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# 2011 INTERSKI PUTS THE EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION

By PETER KRAY; Photos by CESAR PIOTTO

Long after the glow of the fireworks, fresh snow, and new friends made on the slopes of St. Anton, Austria, at the 2011 Interski Congress have faded to embers, the international impact of what was taught, discussed, and cross-pollinated will still be growing. That's because this Interski—perhaps more than any other in the 60-year history of this event—marked the beginning of a new era in country-to-country cooperation.

"It really has become focused on the sharing of different teaching perspectives and the instructors' overall relationship to the snowsports industry," said PSIA-AASI chairman and leader of the U.S. delegation Eric Shekleton. "The quality of seminars, lectures, and clinics presented this year was exceptional."

Sometimes seen as a kind of snowsports instructor's Olympics, when countries came just to wow each other on the demonstration slopes with their hot feet and latest techniques, this Interski placed a focus on information and education. Sure there were several nights under the lights when Slovenians (tuxedo-clad, skiing to the James Bond theme); techno-synched Japanese; hard-rocking Swiss; Argentines, Italians, Americans; and teams from 38 countries in total went rocketing down the demonstration slope in front of huge crowds, hitting ridiculous speeds in tight formations. But out of the nearly 2,000 instructors in attendance, most seemed even more thrilled to hear what all of the other countries were teaching.



The sign says it all—in two languages!

"There is always an interesting clash between some of the national teams at an event like this," said PSIA Alpine Team Captain Michael Rogan. "Some come here completely focused on what they are going to do in the demo, while a lot of others are here more for the instructional component and all of the information that's here for sharing."

In both aspects—informational and instructional—the PSIA-AASI Teams brought their A-game. Their own workshop day on the third day of the Congress brought a standing-room-only crowd to the indoor presentation. Immediately afterwards, PSIA-AASI's contingent sent out more than a dozen on-snow clinic groups, in which various

team members dissected America's latest innovations in how to teach nordic skiing to kids, incorporate freestyle into ski and snowboard lessons, and develop new teaching methodologies in adaptive snowboarding.

Across disciplines, the PSIA-AASI demonstrations on the impact of rocker technology felt like an especially prescient message from the future of ski

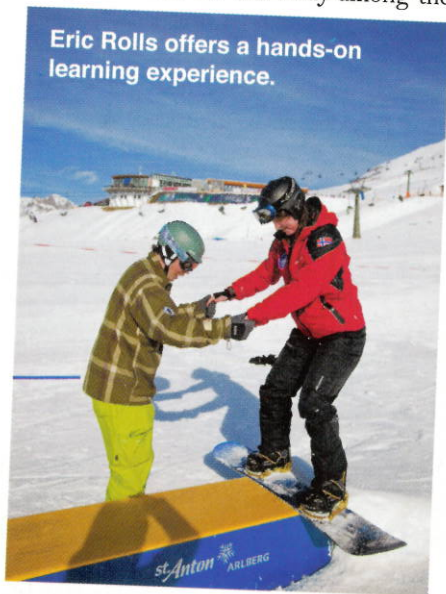


Indoor presentations drew big crowds.

and snowboard instruction. Meanwhile earlier benchmarks, such as America's development of student-centered teaching, and the skills concept—first presented at Interski in Czechoslovakia in 1975!—continued to appear in the baseline of other countries' newest methods of teaching. And in a youth-based program that ran alongside the event almost every day, team members volunteered to participate in teaching trainloads of kids who came up to St. Anton as part of the host country's initiative on reaching children.

"Our teams kept stepping up, whether it was making the extra effort to teach classes or taking time to get to know other countries' perspectives in depth," said PSIA-AASI Executive Director and CEO Mark Dorsey. "It really helped out the Interski organizers, and showed just how committed the team members were to immersing themselves in the event, and to exploring all the opportunities they have for instruction."

