

# ***A VOLLIE'S GUIDE TO VOLUNTEERING***

Doug Airey – Snow Valley Racing, February 2011

This is a summary of key jobs associated with a ski race. It does not incorporate all jobs nor does it cover every detail of the jobs. For more information please refer to the excellent material found at Alpine Canada (canski.org), under National Programs/Officials/Course Material. All volunteers, or often called “Vollies” are encouraged to take the various courses offered by their provincial offices through their local ski race club.

## **Race Organizing Committee**

The Race Organizing Committee, or ROC as it is often called, is the group of people that organize the race. They are responsible for all aspects of a safe and successful race. The ROC is made up of key departments such as: Course, Timing, Race Administration, Gates, Volunteer Coordinator. The ROC will meet months (maybe longer depending upon the size and scope of the race) in advance of the race. They assign “Chiefs” (think department heads), produce a budget and issue a Race Notice among other tasks.

## **The Jury**

The Jury is the overseeing panel of the race to ensure it is safe and that the rules of racing are applied in a fair and consistent manner. The Jury has the final decision on all race related activities with the Technical Delegate (TD), as Chair, having the deciding vote. Who is on the Jury? Typically three people – in all but the largest of races: The Chief of Race, the Technical Delegate (TD) and the Referee. The Chief of Race represents the ROC, the TD is appointed by the provincial governing body (in the case of Alberta – it is Alberta Alpine) and the Referee is appointed by the TD from the coaches. Adjunct members of the jury (non-voting) are the Start Referee and Finish Referee. These last two people are critical to the smooth running and safety of the race (and racers). They are also valued advisors to the Jury.

## **“Chiefs”**

As noted above in the ROC, these people are responsible for specific “departments” of the race. How do you become a Chief? Volunteer! As you gain experience you will be asked to take on more responsibilities (if you want). Typically the name of the Chief is an indication of their area of responsibility.

## **Starter**

This person “starts” the racer from the start gate. Once the Start Referee permits the racer to enter the start gate area, the Starter gives the command for the racer to start. The Starter is in constant communication with the Chief of Timing, via headset, to ensure that not only is timing ready but that the course is clear.

## **Assistant Starter**

Another key position in getting the racers off in time is the Assistant Starter. They ensure the racers are in bib number order and any exceptions are given to the Start Ref and Starter. A strong voice and ability to herd cats are two ideal qualities of an Assistant Starter! This is great position for someone just starting to learn about racing.

## **Course Crew**

These folks are the hands & backs of the race course. Prior to the race getting underway, the Course Crew literally builds the race course from start area to finish area. They keep the course in good shape throughout the race by “slipping” (skiing down the course moving snow built up on the course), tending the gate ruts/repairs, moving equipment around (e.g. rakes, drills, gates). These vollies are outside, moving on skis and working hard! It's a great area in which to learn about racing and seeing the action up close. Novices to experts are needed on the Course Crew.

### Timing

Without timing we cannot have a race. Timing crew report to the Chief of Timing. Prior to the race they set-up equipment in the Start and Finish areas, run timing wire and test everything. The first method of timing is “electronic”. Timing wands and eyes measure the racer’s departure and arrival – feed that data to the Chief of Timing’s laptop and together the science of specific timing software and the art of the Chief of Timing, a racer is provided with a time. However, electronics can fail – especially in the wet and cold environment of alpine racing. That is why there is ALWAYS a back-up system referred to as “hand timing”. The Chief of Hand Timing works for/with the Chief of Timing. You can have a race without electronic timing but you can’t have a race without hand timing! Hand timers (a person with a special timing watch and another writing the times) are positioned at the Start and Finish. Together they record the departure and arrival times. Usually timing folks ski to their assigned areas but always conduct their job with “skis off”.

### Gate Judges

Gate Judges are the unsung heroes of racing. They stand inside the race course but a safe distance from the actual racing. They “judge” whether a racer has properly passed through the gate. Technically it is not a hard job. The Chief of Gates conducts a “training course” before the race and demonstrates what is deemed “correct passage” and how to mark your Gate Judge card. If you detect a fault, you record the bib number and draw a simple diagram on the card. When the Chief of Gates collects the cards after the race, if you have a “Disqualification” (DSQ) you may be asked to attend a brief meeting at the finish line with the Jury. If not DSQs are found, your job is done – until the next race. Depending upon the race, you may watch a few gates. You must be in position well before the race starts (the race can’t run until Gate Judges are in place). Depending upon the race course location and your assigned gates, you may have to ski to your position. Once there, you can take your skis off. Gate Judges stand during the race so dress appropriately!

### Stewards

These kind folks keep spectators and others safe by not letting them come onto the course. Depending upon the race course’s location, there may or may not be a need for Stewards.

### Forerunners

Forerunners are ski racers that are NOT competing in the race. Their job is to run the course before the first racer to “test” the course and timing. Think of this as the dress rehearsal. Any problems with the course set and/or timing are quickly reported by the forerunner to the Finish Ref who, in turn, relays the message to the Chief of Race and Chief of Timing.

### Bib Collectors

At the end of the FINAL race, the athlete’s bib has to be collected. Regrettably, due to cost, the racer cannot keep the bib as a souvenir. Depending upon the Finish area’s location, Bib Collectors (usually two) may have to ski to that location.

### Race Administration

Never have the words “last but not least” been so true! Without the people in Race Administration there would be no race and certainly no awards! Those in Race Adm. work behind the scenes. They collect the race entries from the various clubs racing, conduct the “draw” (done by computer and this determines who gets which bib number) and hands out the coaches’ package (race bib, instructions, maybe lift tickets etc.). They work closely with the Chief of Volunteers to help with Vollie check-in and work extensively with Timing to record the results and determine the racer’s placement. They provide results to the coaches, post the various forms and help the TD complete their paperwork. For non-skiers, this is a great job as Race Adm. allows you to help with the race, know what is going on without skiing or getting cold!

### In Closing

Most, if not all parents who volunteer for race positions have found it rewarding. Not only do we help the racers have a safe and fun race but we get to learn new skills and make new friends. Most of us started with little (or no) race experience/knowledge. To the new volunteer a race may seem full of confusing equipment and acronyms but you learn the ropes quickly and you can ALWAYS count on a fellow volunteer to help out. There never is a stupid question so never hesitate to ask as safety is paramount to everyone! One final thought. Should you volunteer but due to some circumstance you cannot fulfill your commitment – don’t worry. Just inform the club/Chief of Volunteers in as much time as possible so that a replacement can be found. This simple consideration will go a long way to making others’ tasks easier on race day!