

# ***FREERIDING AS A COMPETITIVE DISCIPLINE***

**A guide to culture,  
contests and coaching**



Stephan Skrobar and Stefan Häusl



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contests and coaching**

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This book serves as a guide  
to understand competitive freeriding.

It takes a close look at how freeride contests  
are structured, judged and organised.  
It gives an overview of important freeride coaching  
elements and different coaching systems.

Most importantly it explains how freeriding  
can bridge cultural and social gaps and how the love  
for mountains is a unifying global phenomenon.

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***COMPETITIVE  
FREERIDING  
AN INTRODUCTION***

### **What is freeriding?**

Freeriding is the original and traditional way to ski down a mountain.

In a time before groomed slopes and developed ski resorts, skiers explored the mountains with a very intrinsic motivation: They followed their passion and what their skills, the terrain and the conditions allowed.

With the infrastructural progress and the rise of winter tourism in the 20th century, skiing became accessible to the masses, who enjoyed lift-serviced terrain and well-manicured pistes.

The end of the last century saw a return of the original free spirit. Remote mountains, deep snow and a playful approach to navigating challenging terrain started to attract more and more people. This comeback of riding off-piste was accelerated by the growing snowboard community and their lifestyle, the term 'freeriding' became synonymous with creative and playful riding.

Freeriding became a progressively popular sport. It still is to this day. And its popularity will continue to rise in the coming years.

## What is competitive freeriding?

Competitive freeriding started out as a way to celebrate the sport and display personal creativity and riding skills to the community and a wider audience.

To this day a freeride contest follows a very simple formula.

A start gate. A finish line. A mountain face with playful and natural terrain in between. Ride down and get judged by a qualified judging panel.

Since the first competitions at the end of the last century the contests have become bigger in size, media attention and organisational effort.

The judging system has become more comprehensive and is continuously evolving with the sport.

A global qualifying system starts at local grassroots events in smaller areas and ends on the biggest stage of competitive freeriding, the Freeride World Tour - a season-long, multi-contest event watched and celebrated by millions around the world. This system gives every young athlete the chance to make their way to the very top of the freeride sport, to become a World Champion in freeriding.

## Coaching freeriders

The first wave of successful and internationally known freeriders often had an alpine ski or snowboard racing background and a strong second sport that required the same set of proprioceptive, coordinative and strategic skills that freeriding does.

With the professionalisation of freeriding came the professionalisation of coaching. The current elite of freeriders look back on strict training programs designed to specifically train for freeriding as a competitive sport. This includes all the physiological elements, but also covers the important safety, psychological and social aspects of the sport.

The demand for qualified freeride coaches increases rapidly. Over the last years many associations have started to offer freeride coaches courses to teach the particular requirements and skills coaches need to safely and successfully train young athletes.

## What now?

This book is designed to inform and educate on all the relevant elements of competitive freeriding. It explains the hierarchical structure of freeride contests - from FWT Juniors to FWT Qualifier to FWT Pro (elite level). It gives insight and organisational tips for grassroots events, so you, too, can organise a freeride competition.

The second part of this book illustrates the requirements and the beauty of freeride coaching and illuminates the path for future freeride coaches.

It details the necessary organisational, safety and legal aspects of both freeride events and freeride coaching, and takes a look at the social and cultural benefits of freeriding.



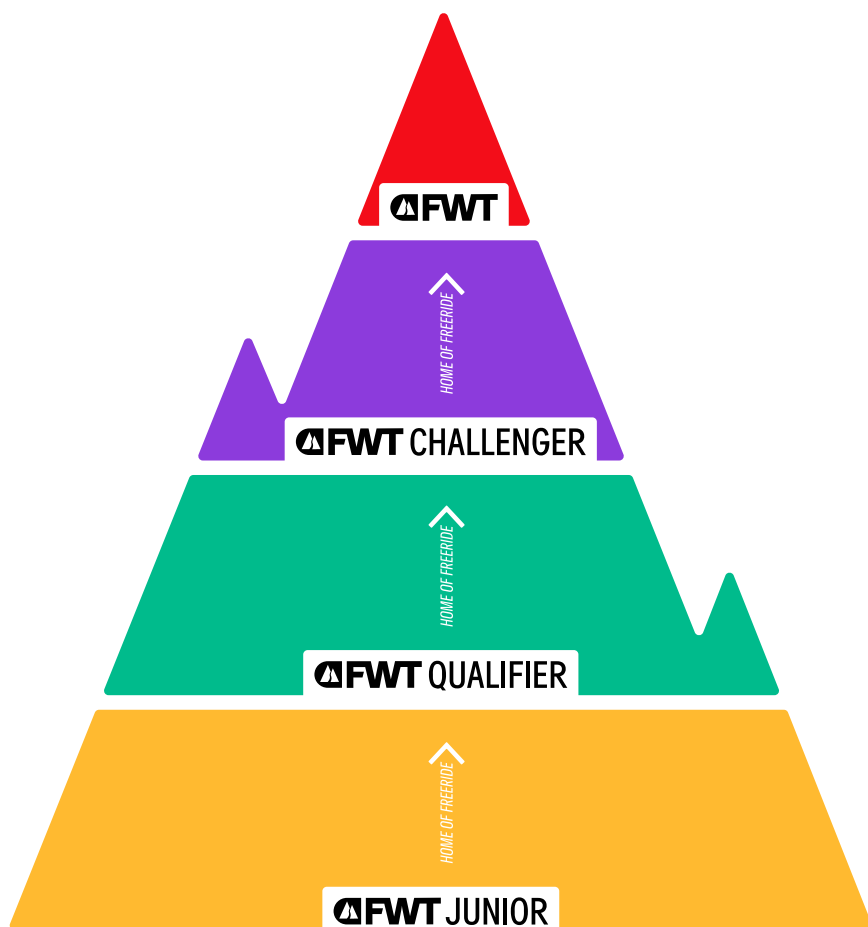




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*PART 1*  
**UNDERSTANDING  
FREERIDE CONTESTS**



### Everyone can compete in freeriding

The system is designed to open a competitive freeride career to any skier or snowboarder who wants to take part in a freeride contest - regardless of age or gender. This system reflects the nature of an organically grown sport founded on passion.

