

In our 7<sup>th</sup> weekly VARA series, Holmenkol takes a look at understanding the weather and waxing.

As cold as it is, I'll take it any day over the warm rain that can visit on a regular basis each January. The phone has been ringing off the hook with questions like "how do I wax my skis to be fast when it's this cold?"

In order to best understand what the snow is doing at these air temperatures, take a look at the lake – Lake Champlain, that is.

Despite our record run of deep cold, the lake is still not frozen over. Why? Bodies of water cool & warm *much* slower than the land or air does. This phenomena works whether the water is Lake Champlain, or simply the snow-pack on your local ski hill. So even though the air temperature reached as low as -20F at my house, the snow temp here in Stowe held at a steady 12F – a 32 degree difference!

For the racer or race parent in the basement or garage the night

before racing or training, the task of choosing the correct range of wax to use can be daunting at best. If you have a snow thermometer, start using it every day you go on the hill. It only takes a few moments, and it will teach you quite a bit about the snow temps. Keep a small notebook and record the history, and you will find that snow temp. varies only a few degrees throughout the course of a month's time.

For the racer or parent who cannot get access to the hill before racing or training, you should still acquire a snow thermometer (about \$10-\$20). While hardly scientific, here in New England I suggest this: go to the northeast side of your home, and take a snow temperature reading. Consider this to be within 1 to 3 degrees (F) of what the snow will be on the race hill, and wax accordingly.

A common mistake that many racers and parents make is to watch the evening news for the prediction on air temperature for race day, and then wax based on that information.

Typically, using this technique will result in being one or two waxes off the mark, and not as fast as you can be.

Clearly, knowing the snow temperature is the most important of all the factors to consider if you want to be fast.

The second major consideration to being fast when the snow is cold, crispy, and aggressively "dry" is the final preparation after waxing. I like to let the skis sit overnight after waxing, then finish in the am before you head for the hill. Be sure to scrape the wax as thin as possible, using a sharp scraper, and then polish to high shine. For harder waxes, I like to start with a stiff nylon brush, and then spend time using a horsehair brush, finally polishing with a softer nylon brush. This will give you a highly polished finish that will accelerate rapidly and glide well.

In summary, think about the snow conditions as constantly but (usually) slowly changing and wax accordingly. When in doubt, the snow in your backyard may be

more accurate than what  
the weatherman says.

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