

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING**  
**OF**  
**USSA MASTERS NATIONAL WORKING GROUP**  
**Sunday, March 18, 2012**  
**Center of Excellence**  
**Park City, Utah**

**1. Introduction**

- A. The meeting was called to order at 3:00 PM.
- B. Approval of March 2011 National Annual Working Group Minutes.

Steve Slivinski called the meeting to order. Steve thanked Walt Evans for allowing the Masters to use the Center of Excellence facility for both the Masters National Working Group meeting and the Open House for the 2012 Masters Nationals participants that would follow the meeting.

Steve brought to the Board's attention the recent loss of two avid Masters competitors, Harold Westcott and Gene Timmons. As true competitors and outstanding gentleman who both took great pride in promoting Masters racing, Steve proposed dedicating the 2012 Skiers Edge Masters Nationals in honor of their memory. The MOTION was unanimously approved.

Steve Slivinski made a MOTION to approve the Minutes of the 2011 National Annual Working Group Meeting. Mark Mirviss approved the MOTION, which was seconded by Gary Randall. Bill Skinner reviewed some of the changes that had occurred since last year, including the new online registration system for Nationals, and the incorporation of Super Combined instead of Downhill for the Spyder National Team.

**2. Working Group Members and Others in Attendance**

Steve Slivinski, National Chairman  
Bill Skinner, USSA Coordinator  
Gary Randall, Alaska  
Ryan Fuller, Central  
Bill McCollom, Eastern  
Mark Mirviss, Far West  
Knut Olberg standing in for Ann Ozuna, Pacific Northwest  
Graham Smith, Rocky Mountain  
Amy Lanzel, Intermountain  
Fran Noel standing in for Toby Chapman, Northern

Others participants in attendance:

Walt Evans, USSA Sport Development  
Jeff Weinman, USSA Comp. Services  
Bob Davis, FIS Representative  
Bob Sarchett, Intermountain  
Keith Thompson, Intermountain  
Thunder Jalili, Intermountain  
Meri Stratton, Intermountain / Big Sky  
Nadine Price, Eastern

Pepi Neubauer, Eastern – New York  
Deb Lewis, Far West  
Mike Braun, Far West  
Dave Kornish, Pacific Northwest  
Wiebe Gurtmaker, Rocky Mountain

### 3. Reports

#### A. Bill Skinner, USSA Masters National Coordinator Report

Bill explained the materials included in the Meeting packet.

a. Competition Guide: The Competition Guide came out in September and hard copies were distributed to each division, as well as posted online. Hard copies will continue to be available but to save money the bulk distribution will be online. Bill asked the Group to review each division's section and submit changes and suggestions to him.

b. Nastar Letter: A letter was sent to 6,000 Nastar participants (Gold and Platinum medalists over the age of 25) with a copy of the Fall Newsletter. The purpose of the letter is to educate Nastar racers on the various Masters programs, explain availability, and encourage racers to join.

Bill explained that a sponsor, EZ Pak, was secured to enhance the promotion. A similar letter was sent to 400+ former USSA Masters members asking them to rejoin. Approximately 100 people accepted the "Free Hat When You Rejoin" offer. He recommended doing a similar marketing campaign next year with perhaps a bigger award.

c. Fall Newsletter: The Newsletter serves as marketing collateral / brochure for the Masters. It includes information on major events, division information, and has educational articles. Bill asked that contributions for the Spring Newsletter be submitted no later than April 1. Articles for the Spring Newsletter will likely include how Ligety won the second run on 35m skis, and another on how we can improve Masters racing.

d. Calendar: Bill emphasized the importance of scheduling events early. He recommended to the Group to try and find out where and when other events were being held, such as J2 and J3 competitions and national events, and try to avoid schedule conflicts. A great opportunity to reschedule events for the following year is just following the end of the current event when thanking the resort representatives for hosting the event. He emphasized that scheduling early promotes good relations with the venues.

e. Survey: Included in the packet are the results of a survey that went to 400 former Masters members asking why they have not renewed their memberships. A list of the names of the non-renewed members will be distributed to each division leader. It was noted that when assessing the surveys, not one response indicated that the reason someone did not renew their membership was because of the program itself. Most of the reasons for not returning were due to injuries, loss in wages, economy, and family obligations. In addition, a request went out to divisions to submit comments / suggestions on how to collectively grow the Masters racing program; the comments are also included in the packets.

