



## *The Scoop: USSA Points, J3 Race Days, and The Race Schedule.*

I know that as a first year J3 it can feel overwhelming as so much information comes flying in. Just when you thought you had it figured out as a J4 (athlete and parent), the rules of the game take a huge step up in direction of more complexity; I'm sure that many of you probably feel a little 'in the dark' as to what to expect. Although the rules do become more esoteric and complex, I assure you that some very mathematically bright people came up with a system that is fair and works surprisingly well (once you get the basics, are user friendly and infinitely interesting as well). This document is intended to build on the information provided in the "Stepping Stones" document you received earlier in the summer and provide a bit more insight on some differences between being a J4 and J3 come race day, the basics of USSA points, and an outline of our race schedule as it pertains to 'the big picture'.

As a J4 everyone was treated equally. When you arrived for a ski race, the starting order was determined by a random sort; then reversed for the second run. Everyone got a 2<sup>nd</sup> run even if you didn't finish your first. There was no ranking system with regard to start position, and there was no ranking system attached to your level of performance. The only measure of your performance was a "World Cup" point system where if you win a race you were awarded a designated number of points (100 for 1<sup>st</sup>, 80 for 2<sup>nd</sup>, 60 for 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc). These points were awarded to the top 30 finishers in an incremental fashion. At the end of the North Series race schedule, your two best finishes per discipline were tallied together and then everyone was put on a list of cumulated points, the athlete with the most points ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, second 2<sup>nd</sup>, and so on down the list. A line is drawn at a pre-determined quota and this is how the Intermountain division determines which athletes qualify for the IMD champs, and which ones don't. As we explore the world of USSA points, don't forget the 'World Cup' system, because we will re-visit this as I explain the J3 Junior Olympics and how to get there.

The following excerpt is extracted from the "Stepping Stones" Document.

- *As a J4 you started in random sequence at a race and everyone got a second run. There were no pre-determined starting positions; everyone had a chance to run 1<sup>st</sup> or last. As a J3 you will find that your starting position at a race is determined by your USSA points in a given discipline. You begin your J3 career with 990 USSA points, and you work your way down towards 0 (the best skiers in the country have around zero points). You carry these points with you for the duration of your skiing career, constantly trying to improve upon them. You get points (or lose them if you want to think about it that way) by entering races that*

*have athletes with better points than you. As a 1<sup>st</sup> year J 3 this isn't hard, especially when you consider that everyone (except other 1<sup>st</sup> year J 3) has better points than you. Your point result is determined by how well you finish in a given scored (J3 and older) race. The closer you are to the winner of the race, the better your result will be. USSA then updates your points every few weeks or so and averages your two best finishes in each event. You have a different point profile for each discipline.*

To build on this idea. Every USSA scored race day (J3 and older) will have a *Penalty*. The Penalty is determined through the use of a mathematical formula that incorporates a number of factors; most importantly the quality of the top ten athletes in the gender split race field. The better the field, the better the penalty.

On race day you begin the first run based on your USSA point ranking within the field participating. Like outlined above, at your first USSA race you will start in the back of the pack. The organizer takes all the athletes who have 990 points and does a random sort to determine your starting position. Your second run starting position on race day is determined by your performance on your first run. If you placed 35<sup>th</sup> on the first run, you run 35<sup>th</sup> on the second run. This is a very important distinction between your tenure as a J4 and your move up to J3. You need to know how you stacked up on the first run in order to time your 2<sup>nd</sup> run start time. To do this you can do a count on the timing board at the finish, or you can wait for the 2<sup>nd</sup> run start list to be generated (usually arrives to the start coach about 45 minutes after the first run is complete). An important distinction on 2<sup>nd</sup> run starting order is the BIBO rule. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> run at all USSA races the top 30 finishers on the first run will be reversed. If you finished 30<sup>th</sup>, you start 1<sup>st</sup>. If you were the winner of the first run, you start 30<sup>th</sup> on the second. If you don't finish your first run, you do not get a second run! You support the rest of the team for the remainder of the day, but you do not get another shot in the course.

