



## Alpine Ski Race Training

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



September 30, 2018

Hello NASA Families and Alpine Skiing Community,

Many of you received a Northwestern Alpine Ski Academy (NASA) communication from Bob Veneklasen regarding the fact that our ski club no longer had a home at Crystal Mountain (CM) due to CM's ruthless and crass actions. Bob's letter was non-emotional and factual. As your Program Director/Head Coach I'd like to share my perspective of the process that resulted in this devastating outcome. This is going to be wordy, maybe a bit emotional, but I want all of you to know an accurate and full account of what has happened.

First, it should be known that I initiated this process in February of 2017 when I brought about a dozen NASA parents together to discuss enhancing NASA's program and the anticipation of my retirement as your head coach at least 3-5 years down the road.

In April 2017, NASA presented to Crystal Mountain a formal proposal to establish a "partnership" between NASA and CM. CM showed a great deal of interest and excitement to enter into a partnership with NASA. The summer of 2017 was literally filled with meetings between NASA and CM. These meetings were amicable and extremely productive. Per CM's request in August 2017, NASA had its attorney draft a Letter of Understanding, which essentially outlined each party's responsibilities. The draft was submitted to CM representatives. A very short time after CM received the Letter of Understanding they communicated to NASA that they were **withdrawing** from the process, citing that another club at CM was being left behind and that they should be included.

It should be noted here that the other club is the North Coast Snowsports Club (NCSC) formerly known as the Leelanau Ski Club. I'd also like to note here that at least several attempts to merge NASA and NCSC took place over about a 8-10 year period. Every attempt to merge the two clubs was unsuccessful because of significant philosophical differences. The motivation to attempt to merge was driven by CM, because they numerous times indicated that with just "one" club at Crystal Mountain the resort could do so much more, particularly on the financial side, assisting the club to secure both corporate and foundation monies.

With the partnership process suddenly halted late summer 2017, the NCSC came to the table again in an attempt to merge the two clubs. The 3 entities, CM, NASA and

NCSC met a couple times perhaps in the fall of 2017 and the merger process rested through the ski season of 2017-2018. In March of 2018, the 3 entities returned to the table with CM acting “seemingly” as a facilitator to affect a merger between the two clubs. A few meetings into the merger process this summer it became more and more clear to NASA that CM was not simply acting as a facilitator but now was seeing itself as an equal player in the merger. NASA never lost focus that this effort was about merging the two clubs and then entering into a partnership with the resort (the original goal).

Noteworthy here is that at our very first meeting in March 2018, there was a tentative agreement to have a 5-member board of directors for the new club. The board composition would be 2 NASA reps, 2 NCSC reps and 1 CM rep on the board. At an early June meeting CM comes to the table and says they want to throw some money at this endeavor and because of that they now wanted a 7-member board of directors and 2 seats at the board. CM's financial commitment was significant and consequently there was no immediate objection to that unexpected spontaneous proposal, but I assure you that maneuver by CM did not go unnoticed by NASA.

Fast forward, to a July 30 meeting and an election of officers took place. There we were with a 7-member board of directors. Four of the 7 members were CM employees (2 high level company executives and 2 seasonal employees). NASA cited that that composition lends itself to potential conflict of interest issues and manipulation by CM. That concern was ignored.

Later in that meeting NASA attempted to present a 12-point proposal (that was appropriately submitted well in advance of the meeting). That proposal was driven by the fact that this process was doing nothing to get us ready for a new season. We were only 4 weeks from Labor Day where NASA typically has its program organized and website updated. The new club's board members were critical of the proposal and ultimately unwilling to give it any consideration. Both NCSC and CM were actually hostile towards our proposal, which in our view, if approved would have launched us into a successful 2018-2019 season.

After the July 30<sup>th</sup> meeting it was very clear that CM grabbed a stranglehold on the new club. It was clear that CM would be dictating the future of the new club. On August 2, I called Steve Kermode. I shared with Steve that from NASA's perspective things did not go well at our July 30 meeting. I shared that we were not pleased that the resort had full control of the new club (never a goal for this process). I shared that this process was not fair and equitable (NASA was bringing nearly \$70,000 worth of assets plus its 501c3, by-laws, coaching expertise, athletes and supportive families etc., vs. NCSC \$1400 cash, period). I also shared that the hostility from NCSC and CM towards NASA was disconcerting. I asked Steve Kermode on August 2<sup>nd</sup> if this merger process fell apart for NASA would NASA have a home at Crystal Mountain. His answer, without hesitation was YES!