#### B. Masters Overview

##### a. Membership Statistics

Bill Skinner met with the Program Committee Chairman, Daryl Landstrom; the USSA Sport Development Director, Walt Evans; and the USSA Competition Services Director, Jeff Weinman; to discuss growing the Masters racing program. Bill reported they hoped to generate ideas directly from the divisions on how to re-energize the program. Due to membership decline, it was determined that they would like feedback directly from the division on how to increase membership, as well as produce better races, thereby attracting a larger Masters membership.

Bill reported on the national membership statistics. He explained that in 2010/2011 the national membership had declined by 6%, and in 2011/2012 it had declined by 8%. Although these figures represent a report card, a more important aspect of success would be results from participation in races. Bill encouraged everyone to review the USSA survey results, and to read Bill McCollum's summary article included in the packet since he is well-educated in ski racing and specifically knowledgeable on the Masters program.

b. Changes

Bill Skinner explained that in 2011 / 2012 the Masters program was overloaded with major events. Because the Regionals, Nationals, and a World Championships were all scheduled in the same year, it may have negatively affected attendance at local races. He reported the attendance for race participation with the Intermountain division did decline. Going forward in 2012 / 2013, the plan will be to schedule the Nationals event in the West and cancel the Western Regionals event. The Speed Series will continue. In the future, if Nationals take place in the East, then there will be a Western Regionals. The change is to remedy having two major events across one geographic region in the same year. This will hopefully make the Masters race series work best for each division and boost attendance at local races.

In the past ten years, USSA Masters memberships have declined by a total of 20%. Rather than to place blame on the economy or new trends like snowboarding and freeskiing, Bill encouraged the Group to help determine the reason for the decline and come up with suggestions to reverse the trend. He explained some of the ideas that might be discussed are marketing, sponsorships, ski shows, program administration, communications, etc. "What can USSA do differently to help our programs?"

C. USSA Sport Development, Walt Evans

Bill Skinner introduced Walt Evans, in charge of USSA's Sports Development. Walt welcomed everyone to Park City and the Center of Excellence. He explained that the Masters is an important program for USSA not only for the athletic component, but the Masters represent a huge fan base for the Olympic Teams. Walt's responsibilities as Sport Development Director are three-fold: "1) Value to our stakeholders, which are you and our clubs, our officials and our coaches, 2) Resort relations, and 3) Growing the Sport." Walt explained his primary focus in the past year has been on clubs and the welfare, responsibility and accountability of venues, which directly affects the Masters.

a. USSA Improvements

Walt Evans explained that many of the improvements by USSA are hidden values to the Masters programs. These improvements help for the security of all athletes by putting racers in a safer environment, such as:

- Since the Spring of 2006, USSA has homologated 700 courses. It is required that Masters compete on homologated courses due to appropriateness for competition and safety.

- A screening process for coaches was launched to ensure junior racers are in a responsible environment. Coaches are screened every three years. Also, referees have to be updated every two years.
- With the help of the Kelly Clark Foundation, World Cup Supply, Reliable Racing, and others, approximately 120 miles of Vnet have been added nationwide.

Additional improvements include the launch of an electronic scheduling process, a new concussion policy, and in November an electronic registration system is scheduled to be unveiled at no charge to the race community.

Walt asked the Group to consider allowing USSA to start scoring Masters events. This would create a national ranking / seeding system for Masters' athletes. He explained this system has been very successful with Nastar and racers enjoy the ability to access a website where they can see their ranking nationally. Hopefully this will also help to retain members and grow the program in the future.

#### 4. **Improvement Ideas**

##### A. Masters Licensing Fees for Coaches

Bob Sarchett advised that encouraging coaches to participate in the Masters program is important because they are high-quality competitors and they could help promote the sport. He recommended waiving the Masters USSA license fee for coaches. He emphasized that the coaches are a great influence on the kids, who grow up to hopefully become Masters racers. Bill Skinner explained the current rule; coaches under 39 years old do not need a Masters license, and coaches over 40 years of age require a Masters license. Bill suggested that careful consideration should be taken because approximately 200-to-300 members requiring only the alpine license may be eliminated, but a higher response rate at races may result. Bill summarized the discussion: "So what we are proposing is having any USSA membership good for racing in Masters races," and asked Walt to consider this proposal.

