

Period 5: Taper Stage

With the Canadian Ski Marathon (CSM) only weeks away the majority of our physical training should now be complete. From this point forward, the best preparation for the marathon, regardless of how much you've skied, is to rest. This period is typically referred to as the "taper stage" during which time our efforts are best spent recharging rather than draining our energy levels. With less training and more rest, it's time to prepare a game plan for the event. In order to help out, I've put together my list of the "Top 5 Tips for the 2005 CSM":

Tip #1: Never underestimate the importance of pre-marathon preparation.

Finishing the marathon or even having fun throughout the weekend has more to do with your pre-marathon preparation than luck. The week before the event carefully look over your equipment to make sure it is in working order for the task at hand. Check skis for cracks; poles for loose handles, frayed straps, cracked baskets; and ski boots for worn laces and Velcro straps. Also, you should always carry a small pack or fanny pack with some minimal essentials that could save day: water, extra food, a cork and wax, an extra long underwear top, extra socks, and even some mole skin or tape in case of unexpected blisters. These are all small items that can be easily organized beforehand and in some cases may save your marathon aspirations.

Tip #2: If you can't carry on a conversation while skiing you're probably going to fast.

Pacing is vital in an event of this length. To have any chance of completing your distance you need to be steady and thus pace properly. A good check is to see if you can carry on a conversation with another skier without passing out from lack of oxygen. Another good trick is to find someone with a big pack, most Coureur de Bois Gold, and follow them closely. Chances are they've done this before and know the proper pace.

Tip #3: Always wax a bit warmer if there is freshly fallen snow on the track.

Fresh snow can be tough for waxing. Rule of thumb is to go a wax warmer if the snow is newly fallen. Also, your technique has to be a bit more refined in new snow as you are kicking against a less firm base than snow that has been transformed and packed down (think of running in sand vs running on the pavement). Therefore... new snow = wax a bit warmer and be more careful with your kick (you can compensate by using your arms more).

Tip #4: Take the time to stop and re-wax if your kick is insufficient.

The biggest waste of energy when xc skiing can occur when you do not have the proper kick. The result is that you will begin to back slip and use your arms more which will quickly wear you out and put you at risk of pulling certain muscles. Think how much bigger and stronger your legs are than your arms. The extra 10 minutes spent waxing before a hilly section may save you hours later down the road. Bottom line is that it is more efficient and more fun to ski with kick.

Tip #5: Visualize your checkpoint transition so as not to waste time.

One of the biggest mistakes that people make in the marathon is spending too much time at the checkpoints. Friendly volunteers, waxing services, warm soup, and chocolate covered peanuts are all distracters that make staying at the checkpoint too easy. As you approach each checkpoint make a mental list of everything you need to do and stick with your plan. You need to be efficient and there is no better way to do this than to plan ahead. Try to spend a maximum of 20 minutes at each checkpoint. Set your stop watch when you enter and keep track of the time... you'll be amazed to see how fast it goes.

Bonus Tip: HAVE FUN!! Good luck!!



photo: Marasport