

# “U12 and U10” 101

## 2023.2024 Edition

Welcome to U10s and U12s at Okemo and to the sport of alpine ski racing! “U10/12” is an alpine ski racing program within the Okemo Competition Center for children age 7 – 11 years. U10/12, which is the next step up from the entry level racing program known as Hopefuls, provides a further introduction to ski racing and involves intermountain competition. All athletes in U10/12s have either been recommended for the program by their Hopefuls coach or passed a screening process. This group is comprised of two distinct age groups - U12 (10 and 11 year olds) and U10 (7, 8, and 9 year olds). The U10s and the U12s race in different race series. At Okemo we train organizationally with U12 and U10s combined, but will utilize age based training groups to provide training appropriate for each athlete’s age class and skill level.

New ski racing parents may find themselves a bit overwhelmed with all sorts of new vocabulary, protocol, and procedures. Therefore, this document will seek to explain some of what a new ski racing parent can expect to encounter, as well as highlight some specifics of the U12 and U10 age groups, *including some changes/updates for 2023-2024 all of which are in bold and italics and this season’s race schedule*, all of which is helpful to returning parents too!

**Vocabulary Lesson:** (What in the world is USSS, VARA, MVC, a U12, OMARA, etc??)

USSS – US Ski and Snowboard is the governing body of ski racing in the United States. USSS also oversees cross country, disabled alpine and cross country, freestyle skiing, freeski (slopestyle and halfpipe), skiercross, ski jumping and Nordic combined, and snowboarding (both alpine and freestyle). USSS develops rules and regulations for ski racing, sanctions events, provides education for coaches, and supports coaches and athletes. **Your child must become a member of USSS as a Competitor U12 and Under in the Eastern Division with Okemo Mountain Ski Club as their club in order to participate in U12 or U10 races. Only choose Okemo Mountain School as your club affiliation if your child is actually attending OMS. DO NOT choose “General Member” – this membership type is not valid for competition.** This can be done online [HERE](#) by creating an account (or logging into an existing one) and following the instructions that follow. Simply creating a my.usskiandsnowboard account does not complete the membership process – you are not finished until you have paid!

VARA – The Vermont Alpine Racing Association (VARA) is the governing body of ski racing within the state of Vermont. VARA develops rules and procedures specific to competitions within Vermont. They also provide support to coaches and athletes by providing opportunities for coach education and awarding scholarships to athletes. **Your child must become a member of VARA in the appropriate age division with Okemo as their club – not OMS (unless they are enrolled at OMS) or OMARA.** This can be done online at [www.vara.org](http://www.vara.org) by choosing the new or returning member link under the “Membership Lists and Services” heading on the homepage

MVC – The Mid-Vermont Council oversees U14, U12, and U10 competition in the Mid-Vermont region, which includes Okemo, Killington, Pico, Salskadena Six (formerly known as Suicide Six), Ascutney (currently closed), Quechee, and Middlebury. These are the other mountains to which U12 and U10 racers will travel to for races and against whom they will compete during the regular season. There is no membership to this organization.

FIS – The International Ski Federation (**Federation Internationale De Ski**) is the international governing body of skiing (Alpine, Nordic, and Freestyle) and snowboarding competition (Alpine and Freestyle). Alpine ski racing athletes are not eligible to compete in FIS races until they are U18s.

OMARA – The Okemo Mountain Alpine Racing Association is a booster club to support the Okemo Competition Program and Okemo Mountain School. They help buy equipment such as special training tools, cover coaches' education expenses, and provide athlete scholarships. **All athletes in the Okemo Competition Program are highly encouraged to become members.** As an added perk, local ski shops provide a 20% discount to OMARA members.

OMS – Okemo Mountain School (OMS) is a ski and snowboard academy in Ludlow that provides athletes with intense mid-week training, while still allowing them to pursue a rigorous academic curriculum. OMS is a separate entity from the Okemo Competition Program, but all OMS athletes join the Okemo Competition Program athletes on the weekend. OMS provides many training opportunities, including winter and summer camps, in which all Okemo athletes are invited to participate as appropriate for their age and ability. OMS coaches all work with the Competition Center programs serving as head coaches of each discipline and age class.

