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# 32 DEGREES

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Courtesy Photo

By Peter Kray

# How 4 Teams Became One

*Assessing the Legacy of the 2008-12 PSIA-AASI Teams*

Only time will tell the true legacy of the 2008–12 PSIA-AASI Teams, with each successive winter helping to clarify which ideas, innovations, and especially which people will have a lasting impact. From the advent of rocker technology and how the teams embraced it, to the rise of the class-encompassing session lesson, the growth of adaptive lessons across all disciplines, and the renewed focus on kids, there are so many exciting things that this group helped define and promote that only a clairvoyant could pick exactly what snowsports instructors in 2061 will still be talking about.

One thing that seems certain, though, is that the role the teams played in the 2011 Interski in St. Anton, Austria, will have a lot to do with how that “legacy” conversation starts. Not just because St. Anton was the venue where they presented so many of the aforementioned innovations (many of which have been well-documented in the pages of *32 Degrees* by the team members themselves), but also because of how the four teams—Alpine, Adaptive, Nordic, and Snowboard—came together to prepare for the event.

“Obviously, rocker was the technological piece that was tied to Interski—and how the teams worked to wrap their arms around and master new technology like no other team before is really an awesome story,” said PSIA-AASI Professional Development Manager Earl Saline. “As is the fact that the Adaptive Team for the first time truly is an equal player within the teams, and how much Bill and Geoff are respected.

“But,” he added, “I’d have to say that ‘connectivity’ is the one word that comes to mind when I think about how these teams worked together, and how everyone was a part of what the teams accomplished,” he added.

Saline said that much of that sense of connectivity came about as a result of the four teams sharing so many notes, practice sessions, and shared epiphanies as they carved down to the core of which emerging and timeless elements of U.S. instruction they wanted to present. What they kept realizing, he said, was how much each discipline has in common. How sliding on snow is still just sliding on snow, no matter what anyone is skiing or riding on; how every instructor shares the same basic goals of connection, understanding, and

accomplishment; and most important, “How when we all work together, we can achieve great things.”

Of course, the role of external factors like Interski, and the sudden explosion of rocker technology, helped expedite that sense of collective purpose. In terms of rocker, and the ease of turn initiation it represents, it’s hard to imagine that there will ever again be a single shift in technology that so clearly affects everything—from telemark skis to snowboards to alpine skis and sit-skis—all at once.

But technology is always changing, sometimes as fast as the weather. And for some of those instructors with the longest tenure on the team, there seems to have been an even deeper shift.

“For sure, out of every team I have been a part of this was the most interactive amongst all of the disciplines,” said Michael Rogan, PSIA Alpine Team Captain. “In preparation for Interski, we collaborated on a lot. Our indoor presentation was built by Josh Spoelstra from the Snowboard Team, Ross Matlock from the Nordic Team, Adaptive Team Captain Bill Bowness, and me.”

Rogan said that multi-discipline presentation of instruction—with a culture of connection as the common thread—was a key aspect of what the teams wanted other countries to understand about the overall focus of teaching in the U.S. But he also likes to point to other successes at home in which the teams have played an integral part, especially in working with the association’s education department to more quickly provide insight to the PSIA-AASI membership. In particular, the use of the Internet to share information, especially with regard to the ever-expanding—and now free—*Movement Matrix*, of which he said, “That’s something the teams were involved in from the get-go. These teams were the first to be involved in the creation of something like that.”

Like Saline, Rogan also hopes that one of the lasting legacies of the present teams is one of collaboration, and working together to achieve common outcomes. But he goes one step further, turning that concept around to focus back on the interaction among team members in each discipline, and how quickly they each take ownership of the messages and ideas that they are individually trying to present.

“On the Alpine Team, I think with (Alpine Coach) Rob Sogard’s guidance, there was really a sense of making sure that everyone was involved in the process, and in the direction of where we went,” said Rogan. “I like to think that we are setting the next team up for that level of absolute participation, because there are so many new ways now to get the message out.”

Asked whether the basics—the student-centered heart and soul and skill-based essentials—of teaching have changed as a result of the new technology, Rogan thinks not. More appropriately, he said, the equipment has caught up to what the best instructors have always taught.

“I think the Skills Concept and Centerline have potentially become more relevant now,” Rogan said, citing two of the most lasting legacies of the past. “The blending of skills is more important than it ever was, and actually a lot easier now to put into practice. Frankly, in the past, even when you were talking



Alpine Team Captain Michael Rogan helped tout rocker technology.

Cesar Piroto



Bill Bowness, Michael Rogan, and Josh Spoelstra epitomize teamwork in an indoor presentation.

Cesar Piroto



National Academy attendees benefit from team wisdom.

Julie Shipman



Adaptive Team members Geoff Krill and Bill Bowness share the Interski scene with Teams Manager Katie Ertl.

Cesar Piroto

about edging and pressuring, there was always still a little bit of hopping around because of the antiquated equipment.”