At the end of the race, every finisher is awarded a certain number of *Race Points*. Your Race Points are determined by two factors: 1) your time difference from the race winner and 2) the *Points Per Seconds*. A race's *Points Per Second* are determined by some other magical math formula which incorporates vertical drop, number of gates, and some other factors. Every race is a bit different, but the gist is the same. To calculate your *Race Points* you multiply your time difference from the race winner and the designated Points per Second. To calculate your final *Result* on the day, you take the pre-determined *Penalty* and add your *Race Points* to them. For example, say the penalty is 80 and you finished 5 seconds behind the winner. The unique characteristics of the course determine that the Points Per Second are 8. You multiply 5 seconds x 8 with a resultant number of 40 Race Points. Your final result on the day is 80 (the Penalty) plus 40 (your Race Points) which equals 120 (your final result). Whew!!!!!! If you are so fortunate to win a race, your final result on the day will be equal to the Penalty (0 Race Points awarded).

Each discipline (Slalom, Giant Slalom, Super-G, and Downhill) are scored separately. Your USSA point profile is established by adding your top two Results in each discipline

and averaging them together. For example: say for GS you had a final result of 150 in one race, 120 in another, and 240 in a third. Your USSA GS point profile would be determined by averaging your top two finishes (150 and 120) with a result of 135, your 240 point result would be dropped and not incorporated into your profile. This number (135) would then be used to determine your starting position at the next race. He or she with the lowest USSA points gets to run in top of the field.

I know this seems overwhelming. With a little bit of practice it actually becomes very simple and elegant. It is a brilliant system and puts 13 year old athletes on the same ranking system as everyone else in the country with a USSA point profile. USSA can determine a very accurate national and divisional ranking based on your USSA points. Even though you have never raced against Bode Miller or Lindsey Vonn, you will be ranked right along with them in the eyes of the United States Ski Association (USSA).

So, how does this work with regard to our race schedule?

As you all should know by now, the available races for J3's are divided up into two distinct classes: Open Races and J3 Races.

- **Open Races:** these events are open to adults down to J3's. They provide you an opportunity to get some exposure to the bigger world of alpine skiing. As a first year J3 plan on starting dead last (or close to it) at these events. We attend these races to gain access to good penalties and therefore improve our USSA profile for better starting positions at our J3 events.
- **J3 Intermountain Qualifying series.** This series is for J3 athletes only, and is the bread and butter of your competitive season. Field size is generally smaller and, after you get some USSA points, you may have the chance to run closer to the front of the pack. There are four events throughout the season that provide you with three starts in three disciplines (Slalom, Giant Slalom, and Super-G). Apart from the SuperG race (three days), these are all two day weekend trips. These are great events, and you will begin to get really familiar with the other athletes from around the division by the end of the season. As a 1<sup>st</sup> year J3 you will find that these events are also really competitive. You will be competing against athletes who have a full year experience (and size) on you. It is rare that 1<sup>st</sup> year athletes win these races, but it does happen!!! This race series is designed to be straight forward and fun. It gives you an opportunity to mix it up with other J3's from the Intermountain division (gone are the days of the North and South series!), and it also provides you with a chance to qualify for the J3 Junior Olympics.

OK, now to tie all of this together with regards to our Race schedule.

### **What is the deal with the Erik Hayes races in December?**

I get this question a lot. The Erik Hayes is our first race of the season. It always takes place in Park City, UT and is a 4 day event. There are two GS starts and two SL starts. The Erik Hayes is an Open Race and you will be competing along side other first year J3's, J2's J1's, collegiate racers, and the occasional US Ski Team member.