Freeriding is - both in its recreational and its competitive form - an increasingly global sport. Regional differences in topography, climate, and social and economical structures lead to the evolution of diverse freeride cultures worldwide.

Competitive freeriding appreciates and addresses this diversity through the introduction of FWT Regions. The internationally unifying progression of freeride competitions is visualised in the sports pyramid below.

This pyramid shows how the competitive system is based on a solid foundation of amateur level contests organised all over the world and peaks at the professional circuit, where a select group of athletes compete for the Freeride World Tour Champion title.

The pyramid is made up of FWT Junior, FWT Qualifier, FWT Challenger and FWT Pro modules. Junior and Qualifier levels are subcategorised by \* (stars).

The more stars an event carries, the more points are awarded for results. More points allow you to enter higher-ranked FWT contests. Your performance moves you through the ranks.



## ***FWT JUNIOR***



Junior events are designed to open freeride contests to a wide range of young riders. The vertical drop of a venue usually ranges from a minimum of 100m with no mandatory steep sections (1\*) to a minimum of 300m (4\*). At entry level, cliffs may not be higher than 2m, with a maximum of 7m at the Junior World Championships. Inverted tricks are not allowed in any FWT Junior competition. Riders will be disqualified if their bindings are above their head at any time.

- Age: 10 - 18 years
- Categories: Ski Women, Snowboard Women, Ski Men, Snowboard Men
- Age Categories: U14 and U18, additional age category U16 in Ski Men
- No overall ranking in U14
- Levels: 1\* (Entry level) to 4\* (Junior World Championships)
- Around 200 events worldwide
- 2 FWT Regions

Venues have to be approved by an FWT Technical Delegate (TD). There is a tolerance threshold for the official vertical drop and gradient for the TD to approve a venue.

All details can be found in the FWT Junior Organiser Handbook (available upon request).

### **FWT Junior 1\*** - The entry level for the kids

**Who?:** Anyone who fulfils the medical requirements, is registered at FWT and presents the waiver signed by a legal guardian. Registration is based on a first-come, first-serve system.

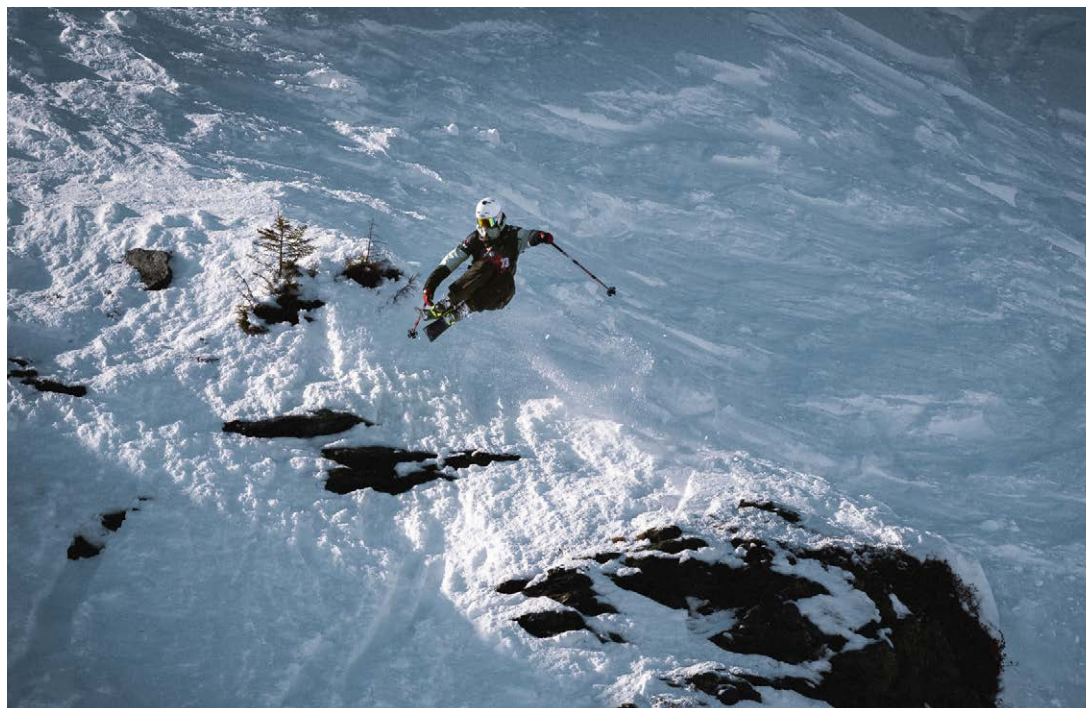
**Venue:** Playful and very easy to ride. No exposed or 'no fall' zones. May be tracked out. Focus on riding technique.