Echoing this sentiment, PSIA-AASI International Vice President John Armstrong, a veteran of seven Interskis, said, "This was far and away among the



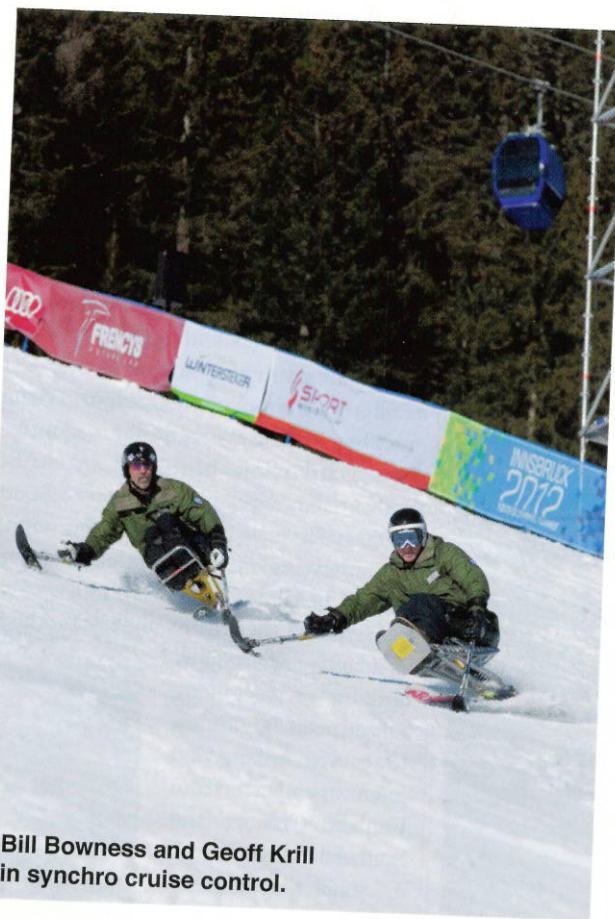
Eric Rolls offers a hands-on learning experience.

top performances I've ever seen from a U.S. team."

Said PSIA-AASI Adaptive Team Coach Bill Bowness—who paired with Adaptive Team member Geoff Krill to lead the U.S. down the demonstration slope at warp speed—the joy of sharing America's latest methodologies was one of the greatest aspects of Interski for him. "My highlight was presenting," he said. "It (felt) great to finally get out and do what we do so well."

### THE PSIA-AASI PRESENTATION

PSIA-AASI set the stage for a meaningful Interski from the get-go with presentations—anchored by a keynote address by Dorsey—that emphasized how American teaching concepts and strategies drive quality lessons on the hill. (To watch this and other key Interski presentations go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and enter TheSnowPros [one word] in



Bill Bowness and Geoff Krill in synchro cruise control.

the search field.) There was certainly a buzz in the air among Rogan, Bowness, AASI Snowboard Team member Josh Spoelstra, and PSIA Nordic Team member Ross Matlock during their indoor presentation. The packed house of instructors from such countries as Switzerland, Korea, Finland, Denmark, Ireland, Canada, and Japan helped stoke it, as did the excitement around the topics the Teams were presenting.

"They worked so hard over the past year to put these presentations together—they actually prepared twice as many topics but only had time for half of them," PSIA-AASI Education Manager Ben Roberts said. "The last couple months they've been completely focused on dialing them in. And the good news is that all of the content influences the clinics that team

members have led and continue to lead across the country this season."

Including adaptive snowsports, getting kids to cross-country ski, and incorporating freestyle at all levels, as well as embracing new technology (i.e., rocker), the topics also covered PSIA-AASI's overall culture of connection. "Our focus is on a partnership of learning," Rogan told the room of instructors. "It's about building a relationship between what our students bring to the table and how we meet their needs."

Highlighting all the intricacies involved in responding to its broad diversity of its

customer's needs—from the background of its students to the equipment they can be riding to America's vast variety of terrain—Rogan emphasized the versatility of American instruction. He also invited everyone to check out the resources available to PSIA-AASI members on the website at [TheSnowPros.org](http://TheSnowPros.org), and explained that all the attendees would have access to PSIA-AASI's member-only material online until March 1. "It's well worth a look folks," one member of the New

Zealand Team wrote in his blog from St. Anton. (It's worth noting that, for the first time, PSIA-AASI members were able to follow Interski—taking in the images and the instructional insights it represents—as the event unfolded via the PSIA-AASI website, the PSIA-AASI Community, and the association's Facebook group (TheSnowPros) and Twitter posts,



Michael Rogan promotes a culture of connection.

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Once on the snow, the crowd seemed to double, especially for the adaptive workshops on snowboarding. "At Vancouver Island where I teach, we're always trying to blend the best teaching methods," Canadian Team member Mike Bray said of an adaptive snowboard clinic being led by AASI Snowboard Team member Scott Anfang. "Everything I'm hearing right now is giving me information that I'm excited to take back home."

