

Western Region Athlete Development System

Western Region Development Philosophy

“An athlete’s genuine commitment to sport will always remain the most important development ingredient.”

Mission & Goal of Western Region Development

Western Region’s development mission, in support of USSA’s Vision, is to promote development of western athletes to the national team level, meeting and exceeding national team criteria. The Western Region’s development goal is to be the “leader in regional athlete development within USSA.” This goal will be measured by podium results at national championship events and by successful advancement of western region athletes to the national team. The region will provide elite athlete support and enhanced training opportunities that complement the local opportunities offered by the clubs and academies.

Importance of Ski Clubs

Western Region recognizes that the foundation of athlete development resides with the many ski clubs and ski academies within the region. These programs, working with their local communities and resorts, attract young skiers and new families to the sport. As young skiers grow, these programs provide the training, education, management, consistency and resources to support athletes as they reach higher competitive levels within the sport. These programs remain the “home base” for athletes, providing communication and coordination with families, schools, funding sources and other resources within the community.

Project-Based Model

Western Region believes in the project-based model of training and competition opportunities, leading the country in collaborative project-based development. This model allows the region to bring together high-achieving athletes of different ages and levels with the region’s most experienced and successful club coaches. The projects provide pace, content and programming that would not be available to these athletes at home. The project-based model allows athletes to be “grounded” at home, surrounded by family and coaches who know them best and believe in them.

Development Responsibilities

The five divisions of the region, along with the clubs, are responsible for development at the entry levels and participation levels of the sport. The region and the clubs are responsible for development at the elite levels of the sport. Where divisional and regional responsibilities meet is fluid and not always clear. Cooperation and compromise are essential for a smooth development pathway. As always, clubs remain the constant backbone regardless of changes within the development system.

U12 and Younger (Introduction / Sampling Years)

Young skiers, from mostly skiing families, are introduced to the sport. Parents generally encourage their children to seasonally engage in multiple sports and activities. The basis for sport participation: *“fun, belonging, and improvement.”*

Club and divisional responsibility

- Local clubs and divisions share the development responsibility.
- Sound fundamentals and skill development should be the primary focus.
- Competition should be local and/or in-house, secondary to training and learning.
- Development efforts should be broad reaching.
- Any local championship or season finale should include as many athletes as possible.

Regional responsibility

- The region strives to provide coaches education through club visits and clinics.
- The region promotes and supports Skills Quest, hosting Skills Quest training and tournaments throughout the region.

U14 Athletes (Transition Years)

During the middle school years, young athletes and their families become more seriously involved in one or more sports of their choice. The basis for sport participation transitions from “*fun, belonging, and improvement*” to “*performing and achievement*.”

Club and divisional responsibility

- Local clubs and divisions continue to share development responsibility.
- Skill development remains the primary focus, introducing tactics and strategy.
- Training to competing ratios remain high.
- The divisions introduce athletes to USSA scored racing with an appropriate schedule of competitions, including speed events.
- Divisional championships and finales continue to include a broad base of participants.

Regional responsibility

- The region continues to provide coaches education through club visits and clinics.
- The region continues to promote Skills Quest training and tournaments.
- Top performing 2nd-year athletes are introduced to the Western Region Development System attending a fundamentals summer camp.
- The region hosts a 3-event regional championship that includes a SQ tournament.
- Top-performing athletes are selected to the U16 National Championships, where the region organizes coaching and provides team management.

U16 Athletes (Specializing Years)

During their first two high school years, athletes and their parents generally choose the one or two sports in which to specialize. Performance and achievement become more important to both the athlete and the family.

Club and divisional responsibility

- Club responsibilities include more full-time training and management, more attention to equipment, and conditioning, and more financial and academic support.
- The club programs are preparing athletes for a life-investment into the sport.
- Divisions are providing a full calendar of USSA scored events that include access to competitions with older athletes, qualification races for divisional teams, and divisional championship and season finale events.

- Divisions are also hosting training opportunities for high-achieving athletes.

