Terrain-based ski lessons speed learning process

By Holly Ramer, AP

NORTH CONWAY, N.H. — Allison Willette's first few skiing lessons left her with a sore butt and aching knees but not a lot of skills. But one day's worth of terrain-based learning made all the difference.

"Yesterday was probably the first day that I enjoyed it," she said.

The instruction Willette got at Cranmore Mountain Resort is a new approach that uses sculpted zones to control students' speed and reduce fears and falls. Without worrying about sliding down the mountain out of control, students can focus on building skills because the banks, berms and bumps naturally slow them down.

That means less emphasis on "snowplowing," or pointing the skis into a wedge shape to slow down. Less time learning to stop, more time learning to go.

"Back in the good old days, we used to get people into a wedge right off the jump, but the wedge was more of a defensive posture, something to slow down and stop with," said instructor Dave Bartlett. "But we were kind of resisting the forces we're working with."

The new method puts the emphasis on shaping those forces, Bartlett said, getting students more comfortable more quickly.

Willette, of Hadley, Mass., tried it out last month with her 8-year-old son. He had never been on skis; the few times she had she'd always felt intimidated. Both made quick progress.

"It allowed you to physically feel what the turn should feel

like, and then you just naturally push in the right direction. So you kind of disengage your brain, and you can do it," she said. "I learned quickly how to make turns there, and I was able to apply that to the flatter field."

Students start out on flat snow, getting a feel for their skis. The next zone is a mini-pipe, where they slide down one side of a gentle, U-shaped slope and part way up the other. The slope is a bit steeper in the "roller" zone, which is followed by a short section of trail with banks and berms that guide students through three turns. The "traverse trax" zone includes eight turns and is the last stop before students head to the chairlift to try out a beginner trail.

Cranmore, along with Vermont's Bromley Mountain and Jiminy Peak in Massachusetts, is one of three New England resorts that partnered with the consulting firm Snow Operating LLC to start terrain-based learning this year. Others that have adopted the approach in recent years include Breckenridge and Vail in Colorado, Northstar in California and Mountain Creek in New Jersey.

Kelly Coffey, training manager for the Breckenridge Ski and Ride School, said he has seen a marked improvement in his students, sometimes even before they actually try out the course. A family of four who took a lesson around Christmas were visibly nervous when they put on their skis, but by the time he finished explaining the zones, they were more relaxed.

"I could just see the tension in their bodies just flow out," said Coffey, who also is a freestyle specialist for the Professional Ski Instructors of America. "From then on, I was able to get them to move a lot easier, and more gracefully, and we could progress more quickly. There were times I wanted them to turn, and they didn't accomplish it, but they didn't panic."

Karen Dolan, director of Cranmore's snowsports school, said

she has seen many trends come and go during her 40 years in the industry, but she believes terrain-based learning has sticking power because it makes learning more fun. And boosting the fun factor makes it more likely that students will return – a key motivator for Cranmore and other resorts given that nationally, 85 percent of skiers never try it again after their first outing.

Mountain Creek saw its so-called conversion rate rise from 17 percent to 65 percent after implementing terrain-based learning. It remains to be seen whether Cranmore will see a similar increase, but Dolan said that kind of improvement would more than justify the $37,500 expense of building and maintaining the new terrain zones. In the meantime, the entire resort, including groomers, snow-makers, instructors and managers, is getting used to the new program.

“They all have to be part of this culture change and understand why we’re doing it. It’s everybody’s job to convert skiers and riders,” she said. “They’re here, marketing spent a lot of time getting them here, so let’s make sure that they’re having fun.”

First-time skiers and snowboarders can try terrain-based learning for free on March 9 at the three New England resorts if they register in advance. The promotion, limited to 150 people at each resort, includes equipment rental, helmet rental, a lesson and a beginner’s lift ticket.

Fire restrictions on BLM land

in Calif.

Bureau of Land Management fire restrictions for El Dorado, Amador, Sacramento, Calaveras, Tuolumne and Mariposa counties went into effect Jan. 10. They will remain in place as long as dry conditions exist.

Campfires and barbecues are limited to designated fire rings in designated campgrounds. Portable stoves with gas, jellied petroleum or pressured liquid fuel are authorized with a valid campfire permit.

Other restrictions include:

• Operation of tools powered by internal combustion engines off established roads or trails.

• Smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle or building, or at a designated developed recreation site, or other designated areas.

• Motorized vehicles off established roads or trails.

