

RACING TIPS

Will Critchley, Winner of 2009 55 km Birkebeiner with pack

Did You Know?

Will has 5 different pairs of race gloves in case of any possible weather conditions.

Come prepared to a race with everything you think you might need and then some extra.

Make some friends! Not only is everything more fun with other people, skiing in a group will make you go faster. By skiing in a train, everyone shares the work. Each person behind you will benefit from reduced wind resistance, and will have slightly better glide. How will it speed up your skis? As a skier in front of you skis over the snow, the snow heats up a little bit and a small layer of water is generated, which will reduce the friction on your skis. It's similar to the concept of sweeping in curling.

Every now and then, trade off leading the group. Two or three people skiing together can make great time.

Make sure to drink at every feed station, even if you don't think you're thirsty. When I saw the World Cup racers in Canmore in 2005, the biggest thing I noticed was how even in a race as short as 15km, all the top skiers took a small drink very regularly, starting at around 3km. While you won't necessarily have that luxury at the Birkie, don't skip that first station because you're not thirsty. And make sure you actually drink what's in the glass, don't just pour it on your face.

On the subject of feeds... ever been tempted to bring along some of those sport gels to give you a little boost to get through that last 10km? Well, you would be very well advised to experiment with any food you plan on intaking during the race well in advance. Some people respond very poorly to the same product that many may be huge fans of. Don't get caught off guard by something that your body just isn't use to.

Be aware of how cold you are *now*, but be conscious of how warm you'll be *then*. Sure, standing on that lake at the start may be freezing cold, but what are you going to do with all eight layers you're wearing once you get into the trees and have been physically exerting yourself for 2,3,4,5,6+ hours? Consider dressing slightly lighter at the start in anticipation of warming. This is a winter sport, after all, you should expect to be slightly cold at some point.

Its difficult to find that balance between having too many layers and being too hot and not wearing enough and never warming up. Try experimenting on training days. Can you get away with slightly thinner gloves because your hands warm up after 20 minutes? Can you wear a vest instead of a jacket? Just don't go overboard and show up in shorts and a t-shirt.

If you find that your warmth goes in waves; you start off cold, and then get warm, then progressively get colder, it could be that the perspiration you're generating is making the clothing layer closest to your skin all wet and essentially useless (yes! You DO sweat in

winter). Many of the high-tech thermal underwears made by companies like Craft are designed to wick moisture away from your skin to keep you dry and are extremely valuable on race day.

Don't forget to protect your face as well; wear sunglasses. If its sunny, it will be VERY bright out there, the light will reflect off the snow. Even if it is cloudy, having sunglasses with yellow or clear lenses are very useful. Furthermore, when you're skiing with hundreds of other people, and poles are flying, snow is flying, people are crashing, and all other manners of chaos is happening around you, eye protection is very valuable.

All elite racers wear sunglasses of some sort. Its quite easy to find a pair of sunglasses that have interchangeable lenses too, as many brands make them. Check out your local ski, bike or running store.