



The MARA Parents Guide - Alpine Racing 2019-2020

Why a Parent Guide?: Written by parents for parents, especially for parents new to the MARA program, this guide is intended to help parents prepare their athletes and themselves for a season of alpine skiing and racing.

Inside you will find guidance for a day of training (Part 1), registering your athlete for a race (Part 2), a day at a ski race (Part 3), and some basics on tuning and waxing skis (Part 4). For those who want more, the final section outlines the MARA ski season as a whole (Part 5).

The MARA program offers kids the opportunity to pursue their passion for skiing and athletic excellence through recurring training and competition. It also offers your athlete social interactions with other kids and adults. Fostering this development offers its own rewards to parents.

MARA Online Resources: You have access to incredible online resources. The club communicates essential programmatic, training and race information to athlete families through its webpage and email. Please take a moment to get familiar with these resources through the [MARA homepage](#).

The [MARA homepage](#) also offers quick links for the team calendar and USSA registration, details on the Alpine Program curricula (an essential read for new and old parents), the season's race schedules, and other useful information.

Through the MARA portal you will find the essential training calendar (with times and training focus).

USSA Online Resources: When attending USSA race events, you will register your athlete for races through the [U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association \(USSA\) website](#). Part 2 has more details.

While you're at the USSA website, take a minute to check out other cool stuff. A "must read" is the one-page [USSA ATS \(Alpine Training System\) MATRIX](#), which is linked on the MARA webpage under Parent/Athlete Resources and at the end of this guide. Other links are listed in Part 3.

PART 1 – MAKING THE MOST OF TRAINING DAYS

Training is physically and emotionally demanding; lasting 6+ hours door to door. The winter environment adds its own challenges. Parents can help their athletes to have fun and perform their best with some routine preparation.



Meeting Place and Start Times: Each training day the team meets in front of the lodge. Training starts sharply at 9:00 am. *Plan to meet coaches at 8:45.* At 9:00, the team will promptly move on to the training venue or begin free skiing. If your athlete is unavoidably delayed, call your coach.

Weekend Schedule: Except when the team is away at races, the MARA team trains on Mt Ashland on Saturdays and Sundays, and Thursday nights. The training schedule can be impacted by weather and other factors. While times are *subject to change*, the schedule is as follows:

- Saturdays: 9:00 am to 3:00 pm
- Sundays: 9:00 am to 3:00 pm
- Thursday Nights: 6:00pm to 8:00pm

These scheduled times may change if impacted by bad weather. These decisions can be made on the hill the day of training, so *prepare to be flexible*. Check in with coaching staff at drop off. Ask your athlete to stay in touch with you during the training day. Parents need to have a backup plan should there be a bad weather day. Offer help to another family if you are able.

The daily training focus (e.g., slalom, giant slalom, gate training or structured free skiing) changes frequently, sometimes day-to-day during the season. Athletes need to be on the appropriate skis for the day's focus.

The team calendar on the MARA webpage sets out the planned daily training focus for each age group. However, the plan may change due to real-time assessment of the athletes' needs and snow conditions. Changes to the planned focus are typically communicated by email if time allows or from coach to athlete. On a snow day with *an overnight accumulation of 6" of snow*, athletes automatically should be prepared to move onto their all-mountain skis or to free ski on their race skis. Often kids bring two pairs of skis up on the hill.

Unless you have provided a separate permission, you must meet your athlete at the end of each training day in front of the lodge. Many of MARA's racers ski off and meet their families to continue skiing or to go home.

Tuning: Sharp edges and well maintained bases are critical to learning to ski race and skiing fast. Run a stone over edges before every training day and wax as often as you can, at least every couple of days. Read Part 4 for help.

Clothing: Cold kids do not have fun or ski well. While you may want to enable your athlete to make choices, letting him or her walk out the door without the proper gear is not only suboptimal for your athlete, it affects the whole team. *Warming stops are not a necessary part of ski racing for the warmly dressed, stopping impacts training for everyone.*



A well-stocked backpack offers a compromise that gives kids some freedom. A list of “must bring” gear that your athlete takes ownership for will ensure both independence and warmth. Essentials for a weather-bound day include an extra-thick fleece layer, a neck gator, glove liners, hand warmers (two sets for the coldest days) and toe warmers. If your athlete doesn’t want to wear it out the door, stuff it in the backpack.