This is an important race for a J3 because it gives you an opportunity to establish USSA points in GS and SL. If you don't attend this race, you will start in the back of the field for the first J3 races in both GS and Slalom. If you attend this race, your starting order at the J3 qualifiers will be determined by how you perform relative to the other J3's in the Intermountain Division. With this being said, this is a huge race, with a huge field of athletes. I, as Head Coach, reserve the right to keep athletes home from this event. The reasons are simple: it is an early season race and the competition is fierce. Some of you will have minimal training at that point in the season and the risk for injury is big if you don't have the necessary skills to handle running 140<sup>th</sup> on course. On occasion it is better for some athletes to stay home and train. I have spent a lot of time observing this incoming group of 1<sup>st</sup> year J3's and I don't at this point anticipate holding anyone back from this event, ***assuming*** everyone stays on board with communication and has strong attendance at our conditioning sessions as Fall sports come to completion. I know that some of you will choose to stay home from this event because of the cost, I completely understand, just know that there will be training at home provided for you. It is certainly not a death sentence for your season. Every year there are a number of athletes who work themselves into the top 10 at J3 races starting dead last. Once you get a few finishes under your belt you will then be in the mix and have a shot at a better start position.

### **What is the deal with the Open Series SG in Jackson Hole?**

Again, this event is very similar to the Erik Hayes, the only difference is that it is the SuperG equivalent. It gives you an opportunity to establish a profile before competing at the J3 qualifier event in McCall later in the season. This race provides a great training opportunity with speed on a great hill. Again, for some this may be cost prohibited, but we can work around it. The strength of field at this event, although an Open race, will be no-where near what you will experience at the Erik Hayes. This event has evolved into a primarily J3 field due to conflicts with the J1-2 schedule.

### **What is the deal with the J3 Junior Olympics?**

Come mid March, if you attend all the J3 specific events you will have 9 J3 qualifier starts (3GS, 3SL, and 3SG). Open races are not used as a qualification factor for the J3 Junior Olympics. The **J3 JO's** is a cool event. They select a team (~24 boys and ~18 girls) to represent the Intermountain division based on results at the Qualifying series. Basically, they take your two best finishes in each discipline, give you a certain number of points based on your finish order (points are awarded for the top thirty finishers—remember the 'World Cup' Point system

for the IMD champs as a J4?), and then tally your total score. At the Junior Olympics athletes travel as a division and race against other top J3's from all over the western United States. In all honesty, it is very difficult to qualify for this event as a 1<sup>st</sup> year J3. It is a great goal, and too lofty for most. As a first year it is *really* important to make sure that you stay task oriented and not get too bummed out should you not qualify for the JO's. You will have another chance!!! For those who do qualify, great job, it isn't easy.

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#### **What is the deal with the Soldier Mtn Downhill?**

This is an awesome event that provides our kids with a unique opportunity to run downhill. The course is very easy as far as downhills go and it a great training opportunity. This season is a little unique in that the following weekend is a J3 qualifier here in Sun Valley. Being that the Soldier mountain Downhill runs Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday it will conflict with our pre-race training for our home event. I know some of you will race this anyway, which is fine. We will need to touch base on an individual basis to make the right choices from a racer management perspective. Stay home and train for the big J3 event? Or let it rip down in Soldier? I think this will be an individual decision based on where you are stacked up in the JO selection process and your personal goals.

#### **What is the deal with the IMD Last Chance Event in Snowbird in April?**

These are the final races of the year and provide you one last opportunity to mix it up with a very competitive field. The results you achieve at this event will carry over into the next season. Based on the near -fact that you will be skiing faster in April than you will be December, this is a great event to set up a strong start to your second year J3 season (which is a big one!).

OK, I realize that most of you probably picked up about 10% of the information I just laid out. That means if you read this 10 times, you should be completely informed and buffed out.

It really isn't as complicated as I made it seem. Once you get into the process it is surprising how well it works. One of the best things about our sport is that determining a winner is easy, the fastest kid wins. There are no judges, and the rules are very simple – Go around the blue and red thingies, and don't miss any.

Of course, the true value of this experience doesn't fall in time spent on the podium, but time spent aspiring for and working towards greatness (which can be measured in many, many ways).

Let me know if you have any questions,

Scotty