Regional responsibility

- The region provides practical coaches education opportunities for U16 coaches to intern at FIS RTG projects, as well as supporting Skills Quest training and tournaments.
- The region offers several training opportunities for high-achieving athletes including a fundamentals camp and Flight School in the spring, a SL camp in the summer, a race prep camp in the fall, and a Europe competition trip in the winter.
- A regional championship brings together the top-performing athletes from the divisions and qualifies athletes to compete in the U16 National Championship.
- The region selects and manages U16 athletes participating in national training and competition projects

FIS JR Athletes (Competition / Investment Years)

Athletes and families have chosen ski racing as a significant part of their lives. Many athletes are fully invested in year-round training and a full schedule of FIS competitions. Other athletes participate seasonally and may still compete in other sports. Some of these “part-time” athletes chose to compete more locally within a USSA schedule of races.

Club and divisional responsibility

- Clubs remain the “home base” for FIS-age junior athletes (U19/21 athletes) whether competing on a FIS track or a USSA track.
- Divisions host an elite level of divisional USSA racing for athletes on either track, and qualify FIS athletes to regional FIS competition.

Regional responsibility

- Western Region hosts two levels of regional FIS competitions; an Open Series to introduce athletes to FIS racing, and an Elite Series for athletes advancing to NPS, NorAms, national FIS competitions, and national championships.
- The region also hosts a regional junior FIS championship.
- Working directly with the clubs, the region provides additional training opportunities for top-performing FIS athletes during the prep period.
- During the winter the region coordinates coaching and provides team management to top-performing athletes at national FIS competitions and championships.

Regional Programming

The region’s most important development responsibility is to provide opportunities and content to the region’s top-performing U16 and FIS junior athletes. This additional programming will complement and enhance athletic opportunities already offered by the clubs, and often not possible for individual clubs to offer their elite athletes.

Principles

- Western Region will design and operate programs in cooperation with USST, National Training Group, and major clubs that enhance and complement the overall training program of the athletes.

- Western Region, in collaboration with western clubs and academies, will support athletes at NPS competitions, NorAms and National Championships
- Training camps will be designed in progression, using annual and multi-year cycles.
- Western developmental level athletes should be developing skills in each of the four alpine disciplines; Downhill, Slalom, GS and Super G
- The program will stress sound fundamentals and skill development at all levels.
- Western Region will support empowerment and engagement through education, training, and development of athletes, coaches, parents, and clubs.
- Western Region will strive to make the program as cost effective and affordable as possible.

Regional Training Group

The Western Region RTG comprises of pool of athletes that annually identify themselves as the region's top performers. These athletes are selected by objective head to head criteria. They are invited to projects ranked by current USSA points considering GS and the events of the project on an NTSM selection board.

U16 RTG

- Athletes are selected each spring into the U16 RTG for the coming season using results from the Western Region U16 Championships for 1st-year U16 athletes, and results from the Western Region U14 Championships for 2nd-year U14 athletes.
- Development requests are considered to the RTG and to individual RTG projects.

FIS RTG

- U19 athletes comprise the FIS RTG and are selected each spring using results from the U.S. NJC, results from the Western Region Junior Championships, and results from the U16 National Championships.
- Development requests are considered to the RTG and to individual RTG projects.

W.E.S.T. Team

The *Western Elite Ski Team* includes regional FIS junior athletes who are on pace to achieving USST national team criteria. These male and female athletes represent the highest achieving junior competitors in the region. Athletes are nominated each spring based on criteria set the prior fall, and officially named to the WEST Team in October after satisfying certain team objectives.

Purpose

- Bring together the region's top-performing junior FIS athletes for pace and training opportunities that augment training offered by home clubs.
- Promote a regional team environment that supports elite athletes at NPS, NorAm and championship competition.
- Coordinate individual athlete goals and needs with home club coaches.

Criteria (see appendix)

- Team nominations will be based on head-to-head results and age rankings.
- Criteria will be unique by gender, recognizing the developmental differences between ladies and men.
- Development selections may be available.

Programming and Content (see appendix)

- The prep period includes projects in May, August, September, October and November, providing a progression of training and preparation leading to early season competition.
- The summer months are reserved for conditioning and club projects with the expectation that club training will continue the prep period progression.
- Two conditioning & testing projects are included during the prep period, and are required of WEST Team nominees. Testing results will be available to athletes and coaches for consideration in the club's conditioning program.

Support (see appendix)

- The USSA Western Region Staff is committed to support WEST Team athletes with the highest quality assistance possible.
- The USSA Western Region Alpine Competition Committee is committed to provide significant financial support to WEST Team athletes at important projects.
- Eligibility for support requires a commitment from the nominees to the Western Region and the WEST Team program.