Keith Thompson and Bill McCollum argued that the membership fee is not the major deterrent for coaches, and others, not obtaining a USSA Masters membership. They suggested other expenses involved in racing far outweigh the membership fee, i.e., travel, equipment, race entry fees, and training fees. Walt Evans agreed with Keith and Bill but added that there is an advantage to having coaches automatically enrolled into the Master program, it will likely produce better coaches.

##### B. Temporary Memberships

Bill Skinner suggested considering adjustments to the temporary membership structure. When racers intend on participating in just a few races per season, it provides the opportunity to convert these temporary memberships into full memberships. He asked the Group if they felt contributing some of the limited Masters USSA budget towards giving away temporary memberships would help increase participation. Bill McCollum suggested allowing racers with only temporary memberships to compete in regional events. McCollum added that the Eastern division has experienced about a 50% conversion rate from temporary memberships to full memberships.

Ryan Fuller reported that the Central division found that the membership process itself was complicated and confusing and would be best served with a more linear approach. He explained that there seemed to be plenty of interest in the Masters racing program but when explaining how to participate; division and USSA licenses, temporary- versus full-membership options, paperwork, race registration, and the like; it became overwhelming and caused barriers.

Ryan stated that we should look at it from the customer's perspective. Nastar is simple, you go to the start gate and pay \$5 and you can race. We should keep the process simple.

Additional ideas included: 1) lowering the temporary membership fees in general, 2) charging \$20 or \$25 for two races, and 3) prorating the membership fee for a portion of the season to half price.

### C. Event Types

Bill Skinner advised that having appropriate types of races and venues would also help increase participation in Masters racing. He spoke with Daryl Landstrom, Head of the Program's Sub-Committee, who thought we should consider discontinuing Downhill events. Sometimes venues are too tough for the entry level person and there seemed to be fewer Downhill enthusiasts. Daryl suggested incorporating a dual event, which seemed to be quite popular among the beer leagues. Or perhaps try a Super Combi where one pair of skis are used for two different events.

### D. Marketing

Mark Mirviss recommended we try to improve the overall image and perception of the "Masters Racer" to promote the program. He advised that many of the club racers and Nastar enthusiasts at Squaw Valley implied the Masters program was comprised of an "elitist" crowd. Although the Masters generally compete on better maintained courses than club races or Nastar, people get the impression that Masters racing is too difficult and there isn't an introductory program to Masters racing. Mark explained the need to encourage all members to welcome new participants into the program. While a portion of Masters competitors are hard-core competitors, most Masters racers are involved in the program primarily for the social aspect; i.e., the parties and to ski with new people. Meri Stratton added that we need to make an effort to get the U.S. Ski Team and club coaches to embrace the Masters; an improved mindset from these groups would help to promote Masters to those individuals not destined for the U.S. Ski Team.

Bill Skinner stated that the image issue may be better addressed at the local level. Bill McCollum commented on the difficulty of the events and added that it would be a shame to see Masters racing neutered to the point that it becomes a glorified beer league. McCollum said: "Masters is at the next level, which differentiates us from those other two programs."

Nadine Price suggested having a small brochure or some type of marketing collateral that can be handed to people. The piece should include simple instructions on how to participate, contact information, and data to entice the reader to participate. In addition to the newsletters and the website, this marketing collateral would be helpful at ski shows and to those inquiring about the programs on the mountain. Walt Evans suggested that he and Bill Skinner work with the USSA art department to develop a really nice brochure shell, then it can be sent to each division to be customized and printed.

Keith Thompson recommended that celebrity talent would be a big draw in gaining interest to our program. By soliciting former U.S. Ski Team talent to forerun races, it would greatly expand awareness and to help increase participation. Bill Skinner advised that this usually costs a lot of money which comes from sponsorships, therefore, securing strong sponsors would be the key into making this goal achievable.

Meri Stratton requested a stronger marketing presence by both USSA and on a division level. She explained that USSA, division heads, and administrators all promote the sport well, yet we need a force to help reach beyond. For example, Bill Skinner did a great job reaching out to

the Nastar group. We need more marketing to get people to the races in all divisions and a specific person coordinating the efforts.