• Shooting using incendiary, tracer, steel core or armor piercing ammunition.

• Fireworks, including the “safe and sane” variety.

For more info, call (916) 941.3101.

Time to sign up for Little

League

South Tahoe Little League is looking for players.

Sign ups are:

Jan. 13 from 5-7pm at Kahle Community Center;

Jan. 31 from 5-7pm at South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena;

Feb. 10 from 5-7pm at Kahle Community Center;

Feb. 26 from 5-7pm at South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena.

It’s also possible to register online.

Little League offers five divisions of baseball for girls and boys ages 4½ (as of April 30) to 12. Player must not turn 13 before May 1.

For more info, contact Leianna Daley at STNLL2014@gmail.com.

Wise snags nomination for Olympic team

By USSA

BRECKENRIDGE, Colo. – David Wise (Reno) clinched a nomination to the first U.S. Freeskiing Olympic team Sunday with his victory in the snowy halfpipe final at the Visa U.S. Freeskiing Grand Prix presented by the North Face at Breckenridge.

Adverse weather forced officials to reschedule the halfpipe

final twice, but the competition commenced Sunday despite heavy snow. Canadian skier Mike Riddle landed second, with French freeskier Kevin Rolland stealing the third podium spot from X Games legend Simon Dumont (Bethel, Maine).

An impressive roster of U.S. skiers made the 16-man final, including rookies Alex Ferreira (Aspen) and Lyman Currier (Boulder, Colo.), who finished eighth and 10th, as well as Broby Leeds (Vail) and Gus Kenworthy (Telluride, Colo.), in 14th and 15th.

Sunday's final also marked the end of the FIS World Cup tour for halfpipe skiing. Aaron Blunck (Crested Butte, Colo.) took second in the World Cup halfpipe overall standings based on cumulative points earned throughout the tour.

Canadian Justin Dorey claimed the FIS World Cup halfpipe title and the crystal globe while teammate Mike Riddle finished third.

Wise's Winning run: Double cork 1260, rightside 900, leftside 900, rightside 720, switch 720, alley-oop flatspin 540

"I'm so happy we got the event off. It's never a good thing to take a qualifier and turn it into a final, so I think all the riders had that mentality," Wise said. "Now the pressure is off I can work on my runs a little more and maybe work on some things I still need to hone in for Sochi."

U.S. snowboardcross team shaping up

By USSA

VALLNORD, Andorra -– Lindsey Jacobellis (Stratton Mountain, Vt.) closed out the Olympic selection period for snowboardcross with a third-place finish in the FIS Snowboard World Cup Sunday in Vallnord.

It was Jacobellis's second podium of the debut World Cup weekend at the Andorran resort, where Czech rider Eva Samkova took the victory Sunday.

Nick Baumgartner (Iron River, Mich.) led the U.S. men in eighth, while Omar Visintin of Italy took the men's victory.

Four U.S. women finished in the top 20, including Jackie Hernandez (Londonderry, Vt.) in 12th, Callan Chythlook-Sifsof (Girdwood, Alaska) 15th and Faye Gulini (Salt Lake City) 16th.

Veteran rider Shaun Palmer (South Lake Tahoe), aiming for another shot at the Olympics after missing a spot on the 2010 team due to a late injury, finished 17th.

Alex Tuttle (Stratton, Maine) rode into 23rd while two-time Olympic champion Seth Wescott (Sugarloaf, Maine) finished 31st in a valiant comeback attempt after a March knee injury.

Trevor Jacob (Mammoth), Alex Deibold (Manchester Center, Vt.), Nate Holland (Squaw Valley) and Jacobellis have each scored a top-four finish, making them eligible for Olympic team nomination. Full team nominations will be announced later in January.

Bowman qualifies for Olympics

By USSA

BRECKENRIDGE, Colo. – Maddie Bowman (South Lake Tahoe)

clinched a nomination to the inaugural U.S. Freeskiing Olympic team Sunday with a win in the halfpipe final at the Visa U.S. Freeskiing Grand Prix presented by North Face at Breckenridge.

Adverse weather at the venue forced FIS officials to reschedule the finals twice, and snow fell on the halfpipe while Bowman, Ayana Onozuka of Japan and Aussie Amy Sheehan laid down the top runs of the day.

Brita Sigourney (Carmel) and Annalisa Drew (Andover, Mass.) finished just shy of the podium in fourth and fifth, putting Bowman in an unbeatable position in the qualification standings.