Slalom – Often abbreviated as SL, slalom is the alpine ski racing event that involves the shortest, quickest turns. Overall skiers will move at a slower speed down the hill, but their turns will be at the fastest tempo. The gates will be single poles – either short, soft “stubby” gates or tall gates with a hinge to break away as a racer clears them. A SL race consists of two runs. SL skis are the shortest type of race ski.

Giant Slalom – Often abbreviated as GS, giant slalom involves moving faster down the hill than in SL. However, as the gates are set farther apart, the tempo of turns is slower. GS gates are two tall poles with a fabric panel between them. A GS race consists of two runs. GS skis are longer than SL skis, usually by about 15-25 cm depending on the athlete's age and ability.

Super G – Often abbreviated as SG, super g (or super giant slalom) involves faster speeds moving down the hill than GS, but an even slower tempo of turns, and the gates are set farther apart still. A SG race consists of only one run. SG skis are even longer, but are NOT necessary for a U12 (or U10)!

Age Classes – The age classes for junior ski racing in USSS sanctioned events are determined by a competitor's age on December 31<sup>st</sup> of the current competition season and are as follows:

U21: 18/19/20 years old

U18: 16/17 years old

U16: 14/15 years old

U14: 12/13 years old

U12: 10/11 years old

U10: 7/8/9 years old

#### **More on being a U12 or U10:**

The focus in U10s and U12s is on fundamentals and making athletes strong skiers, which in turn will make them strong ski racers. Training involves much freeskiing and drill work, as miles under their feet is the best way to improve their skiing ability. As the athletes are ready for it, training will also include gate training. Training will be differentiated somewhat based on an athlete's age group and ability level.

U12s and U10s are split into specific training groups with a lead coach. These groups are based on what skills the athletes are working on, as well as their age class. As there is a wide range of skill level and ability in the U10 and U12 age groups, training focus will differ for different groups many days to meet the athletes' needs. In late December, we will begin to introduce gate training in addition to our directed freeskiing and drill work. Gate training sessions will usually occur on Wardance during the first training block.

Races begin in mid to late January. Attendance is not required at races, but is encouraged.

**Daily Schedule:**

U12/10s train on Saturdays and Sundays from the beginning of December through late March. **The two training blocks are 8:30 – 10:30 am and 11:30 am – 1:30 pm. The meeting spot at 8:30 is the Yurt at the bottom of Wardance and at 11:30 am is outside of the Sugar House.** Dismissal at the end of each 2-hour block will be from wherever the group is at that point for U12s; U10 coaches will return to the Yurt until athletes are more familiar with the mountain. Coaches will be sure that athletes know their way back to a meeting spot with parents. The time schedule may change from time to time if adjustments are needed for any reason, but will be communicated ahead of time to parents via email.

There will be mid-week training during winter break from December 27-31<sup>st</sup>. There is no training on 12/24-12/26 or 1/1. There is NO training during President's Week due to the fact that many schools no longer give a break that week.

**Contacting Coaches:**

Contacting your athlete's coaches with any questions is most easily done in-person at the end of training or via email through Mariel Meringolo, who can either answer your questions or connect you with your athlete's group lead coach. If you need to make contact with coaches the morning of training, or during training, the best way to do so is to call Robin Tracy in the Competition Center at 802-228-1483. Messages can be relayed to coaches by on-mountain radios. *Coaches, including Mariel, are not easily available by email or cell phone during training times, or just prior.*

**Equipment Info:**

**For all U12s and U10s, please consult a coach and/or a local shop in buying your child's equipment.**

The U10s race and train GS, panel SL, and stubby SL, which uses only short, soft gates and requires no special armor. U10s can have one pair of skis for both events. For all first year U10s, we recommend one pair of junior slalom skis. For many second year U10s this may also be an appropriate choice. Once turn shape mechanics and fundamentals are more developed for a racer, we may recommend two pairs of skis – one junior GS and one junior SL for each discipline the children race – though one slalom ski is fine.

The U12s race and train GS, panel SL, stubby SL, full gate SL, and have an introduction to SG via a camp opportunity. We recommend a pair of junior GS and junior SL skis for U12s. U12s must purchase SL armor for training full gates (a chin guard, pole guards, and shin guards). These can be purchased at any local shop. Make sure the chin guard is compatible with your child's helmet. The SG camp does NOT require an additional pair of skis, as all U12s can use their regular GS skis at the SG camp. SL skis are not allowed in the SG camp.