### **FWT Junior 2\*** - First steps

**Who?:** Riders will be accepted based on their current seeding list ranking.

**Venue:** No exposed zones. Playful elements like windlips, small cliffs and rollers allowed. If possible untracked. Option to find creative lines.



[Video: FWT Junior - 2\\* Event](#)

### **FWT Junior 3\*** - Moving up

**Who?:** Riders will be accepted based on their current seeding list ranking.

**Venue:** Includes steeper sections, where good speed control and strong riding technique can be displayed. Reasonably sized cliffs, feature combinations and 'no fall' zones possible.



[Video: FWT Junior - 3\\* Event](#)



### **FWT Junior 4\*, Freeride Junior World Championships** - The pinnacle

This is the highlight in the career of any competitive junior freerider. An annual competition, usually broadcast live and a sizable local audience, with around 60 international participants and many side events. Riders take part in mandatory avalanche safety training as part of the event.

**Who?:** Top U18 plus a selection of U16 riders get invited to the Freeride Junior World Championships.

[Video: FWT Junior : 4\\* Junior](#)



# FWT QUALIFIER



Launch your freeride career. The requirements to register for an entry level contest are kept low to open freeride competitions to a wider audience. The vertical drop of a venue usually ranges from a minimum of 100m (1\*) to a minimum of 300m (4\*), both with multiple line choices.

At the top end of the FWT Qualifier series, 4\* contests require a lot of experience and are normally only open to high-ranked riders. All riders have to sit an online avalanche training course before registering for a contest for the first time.

- Adults: minimum age 18 years
- Categories: Ski Women, Snowboard Women, Ski Men, Snowboard Men
- Levels: 1\* (Entry level) to 4\*
- Around 100 events worldwide
- 2 FWT Regions
- Top three results of the season count

Venues have to be approved by an FWT Technical Delegate (TD). There is a tolerance threshold for the official vertical drop and gradient for the TD to approve a venue.

All details can be found in the FWT Qualifier Organiser Handbook (available upon request).

### **FWT Qualifier 1\*** - The entry level for adults

**Who?:** Anyone who fulfils the medical requirements, is registered at FWT and presents the signed waiver. Registration is based on a first-come, first-serve system.

**Venue:** No exposed or 'no fall' zones. Terrain should be rideable for inexperienced competitors. Fall zones with open runout. Small features may be built. Focus on riding technique.



### **FWT Qualifier 2\*** - Scoring points

**Who?:** Riders will be accepted based on their current seeding list ranking.

**Venue:** Steeper terrain, a number of reasonably sized cliffs and more features to create playful lines.



[Video: FWT Qualifier - 1\\* Event](#)

[Video: FWT Qualifier - 2\\* Event](#)



### **FWT Qualifier 3\*** - Competing on a high level

**Who?:** Riders will be accepted based on their current seeding list ranking.

**Venue:** Terrain difficulties and gradient of the face intensify. The number and size of cliffs and combination features increases, multiple challenging lines are possible.

[Video: FWT Qualifier - 3\\* Event](#)



### **FWT Qualifier 4\*** - Reaching semi-pro status

**Who?:** Riders will be accepted based on their current seeding list ranking. Riders can be invited for individual reasons ("wildcard").

**Venue:** Demanding and exposed terrain prevalent, 'no fall' zones possible. Venue can feature terrain elements found in Challenger and Pro competitions.

[Video: FWT Qualifier - 4\\* Event](#)





# ***FWT CHALLENGER***



The FWT Challenger Tour consists of a series of events that will determine the final list of riders for the following year's Freeride World Tour Pro. The FWT Challenger is a series of events that are invitation only.

The top riders of the FWT Qualifier compete against the bottom-ranked riders from the FWT Pro tour to earn a spot on the following year's FWT Pro circuit.

- Adults: minimum age 18 years
- Categories: Ski Women, Snowboard Women, Ski Men, Snowboard Men
- 19 riders will qualify for the FWT Pro
- 4 Ski Men, 2 Ski Women, 2 Snowboard Men, 1 Snowboard Women per FWT Region
- The best 2nd ranked Snowboard Women rider out of both regions will be also qualified for the FWT Pro
- 2 FWT Regions
- A pre-set number of results count towards an FWT Pro qualification
- FWT Pro riders not making the final cut can immediately compete in the Challenger tour to requalify for next year's FWT Pro

All details can be found in the FWT Challenger Organiser Handbook (available upon request).

**Who?:** Riders will be invited to compete in the FWT Challenger of the FWT Region that they qualified in and will only be ranked in that region.

[Video: FWT Challenger](#)



# FWT PRO



The FWT Pro - the Freeride World Tour - is a series of contests held at spectacular venues around the world. The best ski and snowboard freeriders compete for individual event wins and the overall title of Freeride World Tour Champion.

**FWT Pro** - The professional level. Competing against the best freeriders in the world.

- Adults: minimum age 18 years
- Categories: Ski Women, Snowboard Women, Ski Men, Snowboard Men
- 6 events worldwide
- 2 final events after a mid-season cut

**Who?:** Riders who have made the cut (top half of the field) in the previous FWT Pro season, qualified through the FWT Challenger series or have been invited to compete for specific individual reasons in one or more events (“wildcard”). A limited number of wildcards may be handed to riders.

Riders take part in mandatory avalanche safety training as part of the first event of the series.

[Video: FWT - Pro Event](#)

# ***HOW TO ENTER AN FWT EVENT***

To enter a Freeride World Tour event (Junior, Qualifier, Challenger or Pro) you need to have an FWT membership licence - this can be either a season or a one-event membership.