Helping other teams understand how an adaptive rider might best experience the sensation of beginning to carve, Anfang led team members from Canada, Croatia, and Switzerland through a clinic that was as informative as it was fast-moving. At the same time, Teemu Lehmusto of Finland was following Alpine Team members Mike

Hafer and David Oliver into the terrain park and looking for new techniques to take back home. "Our goal is to make the learning environment as simple and as exciting as possible," said Lehmusto. "The idea that adding freestyle to the lesson can make it more fun and motivating for the student is something that I really wanted to hear more about."

And in telemark and alpine, there was a large contingent of instructors interested in hearing how the U.S. is handling the advent of rocker and "early rise" technology (see "Rocker Goes Richter" in the Fall 2010 edition of *32 Degrees*) in their teaching. Following Alpine Team members such as Bobby Murphy and Jim Schanzenbaker—who broke a binding and watched a ski porpoise away down the off-piste in the expansive terrain off St. Anton's Rendl Gondola—the international crew was almost exclusively on carving skis, but still game to try and simulate the edge-

free initiation of "slarving" turns.

Most interestingly, the majority of other attendees still see rocker as freeride-specific. And given the lack of freeride terrain that countries outside North America, France, Switzerland, and Austria possess, most have yet to incorporate rocker into their own instruction. The idea that, in the long run, rocker might actually benefit beginners and intermediates the most still felt like a revelation to many of them.

"I was looking forward to attending this clinic because of the perspective it brings to working with the growing number of skiers we see who want to go off-piste," said Jakob Janck—one of five Dutch Team members who attended Schanzenbaker's clinic. All concurred that the idea of using rocker as a tool



PSIA's telemark clinic draws them in.

for intermediates was something of an instructional epiphany to them. Said Janck, "The idea that this can be important for up-and-comers is good to learn."

Several of the clinics lasted well past their scheduled finish time. And the on-hill interactions between the PSIA-AASI Teams and their international counterparts was declared a success by everyone—especially in the way that it validated many of the instructional initiatives that the PSIA-AASI Teams have taken. "In some of the other clinics I've taken here so far, people are present but they're not engaged," said Matlock. "Today, they were all engaged. You could see it in their eyes. I think that's a strength of ours—to get everyone participating."

Added PSIA-AASI Education Manager Earl Saline, "While other countries often look to learn from what the U.S. is doing, instructors in the U.S. are also looking to improve themselves. By understanding what our colleagues are

doing and why they do it that way we have more knowledge to use when assessing ourselves. We didn't go to *prove* ourselves, but rather to *improve* ourselves."

## KIDS ARE THE FUTURE

Despite, or more probably because of the fact that this Interski was held in the cradle of ski instruction,—the hometown of skiing pioneer Hannes Schneider, with its bare, expansive slopes, storybook hotels, and laid-back infatuation with skiing and snowboarding—the Austrian hosts seemed eager to give their guests a stage on which to shine. Their demo slope was perfect, complete with a giant screen and a custom soundtrack song. The hotels and coffee houses were warm and welcoming. And throughout the week, the Interski Snowsports School hosted kids from all over Austria for lessons.

A kind of multi-cultural mix of both students and instructors, several delegations provided some of their top instructors for a full day on the slopes of St. Anton. From the very first day, PSIA



Kids in control

Alpine Team members David Oliver and Nick Herrin, as well as AASI Snowboard Team member Josh Spoelstra, joined representatives from Hungary and the tiny country of San Marino in teaching kids from Innsbruck and Bregenz.

"We're talking about the future right here," said Spoelstra. "It's great that we get to spread the message of snowboarding, because the more we get these kids stoked, the more the industry will benefit. It's good for everyone."

Alberta Ferrari of San Marino said she was excited to teach kids from another country because she thinks, "It's important for kids to have different experiences with different teachers." She added that, "With all of the different languages and countries that represent snowsports, it's fun that these kids get to experience that right away."

Of course it being Austria, rather than encountering a group of newbies and youngsters like they might have expected, the first group of kids that hit the slopes

was comprised of a large group of young teenagers who were more than ready to rip the upper mountain. Rather than teaching how to ride the lift, Spoelstra quickly found himself demonstrating how to ollie and ride switch, while Oliver was hardly making turns trying to keep up with several of the fast-skiing girls in his group. Said Oliver with a smile, "We're definitely working on some rotary skills, but there's nothing wrong with their edging."