**U12s and U10s must wear full shell helmets – no soft ears.** The helmet should not have a visor on it. SL chin guards should be removed for free skiing or GS training.

U10 and U12s are only allowed to have one pair of skis with them on a race day. This means that athletes must inspect, warm up, and race on the same pair of skis. Parents and/or coaches may not furnish a pair of "race skis" for the athlete. Athletes can still have multiple pairs of skis (SL, GS, etc), but may only have one pair with them on race day. Additionally, the use of fluorinated wax is prohibited and waxing solutions may not be applied at the race venue, nor can ski tuning benches be utilized at the race venue.

Most U12s and about half of the U10s race in GS suits, but one is not required for either group. If they are going to wear a GS suit, they will need full side zip pants in order to be able to take them off with their boots on at a race. Please remember to remove full side zip pants - unzip UP!

Make sure your child's skis are well tuned. You can get a season tune package from a local shop or learn to do it yourself!

**Basic Race Info and Schedule:**

Races are usually scheduled on Saturdays or Sundays, though some camp/training opportunities may take place mid-week. As races approach, LOTS of detailed information will be emailed to families, including the time schedule for the day, meeting places, links and deadlines to register, etc! *All race registrations and payments will be done online. If you do not register and pre-pay online, your child will not be entered in the race.*

At races, the U10 running order will be by club with a random draw for athlete order within club; however, all girls will go first and then all boys. The second run will be run in reverse order, but with girls still first. All athletes get a second run even if they have fallen or gotten disqualified on their first run. After the race, the course will remain up for 30 minutes for athletes to take untimed training runs – take advantage of this time for some extra training and fun! Awards will be given out after the fun, training runs. U10s will receive awards at races based on their best single run (top ten boys and top ten girls).

At races, the U12 running orders are a full random sort – no more racing by team pod. Girls will also always run first, boys second. The second run will be in reverse order, but with girls still first. All athletes get a second run even if they have fallen or gotten disqualified on their first run. After the race, the course will remain up for 30 minutes for athletes to take untimed training runs – take advantage of this time for some extra training and fun! Awards will be given out after the fun, training runs. U12s will receive awards based on best combined time (top ten boys and top ten girls).

Information on registering for the VARA events is TBD and will be forthcoming! However, please note, they are open events with no qualification procedures. Information on the Piche lottery (or a possible change to that being an Open event) will also be forthcoming.

**2023 – 2024 Race Schedules (always subject to change!):**

| <b>U12 2023 – 2024 MVC Race Schedule</b>  |  | <b>U10 2023-2024 MVC Race Schedule</b>  |
|---|--|---|
| Saturday, January 27 – GS Race @ Killington   |  | Sunday, January 28 – GS Race @ Killington   |
| Sunday, February 4 – Stubby SL @ Saskadena Six  |  | Saturday, February 10 – Stubby SL @ Saskadena Six   |
| Sunday, February 11 – MVC U12 SG Camp @ Okemo   |  | Sunday, March 3 – Stubby SL Race @ Quechee  |
| Sunday, February 25 – Tall Gate SL Race @ Pico  |  | Sunday, March 10 – GS Race @ Pico   |
| Sunday, March 3 – GS Race @ Middlebury  |  |   |
| <b>U12 VARA Events</b>  |  | <b>U10 VARA Events</b>  |
| Friday, February 2 – VARA U12 and U10 Skills and SL Project @ Quechee   |  | Friday, February 2 – VARA U12 and U10 Skills and SL Project @ Quechee                           |
| Monday, February 12 – VARA U12 GS Terrain Camp @ Okemo  |  |   |
| Saturday, March 9 – VARA U12 Tri-Council Race @ Pico<br>(one run of tall gate SL/one run of GS)   |  |   |
| <b>Other U12 Events</b>   |  | <b>Other U10 Events</b>   |
| March 15-17 – The Piche Invitational @ Gunstock (a 3 day event consisting of GS and SL – in the past a small quota of spots was available to MVC and awarded by lottery but it may become an Open event in 2024 – more info to come!) |  | There are usually some fun, open races in late March – stay tuned for details as we get closer! |
| Other fun races, open races happen in March as well – stay tuned for details as we get closer!  |  |   |

## More Questions???

Contact Mariel Meringolo at [mmeringolo@okemomountainschool.org](mailto:mmeringolo@okemomountainschool.org)!