Echoing one of Rogan’s points, PSIA-AASI Teams Manager Katie Ertl said that she also thinks one of the lasting legacies of this squad is how much more closely they worked with the education department (now known as the professional development department). While giving considerable credit to Saline and former department co-manager Ben Roberts, she also points to the welcoming, ready-for-anything nature of the instructors on the teams, and how hard they worked.

“They really are some the nicest, most approachable people

**“I like to think that we are setting the next team up for that level of absolute participation, because there are so many new ways now to get the message out.” —Michael Rogan, PSIA Alpine Team Captain**

I’ve ever worked with,” Ertl said. “From the office to the teams on the hill, there was always a sense of willingness to tackle change, which in this day and age is key to the success of all of us.”

Most important, Ertl said, that ongoing interaction between the professional development department and the teams will have a direct impact on the membership, providing the kind of immediate information that can help fuel every instructor’s personal growth.

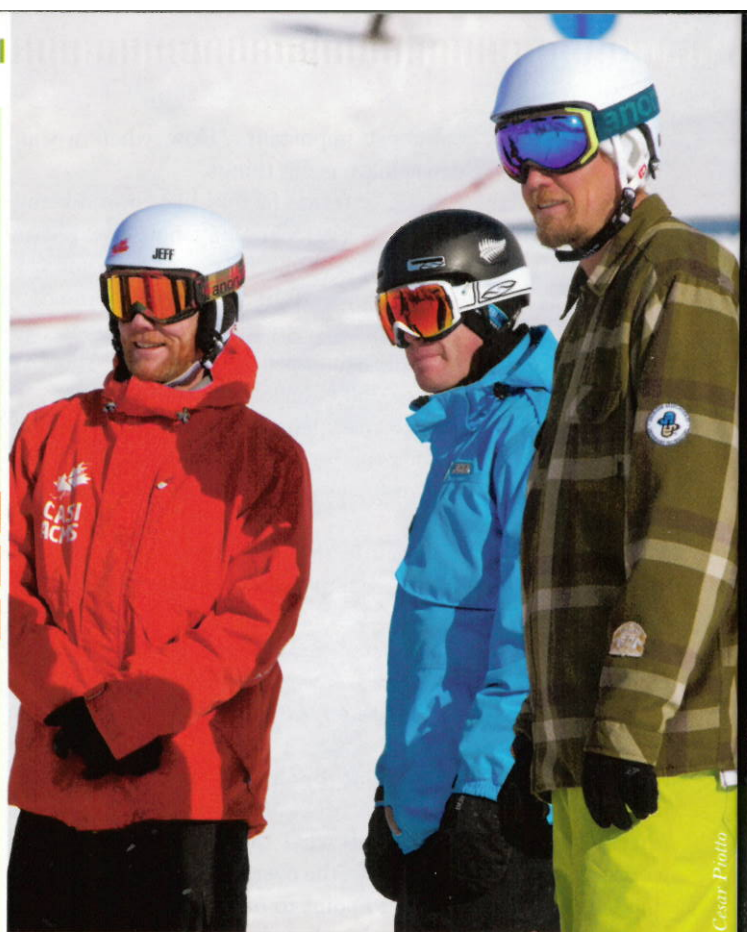
“In some ways the teams have always represented an arm of the department, and what we have with these team members together represents a top ski and snowboard school in its own right, which for all of the divisions continues to be a valuable resource,” said Ertl. “It’s much like the constant level of interactivity in a lesson itself, where you are continually trying to shape what you’re presenting to the best benefit of your student. The question is always how to take the best advantage of that.”

Which may be the most important legacy of all as far as this team is concerned—that as a team, and an association, everyone really is working for the benefit of each other.

It’s an idea that may have been best summed up by Snowboard Team Coach Lane Clegg at the 2011 Team Training session at Copper Mountain. Along with the other members of the AASI Snowboard Team, Clegg was busy trying to summarize all of the accomplishments of the present team for the team that comes next. He said he felt it was important to provide a kind of template for the next team, outlining what had been accomplished, and especially what new challenges and opportunities they might expect.

“We want the next team to be as well-positioned as possible to carry all of this momentum forward,” Clegg said. “We especially don’t want them to feel as if they have to try and start from scratch.” ❄️

*Peter Kray is the special projects editor for 32 Degrees, focusing on emerging snowsports trends and on-snow innovations. Kray skis, telemarks, and snowboards out of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and is the founder of Shred White and Blue ([www.shredwhiteandblue.com](http://www.shredwhiteandblue.com)) a media and apparel company celebrating American boardsports.*



AASI Snowboard Team Coach Lane Clegg (right) meets with international colleagues.



Alpine Team member Nick Herrin works with a National Academy attendee.



LEFT: Alpine Team coach Rob Sogard touches base with Ertl. RIGHT: Nordic Team member Tom Marshall pushes the rocker message.