Rest: Kids should go to bed a bit early. Try to treat the night before a training day like a school night as much as possible.

Nutrition: Kids should have a healthy dinner that includes plenty of *carbohydrates* and a good breakfast that limits sugars and includes protein. Make sure they have healthy snacks in their pocket, fruit or an energy bar. Candy is not optimal during training. *Send your athlete to training with money or a sack lunch.*

Talking to Coaches and Kids about Training: Please let the Head Coach/Program Director, Matt Ver Eecke, know of any special needs your child has. Let your athlete’s coach know about any logistical plans (*e.g.*, leave early) or special circumstance (*e.g.*, getting over a cold). Please direct any training or programmatic questions or concerns to Matt or board members rather than to your athlete’s primary coach.

Get to know your athlete’s coaches, but after 6+ hours on the hill don’t expect a detailed debriefing of the day.

Family fun skiing is recommended by the USSA, and a few runs after practice is a great time for your athlete to show off. Avoid the temptation to coach or correct.

As parents, we all want to hear what our kids learned and that they get their share of coaching attention. It is important to understand that the MARA program is based on planned training activities with limited verbal cues. Ask your athlete what he or she did, not what the coaches said.

Above all, stay positive.

PART 2 – RACE PREPARATION AND REGISTRATION

Parents need to attend to a number of logistical details and to register their athletes and prepare for a race. The first step is to familiarize yourself with your athlete’s race schedule on the [MARA Calendar page](#).

When it is closer to race time, refer to the following list to keep track of the most important details.



- Follow MARA email announcements regarding race registration deadlines and other details (typically two weeks before the event);
- Register your athlete for each race on the MARA website for home races, destination club website for regional travel races, and on the USSA website for USSA races, before the deadline (see instructions below);
- Communicate your plans to the Alpine Program Director and your athlete's coach;
- If available, get the race organizer's "fact sheet" which provides race details (posted on the [USSA/Far West Calendar Page](#) under "Race Announcements");
- Submit liability waivers (usually two separate waivers are required, one for the sponsor and one for the resort)—details should be in the race organizer's "fact sheet");
- Submit payment to MARA for coach expenses before the race;
- Tune and wax skis and ready other equipment; and
- Look for final race details (ticket information, team meeting information) in an email a day or two prior to the race.

For USSA races- You will register your athlete for races through the USSA website. Sign in at: [USSA LOGIN](#). Use the login credentials you received when you registered your athlete as a member of USSA. Highlight your child's membership under "My Account" and then click on the "Athlete Event Registration" icon.

Arranging lodging to attend multiple two-day races out of town is a project on its own. Coordinating with other families is a great way to reduce costs and adds a fun social component for kids and parents.

Plan to travel the day before the race. Most parents seek to start out right after school lets out. If you plan an earlier departure for the longer drives or in anticipation of bad weather, please notify the school in advance and ensure that your athlete coordinates with his or her teachers for any makeup work.

PART 3 – WHAT TO EXPECT ON RACE DAY

Parents play an essential support role at competitions. Racers join their coaches and teammates in the morning, separate and rejoin the team during the day. Younger racers especially need support to stay coordinated with the team's movements on the mountain. Parents are required to supervise and attend to their children while they are separated from the team. It is complicated and you may experience some frustration your first race, but you will quickly get the hang of it.

The race day timeline is fluid and often subject to delay and a lack of real-time information. Anticipating the order of the day's events helps to overcome these challenges. Keeping in sync with the team's schedule will give your racer added confidence.



Outline of Schedule: The good news is each race day follows a predictable rhythm. Each race day starts with an early morning team meeting, sometimes at 7:00 a.m. Details for the Saturday meeting will be announced by MARA via email on Thursday or Friday before the race. Sunday's meeting will be held at the same place as Saturday's, typically 30 minutes later.

Slalom and Giant Slalom races consist of two separate runs each day. Each run is preceded by a course inspection. During inspection, racers side slip the entire course with their teammates and coaches. There is no practice run. In snowy weather, racers (and parents!) may also help prepare the course by pushing snow off the course.