Herrin, after several attempts to stay with his group on-piste, opted for a series of several off-piste laps just to "tire them out before lunch." Interski and St. Anton treated the kids to lift tickets and free lunch along with the classes, and they probably went home with more energy than the instructors they raced from chair to chair.

"It was a lot more skiing than I thought I was going to get today," Herrin admitted after they were gone.

The actual practice of teaching kids paired well with some of the more interesting kid-based theories that appeared in presentations. In particular, Germany's "Kids Are the Future" program, which focuses

as much on the skills as it does the social and psychological benefits of riding, mirrored the PSIA-AASI freestyle-for-kids demonstration. And Sweden unveiled a plan to get all of the country's 4<sup>TH</sup> graders out on snow in a new initiative that resembles America's 5<sup>TH</sup> Grade Passport Program. Austria also presented a terrain park program on utilizing props such as bamboo poles for kids to hold to help stabilize their balance and accelerate their tabletop and rail riding.

## WRAP UP

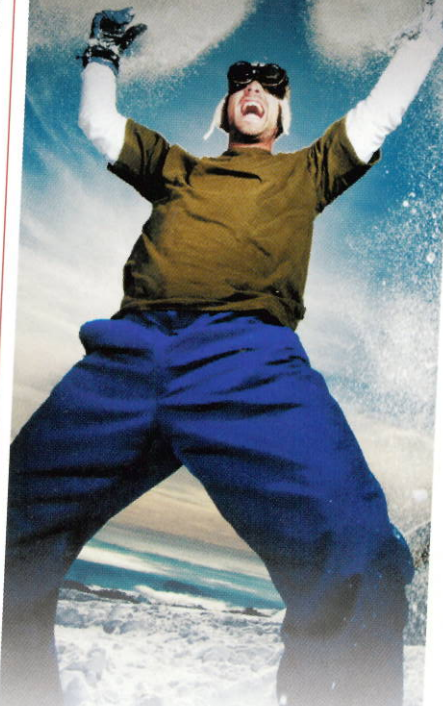
Overall, the entire event infused the PSIA-AASI Teams with some well-earned pride in the development of their own methodologies, as well as great new ideas to present in their clinics throughout the spring and on into next season.

"The entire event was like having one of those great locker room discussions with the entire world," said Alpine Team member Matt Boyd. "Interski

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— Michael Rogan



Making a grand entrance with rocker.

truly transcends borders and brings the world's alpine nations together to move our sport forward."

"It was a great exchange of information," agreed Alpine Team member Eric Lipton. "The nations in attendance really came here to share and learn, not just to demonstrate technique."

Of course that thrill of skiing on the stage of the demo slope never gets old, as attested to by Teams Manager Katie Ertl who said, "Standing up there with all of the lights and the crowd and the Tirol entrance bubble that you ski through onto the slope was fantastic."

But the power of sharing of information will more than likely be the lasting contribution of Interski 2011—especially for many of the team

members who were attending Interski for the first time.

"The whole event really opened my eyes to how the entire international community is constantly developing snowsports instruction," said AASI Snowboard Team member Tommy Morsch. "I think as a team we're coming away from the event feeling like there are many areas where we're a little ahead of the curve, and we're happy there was so much interest in our clinics. But there were also a lot of things for us to learn, and it's great to be going home with this deeper sense of connection." 32°

*Peter Kray is the special projects editor for 32 Degrees, focusing on emerging snowsports trends, on-snow innovations, and the PSIA-AASI 50/50 Project.*

## To get in on the educational excitement of Interski 2011,

be sure to attend PSIA-AASI's 50/50 Celebration in Snowmass, Colorado, April 4–9. Much of the instructional insights we took to—and brought back from—Interski will infuse that event on snow and through indoor presentations. And look for more Interski goodness here:

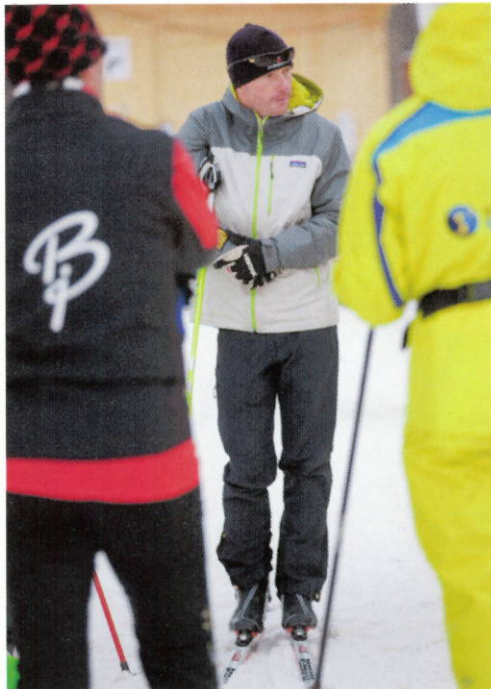
- ◆ PSIA-AASI's website ([www.TheSnowPros.org](http://www.TheSnowPros.org))
  - Blogs in "From the Wire."
  - The Interski Community within the PSIA-AASI Member Community (accessed through the Member Services Portal)
  - Web Extras in the 32 Degrees section
  - The Photo Gallery on the home page
- ◆ TheSnowPros on Facebook
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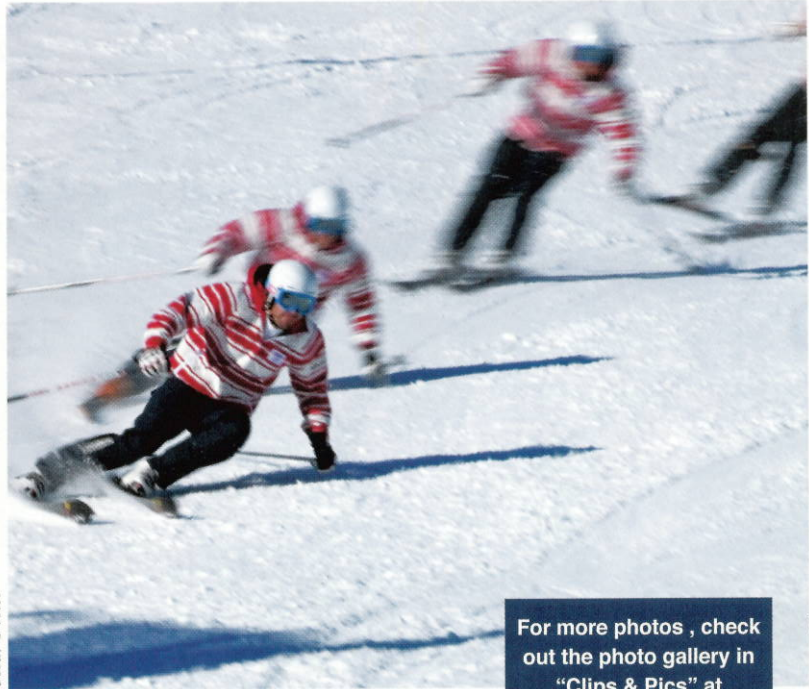
Cesar Piotto

Front row: Doug Pierini, Scott Anfang, Alpine Team Captain Michael Rogan, Gregg Davis, Bobby Murphy, and Eric Rolls. Second row: Dave Lynch, Nick Herrin, Robin Barnes, Geoff Krill, PSIA-AASI Education Manager Earl Saline, PSIA-AASI Education Manager Ben Roberts, Adaptive Team Coach Bill Bowness, Josh Spoelstra, Tommy Morsch, and Dave Lundberg. Third row: Eric Lipton, Matt Boyd, Nordic Team Coach J. Scott McGee, Jennifer Simpson, and Jeb Boyd; Back row: David Lawrence, Dave Lyon, Tom Marshall, Snowboard Team Coach Lane Clegg, PSIA-AASI Executive Director and CEO Mark Dorsey, PSIA-AASI Chairman Eric Sheckleton, David Oliver, Alpine Team Coach Rob Sogard, Teams Manager Katie Ertl, Mike Hafer, and Ross Matlock. (Not pictured: Charlie MacArthur, Jim Schanzenbaker, and PSIA-AASI International Vice President John Armstrong.)



Cesar Piotto

David Lawrence gathers his group for a cross-country clinic.



Cesar Piotto

France shows its skill on the demo hill.

For more photos, check out the photo gallery in "Clips & Pics" at [www.TheSnowPros.org](http://www.TheSnowPros.org).