With your registration for a season or a one-event membership you will automatically become a member of your National Snowsports and/or Ski Associations.

[\[Get FWT licence here\]](#)

(If you have two or more passports you can choose which nation you want to represent. This can be changed once in your career.)

Contact the Freeride World Tour for more details on individual specifications.

# WHAT ARE...?

Region 1:  
List of existing events

Qualifier



Junior



Region 2:  
List of existing events

Qualifier



Junior



## ... FWT Regions

In the FWT Junior, FWT Qualifier and FWT Challenger series the ranking is divided into two FWT Regions, to make freeride competitions as accessible for as many riders as possible.

Region 1:

Europe, Asia, and Oceania

List of existing events [\[Qualifier\]](#) [\[Junior\]](#)

Region 2:

North and South America

List of existing events [\[Qualifier\]](#) [\[Junior\]](#)

- Riders can choose which FWT Region to compete in, regardless of nationality.
- Riders cannot transfer points or qualification from one region to the other once they have committed to a region (points earned in the southern hemisphere will count towards the rankings of both FWT Regions).
- Each region has their own ranking and seeding list.

Ski areas face different legal liabilities in freeriding in different countries. These differences had an influence on the evolution of freeride culture and - as a consequence - how freeride competitions and freeride coaching is organised. For example, for legal reasons most competitions are held inbound (ie. within the boundaries of the ski area) in Region 2.

On-slope inspection is usually the standard form of pre-contest face check in Region 2.

As a result of inbound contests and on-slope inspection, many venues have been skied extensively before the competitions, often with few untracked spots left in those faces. In order to allow fair and consistent scoring in tracked out terrain, varying judging systems developed in Region 1 and 2.

Age categories in the FWT Junior Events are organised slightly differently between the FWT Regions.

### ... Age Categories

Age categories apply to the FWT Junior series.

- For FWT Region 1 riders (except for Ski Men) there are 2 age groups: U14 and U18.
- For FWT Region 1 riders Ski Men category there are 3 age groups: U14, U16 and U18
- The minimum age to obtain a licence and to compete in an FWT event is 10 years.
- Once a rider turns 19 years old they cannot compete in an FWT Junior competition.
- Juniors turning 18 years old are still allowed to compete in the U18 category until they are 19 years old but can choose to switch to the FWT Qualifier series.
- A rider can move into a higher age category or remain in the same category if their birthday falls in the competition season.
- Once a rider moves up to a higher age category they cannot return to a lower category.



- If a rider changes category mid-season, their points from the previous category will not be carried on into the new category ranking.

### ... Venues

A competition venue is the zone of the mountain where a freeride contest is held. It is confined to the area between the start gate and the finish line.

Selecting the right venue is the responsibility of the organiser and the FWT TD. Depending on the level of contest, multiple venue options should be available. Venues should be closed to the public before and during the competition.





# THE JUDGING SYSTEM

*“There is a starting gate and a finish line. Whoever can balance the risk and reward and ski the hardest run the smoothest essentially wins.”*

*Andrew Pollard, FWT Rider*

The goal of the judging system is to ensure that any style of riding has the potential to win on any given day. The most impressive run that showcases the riders strengths best will be awarded the highest score.

Like many other comparable sports, competitive freeriding is often spectacular and awe-inspiring. Watching a freeride competition can leave you at loss for words and your jaw on the floor. The only thing you might be able to utter is “Wow...!”

This “Wow” sensation is called the Overall Impression. Judges take that into consideration, as well as the following categories, designed to create a fair and non-restrictive judging system.



# JUDGING CRITERIA - THE BIG 5

Judges use a point system from 0 to 100. This unified judging system is used for all FWT Pro, Challenger, Qualifier and Junior competitions.

Riders start with a base score of 50 points. Every aspect of their run can add or deduct points to the base score. You will find an example below.

Five judging criteria are taken into account to determine the overall impression and the riders final score.

Let's give each category a closer look.

- **Line**

The level of difficulty and creativity of the chosen line. A high-scoring line connects interesting features, runs through challenging terrain, demands fluid navigation and impresses with a playful, controlled overall execution.

- **Control**

How well the rider maintains control and confidence on their run. Control is a crucial criterion in freeriding, losing control can have severe consequences. Solid landings, quick recoveries and overall control tie this category to the technique criterion.

- **Technique**

How solid the riders technical skills on their skis or board are. Well-executed turns are scoring higher, side-slipping or -stepping will deduct points from the overall score. This criterion is especially relevant in Junior and Qualifier competitions.

- **Fluidity**

Honours how smooth a rider navigates the face, or if the run is interrupted by hesitation, confusion or lack of control.

- **Air and Style**

Rewards creative use of natural features and the skilful execution of tricks, airtime and landing. Showing a personal style while using natural features in freeriding makes this a popular and rapidly evolving criterion.

## RANKING

Ranking the riders correctly is an important and difficult task for the judging panel. Ranking essentially means that when handing out the final score of later riders of a category it will also be put into relation to earlier competitors of said category.



