

FREESTYLE 101

The University of Vermont Freestyle Team



Dick Herring

Dick Herring is a past officer of the Central New Jersey Ski Club. He has been enjoying eastern mountains for several decades. Dick writes travel articles and works for a major financial institution.

I saw something new on eastern mountain snow. It's fast-moving. Its skiers' handle all terrain and master all obstructions. Its members love challenges, the wilder the better. It is organized and disciplined. It competes in the east and wins in the west. It skis in ways we don't always see and is very media savvy. It is just one year old and is showing a new way to enjoy winter.

This new thing is the University of Vermont (UVM) Freestyle Ski Team, a student organization on the Burlington campus. Its members are devoted to freestyle skiing ... an extreme sport that sees opportunities where most skiers see obstructions and risks. Freestylers purposely land their skis on huge metal rails and zoom up and down sides of "half pipes" and sculpted snow parks. They "take air" as easily as the rest of us take cruising runs. This sport grew quickly in the West and now Vermont leads here with the only college Freestyle team this side of Colorado.

How do we describe the team's three dozen members? Limber, nimble ... and also responsible. Their motto is "Safe before the mountain, safe on the mountain, and safe after the mountain." They plan for risks with safety training and injury prevention and always wear helmets. The club coordinates all its activities with the University.

They are fully "wired," using new media and the Internet to fuel their growth. They have two videographers who record training runs so members can analyze practices and share techniques. The team also creates publicity videos to recruit members and find sponsors. Video is part of a Freestyling culture that lives in both "cyberspace" and physical space. Other clubs, from all over the country, publish spectacular videos on the web.

The University of Vermont honored the fledgling club with multiple awards for their accomplishments. They won the "Rookie of the Year" award for the most outstanding new club among

180 organizations. They also were awarded the "Epic performance at Nationals" award for a magnificent performance at the 2008 United States Amateur Snowboarding Association (USASA) competition at Copper Mountain. The team sent five freestylers and they placed within the top six slots in all competitions. President Tessera Hobbs set a fine example, winning multiple events. We expect great things will continue to happen, because as of now, the members are mostly freshman and sophomores who won't graduate for several years.

The University of Vermont Freestyle Ski Team has given us something new and lasting to watch. Vermont pioneered much of the ski industry 70 years ago when it cut the first steep trails down Mount Mansfield. Today these new trailblazers are using that mountain to develop a sport that fuses snow, youthful energies, and a wired consciousness into personal expression on the slopes. ❄️

Photography by Tess Hobbs and Josh Blatt, UVM Freestyle Ski Team

