com I always find her thoughts extremely compelling and I hope you will take a minute to read the latest article by Edie.

Sincerely,

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VARA VISION:

.... to keep ski racing 1st in Vermont..... and Vermont ski racers 1st in the world!

Timing Isn't Everything

by Edie

To all parents glued to their smart phones this weekend, here is some food for thought. This article ran recently in Ski Racing. Find it here or below in a slightly longer, less official looking version. Based on reports from the field, as the competition season begins in earnest this message bears repeating. And trust me, Live-Timing addicts, I fully understand the power of the rabbit hole. Ok-read on!

You've probably seen one by now: A picture of an intensely focused ski racer arcing a beautiful turn in front of a cluster of spectators, all of whom have their attention fixed not on the racer, but on a little, "smart" screen. They're not likely looking at a vital message from a loved one or a work emergency. No, they are probably looking at Live-Timing. Chances are also high that rather than results from a far-off race, they are checking the time of the kid just ahead of the kid they are all now ignoring.

As a coach, my usual position on race day is at the start, where everyone is full of optimism and energy and there is little time for anything but turning screws, cleaning boots and getting psyched. For those of us challenged at multi-tasking, this is a Live-Timing-free zone. As a parent I am beginning to see this enforced disconnect as a gift.

Don't get me wrong-I am a huge fan of Live-Timing. Having a universally accessible real time scoreboard is liberating. In the old days, "live timing" was someone's mother who shuffled between the timing shack and the scoreboard with the latest batch of times, then transcribed them, usually legibly, onto the board to break the suspense. Emotions ensued, the mother returned to the shack, the crowd dispersed, and the next wave of racers built in front of the board.

Live-Timing not only did away with that finish line ritual, but the God-like awareness ushered in a host of freedoms, like knowing exactly when to make your way to the course to race or to watch. It eliminated the need for detailed phone reports at the end of a long day, gave faraway family and friends a way to follow the races, and afforded absent parents a heads-up on the prevailing mood to expect upon homecoming. Heck, it even lifted the burden of performing basic math.

But as with many modern conveniences, this one offers up potential abuse, particularly by "Live-Timing parents," members of the parental species who have become overinvested in their children's results. Like many traits, overinvestment is often hard to recognize in oneself. It's like in the movies when Harry breaks the truth to Sally that she is in fact a high maintenance woman: "You're the worst kind; you're high maintenance but you think you're low maintenance." If you're not entirely sure whether you have been sucked down the rabbit hole, here are a few red flags:

- Do you call or text the coach the second DNF pops up next to your kid's name on Live-Timing?
- Have you ever referred to your kid's performance collectively, as in, "We need a good result today...We need to finish...We had a fast run"?
- Do you, after monitoring Live-Timing, call other parents to update them on their and your kid's results?
- Have you shed tears (not of joy) over your child's performance?
- Do you regularly crow about your child's results in social situations or (cringe) on a social network?
- Do you remind your child before races or runs of what result he/she has to achieve to qualify or succeed according to some external standard?

This is a partial list, but if you answered yes to most of these questions, you may be a

"Live-Timing" parent, and you may want to consider a step-down program. Why? First there is the practical consideration of lowering your own blood pressure, and that of anyone in close proximity. More important is the damaging effect that this hyper-awareness of results can have. While it may seem harmless, consider the message it sends to our kids when we tell them to have fun, relax and do their best, then have our eyes on the screen each run, calculating place or race points to determine how close each kid is to qualifying for the next competition.

Knowing our kids' results, often before they do, tempts us to put our own judgment on their performances before knowing how the kids feel about them. Maybe she was ok with the run until we walked up with a sad face to console her. Maybe he knows exactly where he had trouble and has a plan for the next run. Maybe the time was fast but she is nonetheless disappointed because she knows she held something back. Our kids have plenty to process without the addition of unsolicited parental input.

Admittedly, as a parent I do not always master the fine line between being supportive and being over-invested. Last year I was at a race away from my own team, without any coaching duties and with time to live-stalk on Live-Timing. I attempted to follow boys and girls races in two age groups at two separate mountains, while watching my own son in person at yet another mountain. At first I rationalized that I was merely checking up on my flock. But pretty soon there I was, like a rat in a Skinner Box, incessantly poking the refresh button for another hit of new information, cursing "that darned sun" while shielding my screen from its glare. Not surprisingly I was missing a lot of what was happening on the hill.

Quite simply, seeing the times is not the same as seeing the race. Live-Timing doesn't show the spectacular recoveries, the partial yet brilliant runs, the massive physical divergences amongst same-aged juniors, the skills and moves that are mere glimpses of the possibilities that lie ahead. We have to be on the hill, lift our eyes and put away our smart phones to see all those things.

I suspect most of us struggle to define the etiquette of managing all the information at our fingertips. (Ok, perhaps the parent making Facebook posts of screen shots from Live-Timing-with his kid atop the results-is unburdened by this struggle). My own sanctuary is imposed ignorance at the start. When a kids reports after his run, "I got a 53!" that number means absolutely nothing to me, so I am left asking the same questions the old style, race-watching parents are asking their kids: "How did you feel? Was there any spot that gave you trouble? Was it easier or harder than you thought? What would you do differently next run?" And sometimes there is nothing to say. From their expressions or their body language you know to just give them a hug or a high five. Either way, you'll want your hands free for that.



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