# ***THROUGH THE EYES OF A JUDGE***

## ***A FICTIONAL EXAMPLE***

Wendy Testaburger, Snowboard Women

Start 50 pts

1st: strong, technical turns +4 pts

2nd: 10pt cliff, grab, centred landing +14 pts

3rd: strong technical approach of cliff 2 +3 pts

4th: 12pt cliff, backflip, backseat landing +7 pts

5th: small double cliff +6 pts

Line notes: Lookers left, steep line, flat middle section

Final score: 84 points

Daffy Duck, Ski Men

Start 50 pts

1st: moderate riding +/- 0 pts

2nd: 10pt cliff, no trick, backslap -10 pts

3rd: defensive riding, no cliffs -5 pts

4th: small cliff, no trick +5 pts

Line notes: Lookers right, playful but easy line, steep bottom section

Final score: 40 points

[Video: How Freeriding is Judged on the FWT | FWT24 Judging](#)

# ***THE JUDGES***

*“Athletes should not have to adapt to a judging system. Judging systems should evolve with the athletes.”*

*Siobhan Challis, FWT Judge*

A judging panel consists of a minimum of 3 fully certified judges, supervised by one head judge.

Similar sports have developed similar judging systems: systems that rely on overall impression scores, primarily given by former riders who are respected by the current active generation.

A judge gets certified by the FWT and starts off as a rookie judge, usually shadowing senior judges at an event.

# ***RESOURCES***

Become a judge through the FWT:

[\[BECOME-A-JUDGE\]](#)

Judging Handbook:

[\[JUDGING-RULEBOOK\]](#)



# **GRASSROOTS EVENTS**

## *YOU TOO CAN ORGANISE A FREERIDE CONTEST*

This section will guide you through the steps needed to organise a low-star freeride contest, either FWT Junior or FWT Qualifier. These so-called grassroots events are the foundation of the competitive world of freeriding and usually the first chance for ambitious athletes to compete.

Young riders are often keen to participate in such events, so all organisational obstacles should be kept to a minimum to encourage engagement from the local community.

The Freeride World Tour Events Department provides all the necessary support you need.

Here's how you get your first contest going.

## ***FIND A GOOD VENUE***

The contest face has to fulfil the requirements outlined in the FWT Organiser Handbook. There is, however, a margin for the FWT TD to approve a venue (see 'Understanding Freeride Contests'). Note that venues of low-star contests are sometimes tracked-out terrain easily accessible from the lift.

Deciding on a level of difficulty for a venue depends on the level of riding you expect. If possible, have an alternative option ready to fall back to if

snow or weather conditions don't allow the contest to be run on option A.

The most important aspect of your venue is - naturally - safety. Regardless of level, the face has to be as safe from avalanches as possible. Another important factor is relatively easy access to an injured rider, and safe transport in and out of the face for the rescue team.

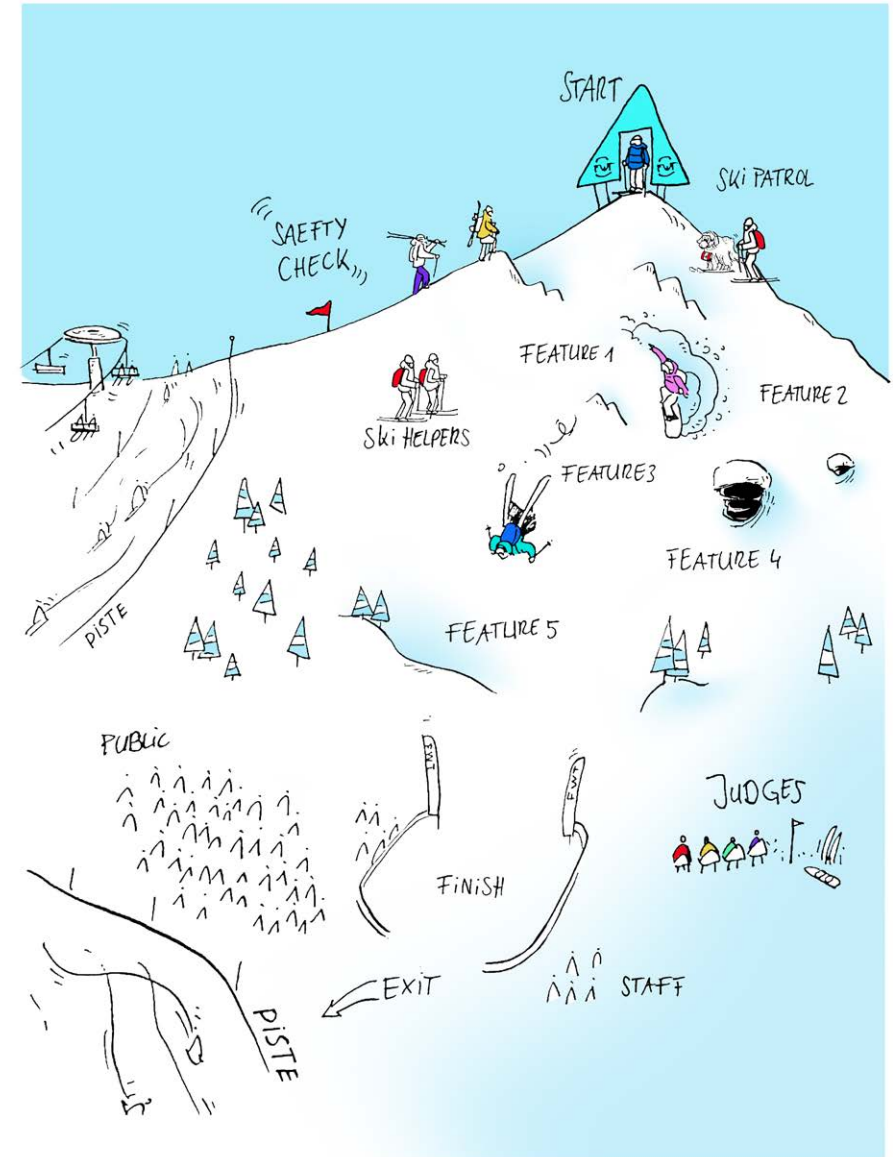
If the safety team deems the face to be unsafe on the day of the event ("comp day"), you have to move the contest to your alternative venue (option B). If snow stability, visibility or other factors out of your reach don't allow a contest on that day you have to postpone the event. Keep an open mind and be flexible to move venues on short notice.

