

Core Fitness for Better Endurance and Technique

In October 2019, I wrote about preparing for the ski season and promised further focus on specific exercises to enhance technique and speed. Read on, friends.

In cross country skiing, as in all endurance sports, fitness is critical to both your enjoyment and success. Unlike most endurance sports, cross country skiing involves significant upper body fitness. Consider elite running or cycling, where upper body muscle mass is a negative predictor of success. Elite cross country racers, on the other hand, gain almost half their power output from the upper body. Simply put, cross country skiers need to make upper body and core fitness a key component of their training.

Let's be clear. Core strength is important for speed and endurance, but it is also critical for maintaining good technique. Without a strong core, balance, stability and stance will suffer. More on that in a later article.

Here is a 20-minute core workout worth consideration. This is in addition to your regular ski workout.

Planks: front, side and other side. Start at 30 seconds each with 2 or 3 reps. That adds up to 4.5 minutes of plank work. Can you increase over time to 60 seconds of each (9 minutes in total)?



Notice in the image that the athlete has a hollow body position that activates the serratus anterior muscles, critical for push strength. For more information, watch the following video: https://youtu.be/F-nQ_KJgfCY



Notice in the image that the athlete is using hip lifts during the plank to dynamically engage more muscle groups.

Crunches: not sit-ups. Activate the abs. Three sets of 20 crunches with a 30-second break between each set is a great start. Work your way up to 3 sets of 40 crunches.

Leg Lifts: This exercise is simple, at least simple to visualize. Lie on the floor with the small of your back against the floor. Slowly lift your heels about 30 cm off the ground, then slowly return them to the floor. Do this over about 20 seconds. Go for 5 reps initially, working your way up to 10 reps. *This exercise is not recommended for those with back issues.* Consult with a fitness expert or a physician.

Figure 8s: Stand with your feet shoulder width apart. Hold a 5 lb. weight in front of you with both arms outstretched, and trace a figure 8 motion in the air. Do this for 5 reps of 30 seconds. Increase to 10 lbs.

There are many more core exercises readily available. Go to reputable online sources such as the Mayo Clinic to learn more.

On the snow, you can work the core with long gradual uphill. Focus on double poling intervals using appropriate technique. If you are not feeling your abs, you are doing it incorrectly. (See articles on Double Pole technique).

As mentioned earlier, good technique is still critically important. In fact, it has been said that good technique equals free speed. Stance and balance are enhanced with core strength, allowing you to glide longer on a flat ski, projecting your weight forward and making gravity your ally. In a short article, we simply can't cover everything. A lesson with a professional will help translate fitness and technique into powerful and exhilarating skiing.

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