

STARTING

A

JACKRABBIT CLUB



ABOUT JACKRABBITS

The Jackrabbit Ski League is the most successful program run by Cross Country Canada and its divisions in terms of number of participants and geographic diversity. Last year there were approximately 9,000 Jackrabbits in registered clubs across Canada. These children are able to participate in a structured learn-to-ski program that is both rewarding and fun.

The scope of this article is to present some ideas on how to start a Jackrabbit program in your community. The ideas presented here have been proven but are not the only way to go about it. A good way to collect ideas is to attend your division's spring or fall meetings where you can talk to other Jackrabbit program coordinators.

INITIAL INTEREST

You may be in the position where you know other people who are interested in helping you start a Jackrabbit program but there are always other volunteers out there. A good way to get a core group together is to hold a public interest meeting within your community. This will enable you to plant the seeds of interest with potential participants and, hopefully, find some volunteers to act in coordinating roles or as leaders. Local and municipal recreation departments will also assist in helping to find others who are interested.

The meeting can be publicised through advertising in the local media. If you develop a good relationship with the newspaper at this time, you will be able to give them regular articles during the season. School and community notice boards are also good places to advertise.

At the meeting, be prepared to answer basic questions about the program. It would be useful to have read the Jackrabbit Leaders' Manual and have a working knowledge of the program. Showing the video "Jackrabbit, A Skiing Experience" or another Jackrabbit video is one of the best ways to give people an overview of the program. The videos are available from your Division.

Before this meeting, it is a good idea to know approximately how many core volunteers you will need. It is also helpful if you have a brief job description for each position and an estimate of the amount of time each job will require. The number of volunteers needed will depend on the type of program you wish to develop, but it is a good idea to start with the following:

Coordinator: oversees the whole program and arranges the site, volunteers and liaises with the Division

Registrar: is responsible for the registration of participants and collection of fees

Publicity person: is responsible for advertising details of the program, first meeting, etc., in the community

At the initial meeting you should try to ascertain how many Jackrabbits you could enrol but it is too early to enrol them.

Once the committee is formed there are several issues that must be dealt with.

1) SITE

The site for Jackrabbit sessions should have the following characteristics:

- . Reliable snow - it is unfortunate when too many Jackrabbit sessions are spent playing soccer instead of skiing, due to lack of snow.
- . A level area large enough to accommodate the expected number of participants.
- . Some varied terrain to practice downhill and uphill manoeuvres. This area should have a safe run out at the bottom so that run away Jackrabbits will stop before hitting something.
- . If the program will run after dark, the area should have lighting.
- . The area should be free of hazards that would affect skiing in a marginal snow year. Wire, stumps and other objects should be removed or cut off at ground level.
- . Washrooms and somewhere to warm frozen digits should be nearby. If washrooms are a considerable distance away you will need extra volunteers to escort your Jackrabbits to them.

A lighted football field or school playground may be the best local site, especially if there is a small hill nearby, or better yet, a wooded area next to a playground where snow is more reliable.

2) COST

After you have found your site you should determine how much you will charge for your Jackrabbit program. If the club has no other source of funding, the program will need to be on a "user pay" basis.

Expenses that need to be considered include:

- . Jackrabbit enrolment fee (differs from division to division)
- . Leader enrolment fee (differs from division to division)
- . Leader courses
- . Trail use fee (if applicable)
- . Gifts for volunteers and leaders
- . Ongoing leader training
- . Badges (ordered from your division office)

Not all these costs need to be passed on to the Jackrabbits. If they aren't, a fundraising plan should be developed to cover the shortfall. Sometimes a local service club will help with funds for the initial start up year. Approach them with a letter requesting this.

3) LENGTH

The Jackrabbit Manual suggests a 12 week program but it is up to the individual club to determine the length of their program. Some programs run for 10 weeks while others run for 15.

The length of the individual session should be determined by age of the participants. For children under 8 years old a one hour program may be sufficient. Longer programs are better for older children.

The starting date for the program can be determined considering the desired number of sessions and the length of the ski season.

4) ADVERTISING

Once the above parameters have been decided you are ready to advertise your program in order to attract Jackrabbits and leaders. It can be very successful to advertise in the schools. You can send an information kit to every elementary and junior high school in your area. Try to supply information to the schools in early September as parents make decisions on winter sports soon after school goes back. Once children are enrolled in hockey, music lessons, etc., it is hard to attract them to Jackrabbits.

5) ENROLLMENT

The enrolment for Jackrabbits can be handled in many ways. Your registrar can field phone calls and send out information/registration kits which must be returned by a given date.

Another method is to have an information/registration day where potential participants can register and receive information on the program. An equipment swap can be run concurrently with the registration and videos can be shown. If you want to talk to the parents as a group, it is a good idea to organize some activities for the children.

6) INFORMATION

As well as the obvious when and where type information it is useful to make up hand outs on:

- what to wear
- where to purchase equipment
- how to size equipment
- basic waxing

7) LEADERS

A large percentage of leaders will come from parents of Jackrabbits and interested adults in the community. Parents may feel that they "don't ski well enough" to help but they must be assured that ALL help is valuable.

Encourage all parents to come to sessions on skis (provided there is enough room for them). This way they will gradually get more involved and may take a leader's course in the future.

How many leaders do you need? Try to keep each group size to a maximum of eight, with two leaders per group. This way a leader can miss a session without causing a problem. You can also pair experienced leaders with new leaders and allow "on the job training". For 24 Jackrabbits, you should break into three groups, necessitating six leaders.

A second method is to have one leader per group plus a couple floating leaders to fill in for absentees. If this person has a higher level of skiing teaching expertise they can also help out with lessons or demonstrations with which the regular leaders are not confident. They can also do assessment for badges.

8) LEADER TRAINING

The Jackrabbit Leaders' Course is usually a one day program run by a course conductor appointed by your division. This course covers:

- how to teach children to ski
- the Jackrabbit skill progression
- games
- child development
- the organization of the Jackrabbit Ski League

You should notify your Division of your need for a course by mid-October or as early as possible.

Some clubs have found it advantageous to pay the course fee for leaders, on their behalf, to attend a course every year. More experienced leaders are encouraged to take further training such as a Canadian Association of Nordic Ski Instructors (CANSI) Level 1 course or a National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) Level 1 technical course.

These courses can be a reward for volunteering as a leader and are very worthwhile for the leader and the club.

For leaders with less skiing skill, it may be beneficial to encourage them to take a ski lesson from a certified instructor.

9) REWARDS

In order to keep your leaders coming back the thanks of the club should be expressed in a tangible way. Some clubs hold a volunteer appreciation party, others present their leaders with a small gift (custom made toques with the club name on them are popular). A thank you card signed by the Jackrabbits would also be appreciated.

The most important aspect of Jackrabbits is having fun, both children and leaders. If you start small and have fun, the program will grow by itself.