Elements of an ideal 1\* and 2\* venue:

- Close to piste / ski area
- Lift accessible / short hike to start
- Can be fenced off
- Finish close to piste

Details on venue specifications can be found in the FWT Junior and Qualifier Organiser Handbooks (available upon request).

Typical grassroots event venue:



## ***FIND A TEAM***

A good team to help you organise the event is crucial.

Your team has to cover

- organisation and communication
- safety and security
- operations and logistics

Often an event is organised by the local ski club in cooperation with the ski area or the local snowsports school. Coaches and riders' parents provide valuable support.

On comp day you need:

- Safety check clearing all riders on their way to the start - transceiver check, back protection and backpack with shovel and probe (airbag at FWT Pro and FWT Challenger events)
- Starter and pre-starter
- Helper(s) in the finish area to collect bibs
- 4 to 6 ski dudes, located at the start or in the face, to assist riders in case of a crash
- Chief of Competition and Safety
- 3 or 6 judges. A competition with more than 60 starters usually uses 2 independent judging panels to allow a smooth run of the event.
- Assistant helping with administration (start list, results, radio communication)
- Security and First Aid, usually ski patrol or the local mountain rescue team

## ***SET A DATE***

Decide on a date about four months before the event. This is usually done in the previous summer. If possible choose a date for your contest when your venues (option A and B) are usually in good conditions for freeriding (snow depth, sun exposure, weather pattern). Plan at least one weather day for your competition.

## ***DO THE PAPERWORK***

The FWT handles the registration of the athletes, this way you can be sure that all competitors have completed the necessary paperwork in time. For example, registration usually opens on 1st of November for Northern Hemisphere events and closes 4 weeks prior to the event. Payment will be done upon event participation confirmation.

The FWT charges an event fee for their administrative work, depending on the level of the contest.

The FWT assigns a certified FWT TD (similar to a FIS Delegate in Alpine Racing), who will be at your event to oversee and assist.

Rider Insurance: Athletes or their legal representatives must confirm a statutory accident and health insurance when registering.

The Freeride World Tour offers additional insurance for athletes to have first aid and evacuation insurance for the event day.

This insurance is recommended, as it guarantees all riders are insured on the event day. The cost for this particular insurance is usually included in the entry fee.

The event organiser decides whether all riders must have this insurance. If so, it will be included in the entry fee. If the organiser has a comparable insurance product in their country, they can use it. This must be clarified with the FWT.

Event insurance: The FWT also offers a freeride contest liability insurance for your event.

All administrative details can be found in the FWT Junior and Qualifier Organiser Handbooks (available upon request).

Get in touch to get started.

# THINGS TO DO BEFORE THE EVENT (AND WHEN TO DO THEM)

(D = comp day)

## D -4 weeks

Entries close (if all available spots on the start list are filled). Riders will get confirmation of their spot in the starting field by the FWT.

If not all starting places have been taken, the FWT can still leave the registration open in order to fill the places.

Venue is now closed to the riders (and the public).

The FWT will provide you with all the contact details of the competitors, from now on you will communicate directly with the riders. Send details and pictures of the venue (option A and B), remind the riders that all venue options are closed now and that riding the venue before the competition will lead to disqualification and is considered a breach of ethics.

## D -10 days

Update the riders about current and expected snow conditions, the weather forecast, date of online riders meeting and the next communication steps. Set up a riders group chat in a messaging app.

Liaise with the head of safety about snow conditions on the face and possible hazards.

Promote the event to the public in the ski area and the local community.

## D -3 days

Inform riders about the program on comp day and update them on the weather forecast.

## D -2 days

Riders meeting (online or in person).

Topics:

- Weather forecast, expected conditions on the venue
- Closed areas
- Program for contest day
- Mandatory equipment
- Judging criteria
- Rescue procedure
- Access to venue
- Access to and time of face check
- Start list
- Q&A

## D -1 day

Set up start and finish area (optional).

Inform riders about any changes.

Short-notice online meeting if necessary.



# COMP DAY!

Run the competition as planned.

Use the riders group chat to inform about short-notice changes.

## Necessary equipment

- Start: Start gate (beach flags)
- Finish: Finish (beach flags, GS gates)
- Fencing: Fences/bunting to secure closed zones and keep the public from the competition face
- Radios: A minimum of 10 radios for communication during the event
- Judging area: Benches and tables for the judges, judging sheets in folders and sharpened pencils (do not use pens as they might not work in wet/cold conditions)
- Computer to enter the score (can be done indoors)

## Optional setup

- Finish arch and sound system for the finish area
- Event announcer and entertainment
- Refreshments and BBQ for the public and the riders
- Side events (safety sessions, guiding, media relations)

## Staff working on the day of the event (minimum)

- 1 safety check
- 1 pre starter
- 1 starter
- 1 helper in the finish to collect bibs
- 3 or 6 judges, depending on the number of riders/judging panels
- Chief of Competition
- Safety team (ski patrol or mountain rescue)

- 4 to 6 ski dudes
- 1 person in charge of communications, start and result lists

# AFTER THE EVENT

Send the result list to the FWT.

