



February, 2014

WHO'S YOUR BUDDY? !

from

VARA's Youth Coordinator Alex Krebs

Hello VARA Members!

Just had a conversation with my friend Edie about how important a good pole plant is for ski racers. Our discussion sparked Edie to pull out one of her prior articles that was focused on the critical importance of pole planting for athlete success. Developing ski racers need to focus on all of the basic elements of our sport. This is especially true this week as I know many of you have training block during this school break and fundamentals are typically a key element of these sessions. Please enjoy the below article written by Edie Thys Morgan, author of the book "Shut Up and Ski" and the visionary behind the blog www.racerex.com



Thank you.

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Please visit the VARA youth Coordinator page on the VARA site
<http://www.vara.org/resources/youth-coordinator/>

ONCE UPON A POLE PLANT BY: EDIE



Alexis Pinturault, needs a really good friend right about now. Look at the video to see who he turns to.

February Break. It's not just a week of snow days and too much hot cocoa. It's prime time to chill, relax, build some snowmen, get some freeskiing and, most importantly, press the reset button. From here on out the ski racing season is a sprint, so this is your opportunity to ratchet back the intensity and regain focus by tending to the basics.

To inspire this I am retelling a tale, that, based on field analysis, needs constant retelling: Once upon a time, we all had to learn some basic skills before we even thought about carving a turn. We did so with the help of instructors, who relentlessly hammered into our muscle memory the humble pole plant. For my husband, that instructor was Sigi Ploberger, a diminutive Austrian ski instructor with a commanding voice, who followed her charges, reminding them to "Tak!...Tak!...Tak!..." with metronomic regularity after each turn. For me, and for other western skiers I suspect, the most formative instruction came from slopes like Squaw's West Face, and Jackson's Tower 3, where you either planted your pole on every turn, or ended up in a heap at the bottom of the run.

Either way the message was clear to all skiers: Your pole plant is your best friend. It is the key to timing the release from one turn and initiation of the next; it restores proper fore-aft balance before each turn; it positions you solidly over the downhill ski (your second best friend); it commits your body to the fall-line, helps you adjust instantly to terrain changes, provides a pivot point in tight spots, prevents rotation, etc, etc etc...Basically, whatever trouble you get into, the pole plant's got your back. Skiers of all ages accepted this, and if we needed any reassurance we looked no further than our bookshelves (remember those?) and the cover of "Pianta Su" with its frame-by-frame sequence of Gustavo Thoeni's perfectly choreographed plant.

As time went on, skiing got easier. Fancy groomers and summer grading tamed the terrain so most runs resembled inclined ballrooms of uniform surface. Then came shaped skis, pretty little things that made carving easy and fun, especially on these manicured trails. Carving was suddenly as easy as leaning whatever direction you wanted to go, standing against the ski, and enjoying the ride. These new friends

became the life of the party, letting new skiers skip right to the prize, without the drudgery of learning and rehearsing something so mundane as the pole plant. Why bother finding the front of the boot, figuring out how to use your ankles or pledging allegiance to your outside ski when these little vixens would show you a good time without all that effort?

But if it seems too good to be true...Yep, eventually the truth came out. Anyone can make pretty turns on a well-groomed even pitch, but what are you going to do when you're cresting a knoll onto a steep pitch, when you hit an ice patch and lose your balance, when your skis lose snow contact in a rough spot? These fancy new fun-loving friends will get you up to speed all right, but what happens when you have to get back in control...immediately? Who's your buddy then? (see what Alexis Pinturault does [between :52 and :54](#) for a clue)

That's right. Your pole plant. Coaches of "modern technique" who advocate learning the pole "touch," or the "motion" versus the plant, need a reality check: when hardwiring kids with essential skills, nuance and shades of gray don't fly. Those who maintain the pole plant is passé need to watch the Wengen slalom, or the recently contested slalom portion of the Super Combined in Sochi. And those who say it is irrelevant in speed events need to take a closer look at the Steilhang of the Hahnenkamm downhill. Real men-real big, fast men-plant their poles mach schnell when necessary. No single skill remedies as many weaknesses and crises, no matter what time of day you call. That's why a simple pole plant drill says a lot about your skiing future.

As on coach puts it, "Pole plants are kind of like manners. If you don't have them when you're young you'll probably never have them. And if you want to go as far as you can you'll need them in your quiver."

So the skiers all woke up after the big party with their new fancy friends, and one by one they realized that they could never really be happy without including their old friends-the outside ski, the ankles, the front of the boot and, most importantly, the pole plant. And they lived happily ever after.

Edie | February 15, 2014 at 2:38 pm | URL: <http://wp.me/p2Ob1Z-ak>



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