

## Interski 2019 - A Collaborative Adaptive Melting-Pot

There was amazing representation of Adaptive trainers at the 2019 Interski congress in Bulgaria. Speaking with other nations Demo team members who had been to several Interski's for adaptive, they roundly said that this year representation was by far the biggest and best ever for the adaptive sector. As it was my first time at the congress I was so excited to meet, and ski with the other delegation countries and share what adaptive snowsports has to offer in Australia.

The presenters from both the US and British ski association teamed up on day one to showcase how they base their Adaptive systems from a solid base of Alpine and Snowboarding skills. This focus on fundamentals proved to be a common and continuing theme for a lot of Adaptive presentations over the week, with both New Zealand and Canada, as well as my own on snow workshop bringing in lots of ideas and concepts from mainstream instruction and how they relate to the adaptive discipline.



PSIA-AASI/BASI collaborative workshop in action

The team from the Czech Republic included 3 athletes with lower leg amputations that skied on specialist prosthetics. Their two presentations started indoors, with a detailed explanation of how they have developed a teaching system and methodology that utilises 3 key players; the student, a professional prosthetics technician and the instructor. The following day we set out on snow to see these theories in action and watch the demonstration athletes ski. While they were all at different stages of learning the sport, and each with a different level of limb use, they all were extremely impressive skiers and their specialised prosthetics were put through their paces.



Czech Republic showing off their custom made ski prosthetics

The team from Poland introduced a few different techniques to help students feel feedback from their skiing while in motion. These included the use of long elastic bands in various configurations as well as custom made hand held short poles, made from old racing gates cut down to approximately 50cm with tennis balls at either end. They had lots of games and drills to help the student gain information on their technique without verbal cues from the instructor. The indoor lecture titled, 'Skiing in the Silent Zone' was focused on teaching Deaf students. The presenter had coached the Polish Deaflympics team and spoke at length about the challenges and strategies for teach hearing impaired skiers.

The Dutch demo team presented their sit-snowboard, a highlight for many at Interski. The new equipment mounted to a regular snowboard supported the uses legs and waist, while providing handles which controlled torsional flex of the snowboard. This enabled the user to be seated, and ride sideways as a sit-snowboarder. The equipment is aimed at paraplegic students with some core, good coordination and mobile upper bodies. It is totally unlike any other adaptive equipment available on the market and opens a new discipline to the adaptive world. The presenter allowed everybody to give the sit-snowboard a try, with help from everyone in the group. There were many countries in attendance with a huge host of Snowboard Demo team members, including Australia and New Zealand.



Gina from the Dutch Demo Team giving the New-Zealand demo member a lesson in sit-snowboarding

Some managed a few independent linked turns, others didn't. While the Dutch presenter made it look all too easy with smooth symmetrical linked turns in the slushy Bulgaria snow. She reports having over 70 students try the sit-snowboard, most gaining independence after only a few lessons.

The Canadian team hosted a great workshop on student identification tactics, getting everybody engaged in role play and assessment. They outlined their Ask-Observe-Test methodology and explained how it has been beneficial to their instructors in real world teaching. While in the indoor lecture, as well as a general overview of their adaptive system. The Canadians presented ideas for understanding anxiety in student, especially those with cognitive impairments. They have worked with a group called Canucks Autism Network to build a 6 step plan for working through a students anxiety. This was; Observe, Stop, Assist self regulation, Evaluate, Validate, Plan.

*Ski Inclusion* is a British based ski travel company that provides services to be people with disabilities to travel to resorts all around Europe. They came to Interski with 4 students of mixed abilities. I spend a little time with each of their guides and students between workshop events to get to know their systems and join in on the fun. It was great to see a company similar in many ways to Disabled Wintersport Australia getting out there among the mountains in Bulgaria and having an absolute ball!

The Bulgarian Demo team as the host, was by far the largest team at Interski and included a young sit skier named Vlady. While he was still an beginner/intermediate sit skier, he clearly has potential and his passion for the sport was clear. I was able to spend a little bit of time with him and his coaches working on a synchro pass that he later put into action at the closing ceremony to raucous support from the large crowd.



The gang from Ski Inclusion at the bottom of the demo slope (left). And Vlady and I after a couple of practice synchro runs (right).

I gave two presentations at Interski, one indoor lecture and an on snow workshop. For the on snow workshop I utilised a sit ski from Disabled Wintersport Australia to demonstrate how the Australian fundamentals of Stance, Rotatory, Edging and Pressure control relate to the seated adaptive skier. I also spoke on our performance system and how we strive to achieve constant control through varied terrain with 3 ideal performances, Steered, Carved and Pure Carved turns. For the indoor lecture I introduced Adaptive snowsports in Australia and spoke to the philosophy of APSI adaptive snowsports being 1, Snowsports are for everybody. 2, Focus on a persons Abilities and their Goals. And 3, to Promote Independence. I introduced the group to the APSI 9 lessons essentials and dived deeper into how we can best identify a students goal and plan for a successful adaptive lesson. Finishing with an overview of the APSI app.



The 'International Adaptive Multi-Sport Demo Team' pose for a photo after the APSI on snow workshop at Interski 2019 Bulgaria.

Overall Interski in Bulgaria from the Adaptive point of view was an amazing melting pot of different nations and associations ideas on snowsports, students and instructing tactics. It was humbling to see so many amazing coaches, instructors, trainers, demonstrators, and athletes all working toward a common goal of the betterment of adaptive snowsports. While words and phrases differed between countries, there were vastly more similarities than differences in philosophies and methodology for teaching adaptive students. And with the strongest adaptive representation ever at Interski the future looks bright for Adaptive Snowsports here in Australia and all over the world.

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