Send a recap email to the riders and thank them for their participation.

All details can be found in the official FWT documentation.



# COMP SEASON THROUGH THE EYES OF A RIDER AND THEIR COACH

## Leading up to the competition

- Check the possible competition dates
- Get a one-event or season membership
- Check the deadlines of your events to register in time
- Read the confirmation and event emails you get from the FWT carefully
- Attend the mandatory online or in-person riders meeting to stay updated on weather, conditions on the venue, time table, safety procedures and organisational details

## On comp day

- Complete inscription in the morning
- Final face check (might vary depending on FWT Region)
- Individual warm-up routine
- Complete the official safety check on your way to the start
- Concentrate on your run

## After your run

- Attend prize giving
- Get feedback from the judges to improve your riding in the future
- Check results online
- Enjoy the atmosphere and cheer on the other riders





# ***ALPINE SAFETY SESSIONS***

Alpine awareness and avalanche safety are significant ingredients of freeriding.

Assessing the dangers and risks of an activity in an alpine environment is a lifelong task. Constantly improving avalanche search tactics and training rescue scenarios are the responsibility of every freerider, regardless of age or level.

Training and maintaining these alpine skills is an essential part of freeride coaching and - increasingly - part of freeride competitions.

# MANDATORY SAFETY TRAINING

## FWT Pro

All riders on the FWT Pro tour have to take part in a mandatory safety workshop. This training session is usually held before the first stop of the tour, if possible on D -2 to give riders enough time to concentrate on face check on D -1 and comp day.

The riders get to select from different training topics to give returning athletes the chance to cover a variety of subjects over the years. The content of the training clinics ranges from different search strategies, to a deeper understanding of the technological background of avalanche transceivers to analysing their performance in a real life avalanche scenario. These safety clinics are designed for advanced riders with extensive knowledge in avalanche safety. Senior riders also give input on what safety topics they want covered.

New riders on the tour get an introductory clinic in small groups to assess their skill level and cover possible deficiencies in their avalanche search tactics.

These clinics are run by qualified guides who work closely with the FWT management and the riders of the FWT Pro.

Voluntary clinics are sometimes offered at later stops of the tour, with a variety of subjects (for example snowpack analysis or first aid).



## Freeride Junior World Championships

If you are invited to the FJWC you have to take part in a mandatory safety clinic, typically a few days before the competition.

This is a hands-on on-snow avalanche training clinic. The juniors get to work with their transceivers, probes and shovels, develop an understanding of search strategies and learn from qualified, FWT approved guides.

The training session is usually conducted in small groups and takes around one hour.



# VOLUNTARY SAFETY TRAINING

## FWT Junior

Offering an avalanche training session as a side event of an FWT Junior contest is an ideal opportunity to familiarise young riders with the use of avalanche safety equipment and educate on the importance of frequent practice. It also gives coaches an idea how they can implement safety education in their regular training in their home resorts.

Organisers can communicate the significance of the subject to parents, coaches and the public by staging a safety-centred side event.

This training should be conducted by trained experts.

## FWT Qualifier

All riders have to sit an online avalanche training course before registering for a contest for the first time.

It is, however, a good idea to offer an on-snow training session as part of an FWT Qualifier event. It gives the riders the chance to train in a professional setting with their own equipment, ask questions and get an update on current avalanche search strategies.

As always, this training should be conducted by trained experts.



***PART 2***  
***COACHING FREERIDE***



# **ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF FREERIDE TRAINING**

Each country is different and has its own regulations. However, in most countries freeride training is organised by either ski clubs/associations or commercial companies.

## **CLUBS/ASSOCIATIONS**

Ski clubs/associations provide training for local athletes and also function as a social hub. Depending on the size of the club they often offer training groups for different winter sports and operate regionally.

The freeride coaches employed by ski clubs are normally qualified and certified by their National Snowsports Federation, so they can offer their services within the club. Some ski clubs also use the services of coaches who fulfil the requirements of internationally qualified guides or nationally qualified coaches.

Due to the nature of freeride training and the responsibility towards younger riders, an off-piste qualification should be mandatory for any ski club coach.

# COMMERCIAL TRAINING

Commercial freeride training is offered by snowsports schools, alpine guiding academies and specific training centres. The legal requirements to operate a commercial freeride training business depend on the national laws and are often stricter than those for federation qualified coaches working within a club. This is mostly due to the specific qualifications and legal standards required for commercial off-piste guiding.

## FWT ACADEMIES



Any club, freeride school or freeride team can apply to be partnered with the Freeride World Tour by applying for an FWT Academy certification.

The FWT supports any organisation carrying the FWT Academy logo with

- Guidelines how to run a program
- Connection to pro athletes
- Support on coaching and event organisation

## QUALIFYING FREERIDE COACHES

Many countries have started to provide specific freeride coaching qualifications. These courses address all the different freeride-specific requirements coaches have to fulfil and cover the legal, technical, tactical, methodical and didactic elements.

### Examples

#### **FWT Region 2 - North and South America**

The administrative organisation is the IFSA, the governing and operational body of FWT Region 2. The coaching certification was established in 2016.

- L100 (L = Level)

Online certification course. A theory introduction to the world of freeride coaching and freeride contests. Understanding the code of conduct, judging and event organisation systems. L100 allows coaches on-slope inspection with their athletes.

Validity 2 years, duration of course 1 day.