The course for the first run is typically set very early in the morning. A break occurs between the first run and the second run, during which the course for the second run is reset.

At USSA events, slalom races typically have different courses for girls and boys (set in parallel). As a result, inspection times for the girls and boys can differ, especially for the second run.

It's helpful to get a grasp on the racers' starting order. The girls run before the boys. The girls' and boys' start orders runs in age class order, youngest first. For the second run, each age class runs in reverse order of the first run. Sunday's start order is different from Saturday. Start lists are available for parents at the race headquarters, usually. Grab one.

The day is capped by an awards ceremony 30 to 60 minutes after the final boy; the top 10 boys and girls for each age class are recognized.

In summary, the timeline for each race day shapes up like this:

- Team meeting;
- Load lift for 1st course inspection;
- 1st run;
- Break and course reset;
- Load lift for 2nd course inspection;
- 2nd run; and
- Awards.

With the exception of the team's morning meeting, all times are subject to change. Expect delays for course preparation on snowy days, timing equipment issues and course closures due to fog or heavy snow.

The two most important items on the schedule are the morning team meeting, and the second inspection. Keep your racer on time and at the right meeting spot for these events, and



everything else falls into place. Don't put your coach in the difficult position of leaving your racer behind.

Plan morning transportation in advance (shuttle bus schedules, parking) to avoid delay. Racers should get a good night's sleep, eat a good breakfast, have a snack and snack money in their pockets, and have their equipment ready.

Coordinating with the Team: As mentioned above, racers join and separate and rejoin their coaches and teammates several times a day. Racers join their coaches and teammates at the morning meeting. After the meeting, the team will load the lift (often before the general public) for course inspection.

Following inspection there may be a wait before an athlete's race start. Since they start first, the youngest girls head straight to start area at the top of the race course. The older girls and all the boys may free ski or take a short break at the lodge while waiting for their start. Help remind your racer to head to the start well before his or her anticipated start time.

After each run, parents meet their athlete at the race course finish. This is essential. Coaches stay at the top of the race course until all the team's athletes have finished their run. Teammates are spread out through the roster. The kids typically want to wait for their teammates at the finish. At most events, you can walk up to the finish from the base of the mountain, allowing you to choose whether to purchase a lift ticket.

Following the first run, parents should accompany their racers for a break and help to keep them on time for the second inspection. The team stakes out a "spot" in the base lodge near the lift servicing the race course. Head there after the first run. You should already know when your athlete is loading the lift for course inspection for the second run. Confirm the timing with other parents and your coaches.

Racers with speed suits will leave their coats and pants at the start. These will be brought down from the start by a coach or parent at the end of each of the girls and boys runs (sometimes after an age class). In bad weather, coats are often brought to the base lodge.

The team regroups for the second inspection. The planned time is subject to delay. You can be sure the second inspection will follow almost immediately after the course is reset. Connect with your coach or other parents. Girls and boys may meet at different times. Coaches gather up the kids at the base lodge or meet at the bottom of the base lift servicing the race course. Again, there may be a wait after inspection before an athlete's start.

Like the first run, parents gather their athlete at the bottom of the race course after the second run.



The team needs parents' support through bad weather or other race delays. Snowy or cold weather slows the race schedule and lengthens the downtime between the inspection and a racer's start. Cold weather may bring kids into the lodge to stay warm during their downtimes. Helping to keep your racer on track while the coaches manage the start is essential.

Limitations on Starting Area and Race Course: The starting area of a race course is no place for parents while the race is running. All the teams attending the race, their coaches and their equipment must fit into a small, pitched area that is cordoned off with fencing to keep out the general public, including parents. In addition, coaches are helping racers to prepare mentally. The distraction of parents can put unneeded pressure on racers. You can stop by outside the edge of the fenced area to check in with your racer and team, but it is best to not linger at the start.

The entire race course is also fenced off to avoid interference with the race. In order to view the race from slope side, you must stay out of the fenced area.

Each race venue has its own quirks. If you are not sure where the boundaries are, ask one of the MARA coaches.

