

Race Tactics and Evaluation

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Chandra and Tara are members of the Canadian 2005 World Championship Team. They are looking forward to racing for Canada in the 2006 Olympics in Torino, Italy.

Tactics

Strategy is fun to work on. You can learn so much from every sprint race. Discussing, evaluating and trying out ideas and courses is essential.

You can go into something with a loose plan, but nothing can be too rigid because you always need to think on your feet and react to what others are doing. I've had some success with a move we call "The Slingshot," but I've also experienced a race where I was too confident in its effectiveness and screwed it up.

Warm Up has to be addressed before we even get the fun ideas going. It's important to be really fired up before the qualifier, and well warmed up. Lots of intensity and some plyometric jumping

around in the start pen are good. Chandra's warm up Fifteen minutes of zone 1, 10 minutes skiing strong (around threshold pace), some hard work (15-60 seconds hard, twice) and then 10 minutes of warm-ups and jumps in the start area.

Tara's warm-up For a sprint race, I warm up quite a bit more than a distance race. After about 15 minutes of zone 1, I like to do the entire course hard about 30 minutes before my start. After that, I continue to ski easy with 10-30 second sprints mixed in, right up until the start.

The heats often require much less warm-up, unless there is a long break after qualification. I usually just do short sprints before

the first round, and then keep moving at a slow pace between rounds.

Sometimes running can work instead of skiing to keep the blood moving between rounds.

Slingshot relies on a downhill before the straightaway to the finish (a common feature in many of the courses I've seen.)

Ski relaxed in 2nd or 3rd place, and make sure you're right on that first place person's

skis as you crest the last downhill. Give a push or two extra compared to the person you're tailing, and tuck in really low behind them.

When your speed exceeds theirs so much that you'll crash into them if you don't move, pull out beside them, and try to carry your 'extra' speed to the finish. Switching Gears (by Chandra) is the way you make a move in your heat. The best places to "make a move" must be scoped out before competition, or noted from other heats (keep an eye on the people who are making it through to the next round).

Switching gears usually works better if you're in one of those heats that start out a little mellow, compared to a heat that is all out

from gun to tape.

I like to ski in 2nd or 3rd like in the slingshot and conserve energy for a powerful change of gears up say, the last hill, at which point to goal is to get a gap between you and the rest of your heat. Think of yourself as "launching an attack" like in the Tour de France.

Winning From The Front (by Tara) It is possible to win from the

front, especially if the qualifier has shown that you are much stronger than your competition.

Witness Marit Bjorgen at the World Champs in 2003. This strategy is only advisable if you are very confident that you can get a gap on your competitors before any downhills that may be present in the course.

You can either make that gap by dropping people off the start or by

taking it easy (relatively speaking of course!) and then switching gears suddenly as described above. This can be an important strategy on narrow courses where passing is difficult. Ski big and don't let anyone pass.

Foot Throw (by Chandra)

(Could potentially change your life.) I believe that we race the way

we train, and that success is a habit. You can't expect to perfectly

time a daring lunge when the heat is on. It takes practice.

My favorite is The Line Drill.

My teammate skis 50 meters in front of me and makes finish lines with her pole so that I get about 10 lunges in a row. Then we switch.

Make sure to stretch and work on your splits before doing this or you will be SO sore the next day.

A Word About Free Skating

(by Tara) A lot of people get too comfortable in their tucks. While

this is fine in a distance race where you need the rest (free skating uses more energy) it loses valuable time in a sprint. Staying low and putting in some powerful strides while others are tucking can make a huge difference!

At U23s last year, there was a small downhill (not big enough for a slingshot) just before the finishing stretch. In all of my heats I

gained on people or passed people on this seemingly insignificant bump in the course just because I was free skating while they were

tucking. Powerful strides are the key here (use those legs!)

Keep 'Em Guessing by never becoming regimented in a certain style of racing or stratagem. Always work on your bag of tricks and expand them with every event you race or watch.

Don't Be Intimidated In Any

Situation (by Tara) I have learned that on the start line of every single sprint race, you should be thinking, "I can win this race." It doesn't matter if the world champ is on the start line beside you - anything can happen. If you concede the race before you even

start, you may let opportunities pass you by.

Write It Down in a race evaluation, in a special book on sprinting or wherever it's meaningful to you. Learn from your mistakes, then laugh about them and don't repeat them.

Talk about ideas with your coach, but don't forget about your gut, which can tell you a lot if you just listen to it.

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