



RIGHT OR WRONG? . . . "Don't let your legs get this far apart," says Mike Keagy as he demonstrates the right and wrong approach to an alternate ski class. Note that Mike sports the longer ski, all of four feet, while the youngsters wear three-footers, or four-footers, depending upon their degree of proficiency.

3-foot skis hold the key

A week's lessons takes minutes

By BUTCH HORN
Sunday News Outdoor Writer

Our introduction to skiing was an unusual one. But then, so were some of the experiences we've had in the past — and we now rank as veterans of about four hours on skis.

After finding the correct size for the cumbersome boots, we got our first lesson, on the floor of the Hiawatha Valley ski shop, at the base of "Crap-Legs Run" between Alma and Cochrane. Ski school director Mike Keagy took command of the learning session, measure that he was trying to make skiers out of a pair of novices. Up-ward, he produced a pair of "skis" or at least two cardboard replicas with the slats printed on them. Here, we took our first week's lessons — in about 15 minutes.

Time, like many other features of our lessons, was much shorter than you imagine. As we prepared to make our first jump to the lift, Mike explained the method of instruction used in his ski school.

"We use the GLM method," he explains, alluding to the Graduated Length Method. "All our students start out on three-foot skis, then as they get better, they go to four footers and so on."

He went on to point out that the idea behind the GLM isn't a new one. The method was first used about 20 years ago. The idea was to teach parallel skiing in the shortest time while making it easy and safe. "Cliff Taylor invented the method," Mike explained, "and he showed that the small skis were much easier to handle. Students could do things in a matter of hours that it took weeks to master on longer skis."

The GLM method is relatively new to midwestern ski areas, but Hiawatha Valley instructors swear by it. Right now, the ski school has more than 200 youngsters enrolled in classes, all getting their first look at the slopes on the small skis.

Mike and his wife Patty head the school, with a group of local instructors handling class duties. While Patty handles some of the hectic paper work in the shop, Mike heads the list of certified instructors. He is assisted by Nancy Senti, wife of the area's manager, and six instructors.

Three of the young instructors are students at Winona's St. Mary's College, including Greg Egan (better known as "Geeg"), Mark Justice and Gene Raymond. John Richert is also from Winona. Diane Butterfield attends the College of Saint Teresa and Joan

Schlusser is a student at Cochrane - Fountain City High School.

The ski area has offered a series of student ski lessons with buses of eager skiers coming from Alma, Mondovi and Cochrane-FC schools to take advantage of the lessons and slopes. "We want to make skiing available to everyone in the area," says Mike, "because as long as they live here, they might as well learn to enjoy the winter weather. Besides, this is one sport where you don't have to be big, strong or especially athletic. And when you're out of high school or college it's still fun."

As we rode the rope tow — a little higher up the hill each time — the things Mike said began to take shape. It was easy to make the short skis respond in gradual and sharp turns. It was easier to turn around without tangling one ski with the other, and it was easier to get up after a fall — or, in our case, after many falls.

"You have to remember a few basic things," our instructor explained. "Balance and rhythm are the keys; it's not a matter of strength."

In fact, trying to get too forceful makes things harder. We found that the skis could be overpowered if you got carried away, and that fighting a fall when you had no chance of winning, led



HELPING HAND . . .

When you run a ski area in the Midwest, you can't always depend on Mother Nature, so you have to give her a helping hand. The lights that make night skiing a pleasure illuminate this snow making machine as the crews at Hiawatha Valley take advantage of a cold evening to make some of their own.

to some spectacular landings, each of which brought laughs from spectators and participants.

In spite of no previous knowledge of the sport, my wife and I surprised ourselves with what Mike's coaching and the GLM method allowed us to accomplish. As we prepared to call it a night, Mike set up one last exercise. He jammed a series of poles into the snow, forming a miniature slalom run on the beginner's slope — which he expected us to navigate. Believe it or not — we certainly had a hard time believing it even after it was over — we negotiated that course several times before winding up our first lesson. With two hours of experience, we were actually making parallel turns with little trouble.

On our second lesson we were promoted to four-foot skis, and you'd be surprised the difference that extra foot makes. We continued to improve, although a bit slower. After about four hours on the slopes, Mike estimates we've covered about three weeks' worth of lessons on regular, long skis.

The classes, for hopefuls of all ages, are designed to develop skiers for the future, and the Hiawatha Valley ski area has one eye in that direction. With the youngsters and their parents getting a taste of the alpine sport, the staff at Hiawatha Valley is sure it will be back. And next week, it'll find a revamped setup, or so the plans read.

"By this time next year," beams Mike, "we'll have a chair lift to the top of the ridge — that's about 600 feet up — and a series of natural terrain runs down from there."

Today the valley boasts two wide, gradual beginners' slopes served by a rope tow and four intermediate runs with a poma lift.

"All of our runs will be re-cut, with a couple running 6,000 feet or more next season," says Mike. "And there will be some new ones that should be really something."

The prototype of this style run has been cut through the wooded slope on the ridge and has been tested by Mike and some of his instructors. Not for the unskilled, it has been rated a real thrill by the valley staffers. By setting the ground work with the lesson program and building toward the future, the staff and skiers at Hiawatha Valley are trying to give local sports enthusiasts the way to make the best of midwestern winters — and they've enlisted at least two more for the skiing legion.



ARE YOU COMING? . . . Instructor Mark Justice looks back to see how his class is doing as he demonstrates the "snow plow." This is one of the basic tactics used in the long-ski lessons, but at Hiawatha it is just a minor part, showing students the difference between the slower, wide turns and crisp parallel turns.

● Winona High
● Cotter High
● St. Mary's
● Winona State

BASKETBALL

THIS WEEK
ON
KWNO
THE SPORTS ACTION
STATION

Wed., Feb. 2
St. Mary's vs. Augsburg
7:15 p.m.

Fri., Feb. 4
Cotter High vs. Austin Paccell
7:45 p.m.

KWNO



ALL SET? . . . As young skiers prepare for the slopes, Greg Egan, left, and Nancy Senti, right, help them get their safety bindings attached, lift tickets secured and every-

thing ready for a day's lesson. Both Greg, or Geeg, or George as his fellow instructors call him, and Nancy instruct a group of youngsters in a class.