Lift Tickets: Parents are responsible for purchasing racers' lift tickets, either at race headquarters or from the resort ticket window. At some events, tickets may be pre-arranged and handed out by coaches at the team meeting. MARA will provide details on racers' ticket prices and purchase location in the pre-race email sent Thursday or Friday.

Try to buy tickets in advance of team meeting. Please buy Sunday's ticket when you buy Saturday's. It's best to put tickets on goggle straps, or inside speed suits, as racers may need to ride the lift before catching up with their coats and pants.

Race organizers often offer discounted parent and sibling tickets. If sold through the race organizer, these must be purchased at the beginning of the day.

Talking About the Race: We all know that parents play a role in the psychological development of their children. What you may not expect is just how critical this role is at the finish of your athlete's races. The rubber meets the road on these occasions.

Take some time to prepare yourself. The USSA website offers volumes of information. Here are links to a few examples: [USSA Teaching Parents](#), [USSA Performance vs Results](#) and [USSA Alpine Parent Webinar](#).



While this guide can't begin to offer what is available elsewhere, here are some of the basics. Focus on the enjoyment and fun of racing and the process of improving. Be encouraging, don't criticize. Let your athlete know that he or she is improving and will continue to improve. Start by asking your athlete what they liked about their run. Steer clear of finish order; don't approach the results board unless your athlete invites you. If your athlete crashes, skis out or misses a gate, let your athlete know it happens to everyone, that's why there are two runs.

Coaches: Coaching a race is physically and emotionally demanding. Support your coaches on the hill. Bring an extra sack lunch, buy a cup of coffee, carry a load of coats to the finish. If you have a concern, don't distract the coaching staff if it can wait. Bring concerns to the Head Coach/Program Director, Matt Ver Eecke, or board members; best when back in town.

PART 4 – TUNING AND WAXING YOUR RACER'S SKIS

We train like we race, so that we race like we train!

Sharpened and polished edges, a clean well-maintained base, and regular waxing will make a difference to your athlete's experience on the race course. For many new parents this is a challenge. Fortunately, the MARA program has a comprehensive tuning program that consists of the following 3 parts:

Commercial shop support: Rogue Ski Shop offer MARA athletes special pricing on base structuring, tuning, mounting, footbeds and boot fitting. (Sorry parents, this pricing is for club kids only.) Be aware that the machine tunes take more edge and base material off the ski than a hand tune; limit machine tunes to one or two a season.

Coach tuning support: Some coaches are all available to tune and wax skis. To participate in this program, please pay the program fee of \$75, through the program Administrator or Head Coach. The program fee will be used to pay for tuning equipment and wax. Once your program fee is paid, you will make arrangements with the coaches and pay them directly in cash or by check, \$15 per tune.

Tuning clinics: You and your racer can tune at home, *if you learn how*. With enough interest there will be MARA tuning clinics for parents. Separate clinics will be offered for U14 and older athletes, again with enough interest. These clinics will teach basic skills and the equipment you need. Dates and locations for these clinics will be communicated by email, and will be hosted by MARA coaches.

Tuning through regular maintenance is best for race performance. Tuning only for races can create difficulties for your racer, because it takes time to get accustomed to the difference in tunes. Given the options the club offers, hopefully you will find a practical way to tune and wax early and often.



U14 racers should be able to tune skis with parent supervision. Tuning tools make great Holiday presents. Every U16 through U19 racer should be able to tune and wax his or her own skis.

PART 5 – THE MARA SKI SEASON

The alpine racing season, like any athletic season, progresses through early season training, competitions and championship races. But there is much, much more to the program. The MARA program’s official training schedule starts in early to mid-December and runs through late March, and can start much earlier and end much later for those that are interested. That’s a steady three months at minimum. But the ski season starts long before Mt Ashland opens its lifts and continues beyond the end of the official training.

During the summer, the coaching staff offers advice regarding conditioning and summer ski camps, as well as dryland training for older kids.

Fall sports (for example, soccer or cross-country running) offer great cross-training opportunities. MARA also offers dryland training when athlete interest is high enough (strength and endurance conditioning and coordination training specific to the sport). MARA coaches can make recommendations about what equipment is right for your child, and where to purchase.