Additional ideas included:

- 1) Re-igniting the poster promotion USSA conducted a few years ago,
- 2) Launching an “Introductory Training Days” program for new racers,
- 3) Holding night competitions,
- 4) Having more organized training programs,
- 5) Offering “Drop-in” training sessions or punch cards,
- 6) Incentivizing current members to bring in new members,
- 7) Building a stronger online presence,
- 8) Acquiring a targeted email / mailing list (such as: Nastar or Fuxi list),
- 9) Sending a promotional mailing to parents of the J3 and J4s,
- 10) Encouraging the resorts to promote the Masters by giving a “Free Day of Masters Training” voucher with every seasons pass, and
- 11) Creating a Committee to propose a comprehensive plan.

Walt Evans recommended that a Committee be formed who could develop a list of ideas and formulate a plan. Bill Skinner and Walt can evaluate the plan, determine the best ideas to move forward, and present the ideas before the National meeting in May. Walt also suggested rolling-out a test program in a single division or state next year. The plan may contain format changes, a night Slalom event, a dual event, an open house, etc.

#### E. Sponsorships

After several comments on the possibility of securing U.S. Ski Team alumni to participate in Masters events, Bill Skinner explained the costs involved in securing “star talent,” as well as the need to acquire sponsorships to pay for the talent. He expressed concerns with the lack of marketing support at USSA that would usually help in securing sponsors. Pepi Neubauer asked about restrictions for securing Masters’ sponsors. While Skinner explained that regionally the sponsorship criteria was quite flexible, Amy Lanzel advised there is additional criteria to consider, one of which is with the individual resorts. While a sponsor may be approved by USSA, each resort may approve / decline an event’s sponsor. Pepi stated that it would be quite unfortunate to work hard on gaining a sponsor just to have the company declined, and therefore requested a sponsorship guideline. Walt Evans offered to send a list of potential companies that should not be approached with respect to sponsoring the Masters program.

### 5. **2013 Masters Nationals**

Bill Skinner reported that Nastar and the U.S. Ski Team were combining forces to produce Nationals events for 2013. The program was put together because of the sponsorship angle; both entities were sponsored by Nature Valley. Skinner expressed interested in having the Masters associated with this endeavor. Since the Masters use the same type of venues as the National Team, it makes sense that the venue will benefit from the added events, while the Masters would benefit from any media and press exposure that is already in place. These events are in the final negotiation stages and are forecast to be held in the Tahoe California area.

A second option for the 2013 Masters Nationals venue would be Big Sky, Montana. Meri Stratton is the liaison with Big Sky and stated “Big Sky is ready, willing and able to put on the Nationals next year.” Meri explained Big Sky can hold any kind of event, including Downhill, Super G, GS, Slalom, or a Super Combined. Big Sky produced this year’s Western Regionals and numerous Masters Nationals in the past. Big Sky is excited to hold our 2013 Nationals and Meri highly recommend considering this venue for next year’s Nationals.

Bill Skinner proposed a vote on having either a traditional event (Downhill on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday; Slalom, GS and Super G would be held over a two- or three-day period at the end of the week) or incorporate Super Combined in the National schedule. If Super Combined were incorporated into the schedule there would be no Downhill at the Nationals, similar to how the event was structured this year.

**6. Voting Issues:**

(1) Should the 2013 Masters Nationals be structured in a traditional format versus Super G (no Downhill) format:

Fran Noel, Northern:	Super Combined
Gary Randall, Alaska:	Downhill
Ryan Fuller, Central:	Downhill
Knut Olberg, Pacific Northwest:	Downhill
Bill McCollum, Eastern:	Abstained
Amy Lanzel, Intermountain:	Downhill
Mark Mirviss, Far West:	Downhill
Graham Smith, Rocky Mountain:	Downhill

(2) Selection of members to form a Development Committee. These individuals will develop a suggested plan for upcoming changes for submission to USSA. The following people were approved unanimously to the Committee:

Ryan Fuller, Central  
Nadine Price, Eastern  
Thunder Jalili, Intermountain  
Bill McCollum, Eastern

Steve Slivinski made a MOTION to allow attendees to review the division reports in the packets on their own rather than addressing the issues at the meeting due to time constraints. MOTION was seconded by Gary Randall. MOTION passed unanimously.

Steve Slivinski adjourned the meeting at 5:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Donna Allen  
Acting Recording Secretary

Attest:

---

Steve Slivinski  
Alpine Masters National Chairman