



## Alpine Ski Race Training

*-instilling values necessary  
in both **SKIING**  
and **LIFE!***



# Skiing is in My Blood

By Gabe Braveheart

Special to the Record-Eagle

I am awake and it is 5:30 in the morning and at first I don't know where I am or what I am doing. Then I come to my senses and realize that I am in Copper Mountain, Colorado at a week-long ski camp run by my coach, Dan Janowiak. I quickly get dressed and put on my boots, which are very hard to walk in because they fit tightly so that I can have ultimate control.

I make the long 150 foot walk to the mountain and get on the four-person chairlift. It is still very dark, so when I get to the top of the lift, I go in the large hut with many other racers. We will all wait sitting on wooden benches in the big hut preparing, mentally and physically, for the day of training ahead. We are silent, but we can tell what all the other people are thinking: how cold it is up here and we did not bring enough layers. We're also thinking about all the crazy people like ourselves who love to ski.

There are skiers here from all over the world, of all different skill levels. In one corner of the hut there might be a pro from Croatia; in another corner, a beginner from Ohio. We all share a common love for ski racing and a common goal to get faster.

When I first came to this Thanksgiving week camp, I was 11. At that time, there were about 45 people who came to the camp on a tour bus. It took us 24 hours to get to Copper Mountain from Manistee and we had a good time on the way.

Now there are only about 15 people at the camp. I don't know why all of the people stopped coming, but I would think it is because many of them have graduated and moved on. We are all in the same skill range, some a bit better than others, but a very good group in all.

Out of nowhere our coach appears, signaling us move on to the hill. We grab our backpacks and walk outside. Our coach is a fairly old man with not many hairs left on his head, and he always has a calm and collected look about him. He has already set the course for us, so all we have to do is ride the second chairlift all the way up to 11,200 feet.

We are now at the top of the mountain. The sun is just peeking over the majestic mountains straight out in front of us and I feel ready for a good day. We ski down to inspect the course. This is a very important part. We see what we need to visualize. This makes us ski the course faster because we have already done it in our minds several times before we actually get to ski it. It also makes skiing it a lot safer.

After we inspect and warm up with a few runs, it is time to go to the top and get ready to run. Some people take off their jackets and pants and ski in their skin-tight race suits. But I'm still chilly so I keep most of my clothes on. After waiting in line for a minute or two, I stand at the start, wide awake, and happy to be skiing. I push out with my poles and am on my way.

As I arc down the steep hill, zipping past the red and blue plastic fall-away gates, I think of nothing but the next turn, always looking ahead and toward the next gate. As I finish, about 30 seconds later, I come back to the world.

I talk to my coach about my skiing for a few seconds before heading up the lift to do it all over again. After about seven fun runs, it is 9:00 AM and we are ready for a break and a change.

While we are in the hut, our coaches will be out on the hill setting a new course. We will switch from giant slalom to slalom. The main difference is that slalom has a tighter turn radius than giant slalom, but there is one more main difference as well: slalom has only one turning pole instead of two. Slalom is the event that I am best at, so I am getting excited. While our coaches set the course, we prepare ourselves for battle.

Slalom is like going down a hill at 20 or 30 miles per hour and being hit with plastic red or blue noodles. We have been taught to cut the turns so that we hit the gate with our shins and hand to protect ourselves against the poles.

When our coaches are ready, we all go out once again to face the wrath of the mountain. At least by this time, it has warmed up a bit. We do what we did earlier except this time it is a different event, one quicker and better suited for my style.

After two hours, we are tired and all ready to go down the hill and back to our condos. This is by far the hardest part of the day. We have to ski down about a mile with two pairs of skis and a backpack weighing about 30 pounds, filled with clothes and food.

As we go, it gets warmer and warmer until we reach the bottom where it is almost hot compared to the top where we have been. But the toughest part of our journey is not yet over. We must remove our skis and somehow get all of the way to our rooms with all of that gear by foot.

**At the time of this writing, Gabe Braveheart was a tenth-grader at Benzie Central High School.**