With cooperative weather, pre-season camps offer early on-snow training. While these camps involve an extra cost, participation jumpstarts your athlete’s fundamental skills and affords an opportunity to bond with teammates and coaches.

Official Training: The Alpine Program’s official training on the mountain starts the first weekend of January 4, 2020. (Think Snow!) The Alpine Program’s training consists of five components:

- Holiday Break;
- Weekend training;
- Thursday Night Gates;
- Friday gate training;
- Dryland training (U16 and up).

With the Holiday break from school, the program is able to put our athletes on the snow for focused training for 4 days (depending on age class). While it’s a busy time, *try to fit in as much training for your athlete as possible during the Holidays*. This concentrated training gives a boost to skill sets for the racing season. Kids can see improvements in their own skiing which builds their confidence for the upcoming competitions in January.

Race Competitions: Many of the season’s alpine races require overnight travel to a variety of ski areas. We encourage organizing with other families to ease some of the travel burden.



Getting a handle on your athlete's race schedule helps you and your athlete to prepare. The season's race schedules are available as [MARA Calendar page](#).

Participation in competition is encouraged, the races are fun! That said, there is no requirement to attend races. Especially with U10s and younger, trust your instincts; participate at the level that feels right.

Championship races are scheduled in March (depending on age class). At this point, athletes have been on snow for several months, competed at a number of races and are ready to ski their best. Each age group has its own championship race or championship series. These events attract more skiers in each age class and as a result are both competitive and fun. U10s and U12s do not need to qualify to compete at these championships.

All U14s can race in their qualifier, the Far West Tech Finals. This is a 4-day event and its organizers include lots of fun events outside the race course. Advancement to the U14 regional championship race is based on Tech Finals results.

The racing schedule continues beyond the end of the official training schedule. For U16s and younger, the end of April offers the final race of the season, the May Day Races, in Bend, Oregon.

Summer Camps and Activities: If you are still reading this, you are in the right place. Your kid loves skiing, and you love supporting that passion.

Keeping your kid on snow in the summer is a debate with your wallet and the marginal utility of those dollars. While it's no modest expense to travel to Mt. Hood, MARA camps are more affordable than others. Planning starts during the regular season. Stay tuned.

In any case, hiking and mountain biking and rafting make for an excellent summer and you can save those dollars for pre-season camps and the quiver of skis your racer needs.

Volunteering, Donations and Support: MARA needs your help. As part of club membership, each family is required to volunteer for 3 of MARA's 6 race days (3 weekends of racing), provide 6 hours of off-mountain volunteering or donate \$100. If you have a skill that may fill a need, let the club know. Please consider making an extra donation of your time or your money.

Parents play a vital role in the success of MARA. At the core, love and caring for your child brings you here. Remember other athletes, coaches, parents and the club also need and thrive on the positive support you can bring.

Each extra bit of help makes a difference.



APPENDIX Web Addresses for Hot Links in Text

MARA HOME PAGE: <https://www.mtashlandracing.com>

MARA UPDATES PAGE: <http://www.mtashlandracing.com>

MARA PARENTS HANDBOOK: <http://www.mtashlandracing.com/parent-athlete-resources/>

SKI RACING MAGAZINE: <http://www.skiracing.com/>

USSA ATS MATRIX : <https://usskiandsnowboard.org/sites/default/files/files-resources/files/2017-11/Alpine%20Training%20Systems%2011-16-17.pdf>

USSA/FAR WEST CALENDAR PAGE: <https://fwskiing.org/content/schedule-results-new-site>

USSA LOGIN: <http://my.ussa.org/myussa>

USSA REGISTRATION HELP: <https://usskiandsnowboard.org/sites/default/files/files-resources/files/2017/Event%20Athlete%20Registration%20Instructions%20-%20Parents.df>

USSA Teaching Parents:

https://my.ussa.org/sites/default/files/documents/athletics/alpine/2014-15/documents/parents_peak_performance.pdf

USSA Performance vs Results: https://ussa.org/moodle_instances/moodle-prod-data/filedir/53/38/53387831e45af334f84cba81_acc4fef2728fdf73

USSA Alpine Parent Webinar

<https://usskiandsnowboard.org/news/alpine-parent-webinar-supporting-your-ski-racer>