



Club Questionnaire: Craftsbury Outdoor Center

Q: Share some Club highlights from this past season.... for example: Best or most well attended events; fun practice sessions/drills; social events/Club building activities, etc).

A:

Fort Kent

We brought a large contingent of kids (mostly U15s) to Nationals at Fort Kent. Our kids (The “Spriglets”) and elite Green Racing Project (“The Sprigs”) athletes raced together on relay teams and did some pre-race course scans together. We also invited other local athletes (kids thru masters) from Ethan Allen and Ford Sayre into our group since they didn’t have coaches attending the event. The entire group shared a wax cabin during the weekend and it was neat to see athletes of different ages and different clubs supporting each other.

Novice Racing at Craftsbury

In mid February we held the Bayley-Hazen Biathlon race. We had almost 80 novices complete a safety clinic and try their first biathlon race. Our “expert” racers (including many of our Spriglets) stuck around after their own race to help out as volunteers with the novice event. It was neat seeing a lot of parents of kids from our programs jumping in and trying biathlon for the first time. We had hoped to hold a second version of this event in mid March but unfortunately the early melt-out this spring made that impossible.

Q: Highlight a story (or two) of Club participants who improved the most, and/or were able to participate in high level competition this past season.

A:

The Soldier Hollow World Cup was a special experience for the club because we had representation in all corners of the event. We had several GRP Sprigs racing: Kelsey, Jake (who anchored the men to a historic 4th place!) and Margie (who raced in US World Cups for both biathlon and xc skiing this winter!) GRP ski coach Pepa spent the week helping staff the Bulgarian biathlon team. A couple of our club coaches, Rick and Susan, worked as Chief and Assistant Chief of Course. Our HR/accountant from the Craftsbury Outdoor Center spent the week volunteering on the range and the course. And we even had one of our Spriglets, Clare, and her dad Hugh volunteering for a couple days!

Q: Share one secret to your success as a club, or something you consider to be Best Practice.

A: Our biathlon kids are also required to be part of our ski training programs. In both programs we emphasize the importance of a learning-mindset and we work hard to build a supportive team culture. We keep the focus away from results. Most of our club ski practices end with a giant game of dodgeball. Most of our club biathlon practices end with some sort of relay game. We always make all members of a relay team do a final loop of skiing together as a group after their last shooting. As teams finish, they are encouraged to cheer for the remaining teams. They like to make a tunnel with their poles to greet the last teams coming into the finish.

Q: Share either some history related to your club, or some plans or excitement for where your club is headed.

A:

Our ski club operates through the Craftsbury Outdoor Center, a non-profit dedicated to promoting lifelong sports and sustainable practices. We have athletes of several different sports that come here to train- rowers, skiers, biathletes, runners, and mountain bikers. Although we have supported elite level biathletes for over a decade, including several Olympians, we had minimal kids biathlon programs until recently. In 2019/2020 we built a new 15 range with a roller loop and that has elevated the visibility of biathlon greatly among the users of the Outdoor Center facilities. At the same time, we've had several retired elite biathletes settling in the area. By involving them as coaches we have been able to develop more club offerings and meet growing demand for the sport. Right now we have an awesome cohort of U13-17s falling in love with biathlon and we hope to bring some to junior trials soon.

Q: How does your club attract new members/XC skiers?

A:

We believe in the importance of a strong ski foundation for biathletes. We have a thriving ski program with 200 kids participating during the winter. Of those kids, about 30 of them choose to add-on our biathlon programming. Going forward, we hope to facilitate more overlapping training and racing opportunities between skiing and biathlon. This can be done by aligning race calendars thoughtfully, encouraging athletes to participate in high level ski events to supplement their biathlon racing, and building a culture of collaboration among coaches.

Q: Has your club had success finding grant funding? If yes, what grants?

A:

Q: Share if your club has done any fundraising or community-related events. If so, how did it go and what did it take to organize?

A:

Our biggest fundraiser is a ski & bike swap that the ski club does every second year. This requires gathering a lot of inventory from community consignments, outside vendors, and from our ski & bike rental fleets turnover. Smaller fundraisers we do include grilling and bake sales at race events. Craftsbury uses money from fundraisers to support scholarships for youth/junior club athletes.

Q: How/where does your club purchase ammunition? Any good connections you can share?

A:

We source ammo through Lost Nation R&D. They are based a couple miles down the road. In addition to producing their own nifty stocks (fully adjustable!), they can import rifles & rifle parts directly from Europe.

Q: Is there any aspect that you are in need of guidance on, or you feel you could learn from another Club?

A:

Facilities: This summer we are planning to rework the design of our lead traps and paper target hangers based on a design we saw in use at Soldier Hollow.

Programming: We have made a lot of progress with our kids biathlon offerings in recent years but there is a need to offer more opportunities for masters. We are working on that with some help from our Green Racing Project elite athletes.