Sunday's final also marked the end of the FIS World Cup tour for halfpipe skiing, and Devin Logan (West Dover, Vt.) was named the FIS World Cup halfpipe champion and awarded the crystal globe for her winning the most FIS halfpipe points throughout the tour.

Bowman earned the silver in the FIS World Cup overall halfpipe standings with Amy Sheehan taking bronze.

Bowman's winning run: Straight-air Japan, unnatural (rightside) 900, straight-air mute, rightside 540, leftside 540 mute, rightside 720 tail and switch 360 mute.

"I've never been in this position. It's our first Olympics, but it's pretty exciting. I've just been trying to take each competition day by day, not looking at the big 'O,' but now that I know I get to compete there so I'm pretty excited," Bowman said.

USFS to pile burn on both ends of lake

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will continue prescribed fire operations off of Bunker Drive near Tahoe City and on Luther Pass near South Lake Tahoe through the week of Jan. 12–18, weather and conditions permitting.

All prescribed fire projects are conducted in accordance with an approved prescribed fire burn plan. Burn plans describe specific conditions under which operations are conducted including the weather, number of personnel, opportunities to minimize smoke impacts, and available burn days. This information is used to decide when and where to burn.

Smoke from prescribed fire may continue for several days after the initial ignition. Smoke that settles in low lying areas in the morning usually lifts out of the area during normal daytime heating. All prescribed fires are monitored regularly for burning and smoke dispersal and action is taken to mitigate concerns as they arise. The Forest Service makes every effort to conduct prescribed fire operations during weather patterns that carry smoke away from communities.

Kashima wobbles before

placing 6th

By USSA

PARK CITY -– Canadian skier Alex Bilodeau overtook teammate and World Cup leader Mikael Kingsbury for the victory Saturday in front of a crowd of 8,000 at the Visa Freestyle International FIS World Cup at Deer Valley.

Alexandr Smyshlyaev of Russia took the third spot, while crowd favorite Pat Deneen (Cle Elum, Wash.) finished fourth, the top finish for the United States.

Deneen posted the fastest time of the day during finals on the long, steep Champion run, the 2002 Olympic venue.

Sho Kashima (Stateline) advanced to the superfinal, but he lost control for just a second before the bottom air and finished sixth.

The crowd grew to about 8,500 in the finish area during the finals, and the roar became louder as the snow began to fall during the men’s superfinal.

The U.S. men have two more chances to seal their two required FIS World Cup podiums for Olympic team qualification.

Snow dance opens the skies in Lake Tahoe

By KCRA-TV

A “snow dance” performed by a group of traditional Native American dancers produced immediate results at Lake Tahoe on Saturday. It began snowing at the very same time the Eagle Wings Dancers appealed to higher authorities during a ceremony at Sugar Pine Point State Park, organizers said.



Snow and rain falls at Donner Lake on Jan. 11. Photo/LTN

About 20 young female dancers in traditional dress performed in conjunction with the annual Olympic Heritage Celebration, which commemorates the 1960 Winter Games at Squaw Valley.

Heidi Doyle, executive director of the Sierra State Parks Foundation, said she’s becoming a believer in the snow dance because the Nevada-based group was booked for the ceremony in October and it’s the first snow around Tahoe since early last month.

Read the whole story

Holland 4th in snowboardcross

By USSA

VALLNORD, Andorra -– Trevor Jacob (Mammoth) rode to his career first snowboardcross victory Saturday in the FIS Snowboard World Cup in Vallnord, putting him in prime position to make the Olympic team with just a month before Sochi.

Olympic medalist Lindsey Jacobellis (Stratton Mountain, Vt.) took third in the women's race with Canadian rider Dominique Maltais sealing the victory. It was only Jacob's 10th World Cup start.

A core of American men claimed three other spots in the top 10, including Nate Holland (Squaw Valley) in fourth, Nick Baumgartner (Iron River, Mich.) in sixth and Alex Deibold (Manchester Center, Vt) in 10th.

Deibold, Jacob and Holland have all satisfied the objective criteria for Olympic team qualification. The team will be named later this month.

Seth Wescott (Sugarloaf, Maine) was set for a comeback after a knee took him out of competition in March, but he missed qualifying by 0.02 on Friday.

Jackie Hernandez (Londonderry, Vt.) finished ninth with Callan Chythlook-Sifsof (Girdwood, Alaska) and Faye Gulini (Salt Lake City) taking 23rd and 26th.