NASA leadership unanimously agreed to withdraw from the merger process. That decision was made because it was best for NASA athletes and our organization. Bob Veneklasen informed the board of the new club of our decision via email on August 9, 2018. On August 14<sup>th</sup> Bob Veneklasen received a call from Crystal Mountain (Steve Kermode and John Melcher) that NASA would no longer be allowed to have lane space at CM. Within just a couple hours, CM's Steve Kermode put out an email to I believe the entire CM community, that this process had been happening and that NASA had withdrawn from the process. He went on to state that the new club, Crystal Community Ski Club (CCSC), would be doing race programming in our place. WOW! NASA did nothing to deserve this outrageous treatment by CM. We have had an amicable and productive relationship with the resort since 1973. What particularly troubled me was that as the person who founded our club (with the help of a few parents) and provided leadership, as its director and head coach for 42 years, never received any communication from the resort. I had to call Steve Kermode 3 days later to find out what was going on!

Subsequently, I learned that CM was interested in hiring me to be the head alpine coach. I know what you're thinking...how could I even possibly consider? I did consider that offer (as I believed it was in the best interest of our NASA athletes and families) and met with Steve Kermode and John Melcher. Within days (September 7<sup>th</sup>) they had sent me a salary offer and I sent CM a counter offer (September 9<sup>th</sup>). At this point, I really thought that we were back in the game so to speak. Then, on September 19<sup>th</sup>, I received a communication from Steve Kermode that the new board had met and that they had "different visions". Steve went on to say that "in the interest for the new direction this club has been working toward the past two years, feel it better to pursue other options at this time. We wish you well in your future endeavors". This desperate effort clearly failed.

I tried to kick down the doors with CM one more time on September 20<sup>th</sup> by asking some questions of CM to consider. Steve Kermode's verbal response on September 26<sup>th</sup> was that "you had your opportunity and you stepped away. We are moving ahead with one club". That second I had to get off the phone! Folks, I assure you that CM at no time gave NASA a warning (or even a hint) that if we withdrew from the process we'd be so harshly punished and kicked to the curb!

So, here we are today unable to run an alpine race program at Crystal Mountain like we have for the past 40 plus seasons. They do not want us training on their hills. CM now has its own ski club (at least in theory). It's going to be OK 4 high school teams (Glen Lake, Benzie, Onkama and Traverse City West) to train and race at CM. My understanding is it's going to be OK for the Grand Traverse Ski Club to train at Crystal with its middle school group and US Ski and Snowboard team. CM will continue to host collegiate racing. Yet, NASA is not welcome! Folks, we have done more good for CM than all those groups combined! This new club/CM talks boldly about "community", yet they punish and discriminate against our club! We have been seriously wronged! Our organization and our athletes and families do not deserve this treatment! CM's lack of respect for our athletes is unwarranted! It

truly is our **athletes** who are being severely punished unjustly! As you can tell I'm outraged by CM's actions and their blatant dishonesty!

Folks, if you have any feelings about this matter and I know you must, please share those feelings with Crystal Mountain leadership.

Chris MacInnes, president: [cmacinnnes@crystalmountain.com](mailto:cmacinnnes@crystalmountain.com)

Steve Kermode, VP of Recreation and Retail: [stevekermode@crystalmountain.com](mailto:stevekermode@crystalmountain.com)

John Melcher, COO: [johnmelcher@crystalmountain.com](mailto:johnmelcher@crystalmountain.com)

Finally, NASA families and athletes, you must know that through this process your NASA leadership represented you professionally and honorably. We always brought an optimistic attitude to the table and always kept our athletes and families best interest a priority. I am proud of the NASA board and their truly honest efforts. I only wished that CM would have been honest with NASA. What the resort did to us is clearly unprecedented! Do resorts really kick their best customers out the door? They have embarrassed themselves and diminished their brand and unjustly harmed our athletes and organization!

There you have my personal account of what transpired. Please feel free to share this communication...especially to anyone connected with the skiing community in anyway.

As always feel free to contact me anytime and thanks for your understanding and support.

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