

Coaching Beginner Barefooters

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Photography by Lynn Novakofski

A coach or ski partner can be the most important tool to have in the boat. They provide a set of eyes that do not lie and they are there to offer constructive criticism. Constructive criticism can be hard to absorb, but must be accepted to achieve your goals. Coaches or ski partners can play many mind games, which in return will build the skier up when needed or tear them down when they become over confident. It is important that the coach understands the individual and that communication is freely expressed between the two individuals.

1. Always build a strong foundation. By spending time on building your foundation as a barefoot skier, you will be building your confidence while reducing your chance of injury and setting yourself up to progress into more advance levels. The coach or ski partner should continuously stress the basics of the foundation and never let the beginner skip steps. When the foundation is well constructed, you will become a well-rounded skier with a bright future.

2. Have a complete understanding of what you are doing and why you are doing it. The coach or ski partner needs to make sure the skier is on the same page. With this being said, it is more beneficial to have the skier explain everything in detail, as well as performing it on dry land before attempting the maneuver on the water.

3. Your basic tricks are one foots, toe holds and wake slalom in which all should be followed by the reverse. As you become more advanced, these basic tricks should all be performed backward as well. As you progress in the sport everything you learn will become easier and safer because you have spent time strengthening your basics.

4. Get out of your comfort zone by working on your reverse until it is no longer your weak link. You are only as good as your weakest link. Most skiers want to work on what their strengths already are, but to improve you should always work on your weak points of your skiing until it is as strong as your basic skills. By doing this you



are always raising the bar and your skiing will always improve.

5. Always be positive and reinforce good habits. The whole idea is for the skier to ski with confidence and to have total control of their skiing. Have a complete understanding of what they are doing before they move forward to more advanced tricks.

A barefoot boom is a great training device, but you do not want to become dependant on it. After you become comfortable on the boom you need to start mixing it up with long line. Always go back to the boom to clean up your skiing if you start to pick up bad habits. Thirty percent of your time should be spent on the boom, while 70 percent of your time should be utilized by skiing behind the boat.

These are some basic coaching rules we use at Keith St. Onge's Barefoot Ski School. Be sure to build on the foundation, while understanding what you are doing and why you are doing it. Working hard on your basics will prove to be beneficial, and make sure you get out of your comfort zone and work on reverses. And remember, everyone needs a pat on the back. Be positive and reinforce good habits.

Gary "Swampy" Bouchard is the coach of world overall champion Keith St. Onge, who is sponsored by MasterCraft, Vortex Wetsuits, Gopal's US Gear and Clincher. For more information on Keith St. Onge's Barefoot Ski School, visit ksobarefoot.com, call (863) 877-0039 or e-mail reservation@ksobarefoot.com.