- L200

On-snow, inbound course. Understanding line selection and skill acquisition. Develop young freeriders. Regional differences in course syllabus, eg. technical training in loose collaboration with the PSIC (Professional Ski Instructors of Canada).

Validity 3 years, duration of course 3 days.

- L300 is examiner level.

### **Austria**

Specific coaches course for freeride trainers. Financed by the Ministry of Sports and run by its educational body, the BSPA. Established in 2022.

Duration: 20 days

- Part 1 - Freestyle - 3 days

Parkour/ freerunning and gymnastics, freestyle jumps with ski/snowboard equipment with landing airbag.

- Part 2 - Athletic training - 6 days

Education in strength, endurance, speed and flexibility training.

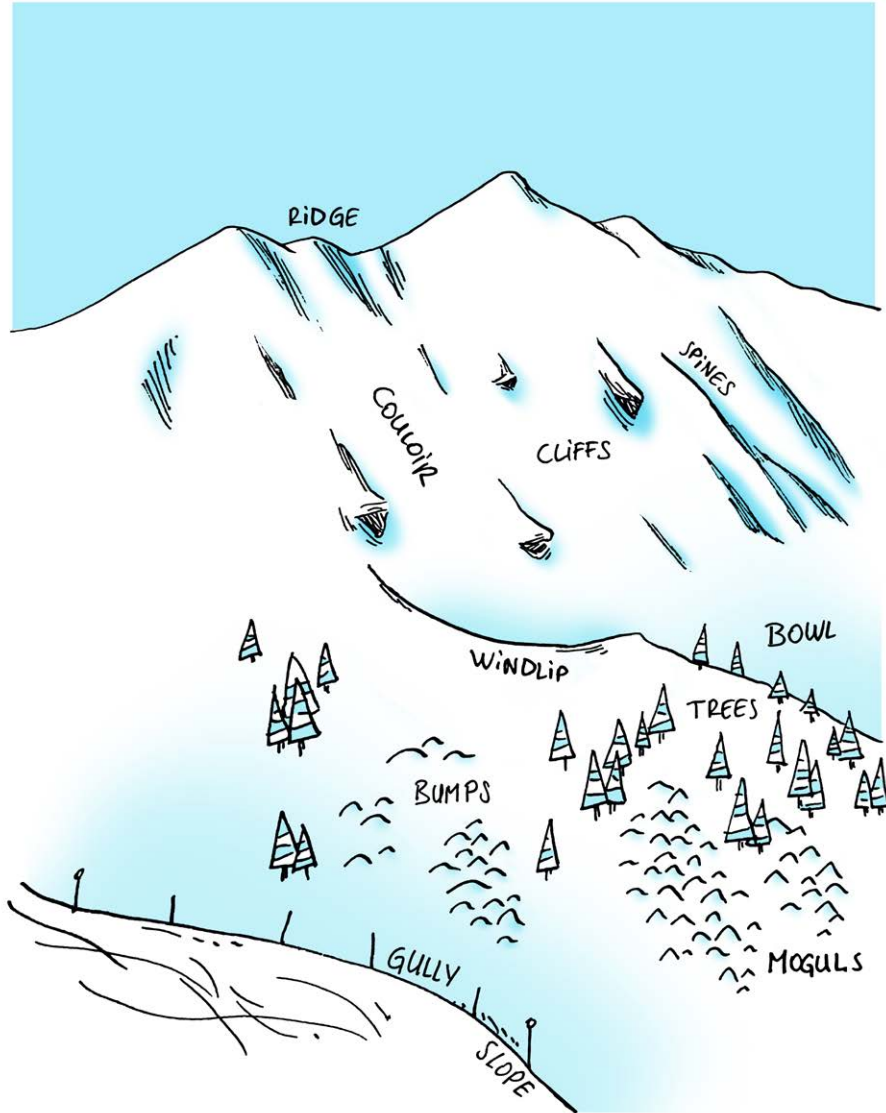
- Part 3 - Snow and safety - 6 days

Coaching teams off piste, safety and safety education, decision making, rescue procedures.

- Part 4 - Freeride coaching - 5 days

Coaching freeride elements, lines, riding technique for freeride teams and athletes.

Typical freeride terrain elements:



# FREERIDE TERRAIN

Depending on the specific content of the training and the level of the athletes, the terrain requirements can be surprisingly low.

Terrain at entry level freeride coaching should be playful and safe. Off-piste (mostly tracked out terrain near a piste) features include rollers, windlips, tree stumps, small cliffs. Approaching features from different angles allows a creative use of terrain elements. Entry level training focuses on getting comfortable with movement and speed as well as creating a solid technical foundation for further progression. Technical training and drills on the piste are a crucial part of entry level freeride coaching.

Availability and - even more importantly - the safety aspects of the terrain require a lot of flexibility in structuring freeride training. Often the training terrain is chosen on the actual day depending on the conditions and the avalanche danger.

As the level of the athletes increases so do the difficulties of the terrain. Assessing the safety situation of the terrain is always top priority.



# ***WHAT YOU NEED AND HOW MUCH IT COSTS***

## ***EQUIPMENT***

This lists the necessary equipment for on-snow freeride training. Additional equipment might be needed for technical on-snow drills or general off-snow training.

Overall, remarkably little equipment is needed for effective freeride training.

### **Riding Equipment**

#### *Skis*

length:  $\geq$  body height, width: ~90mm (10 yrs) -> ~115mm (adult), slightly raised tail

#### *Snowboard*

length:  $\geq$  155-170 (adult), slightly bigger nose than normal boards

#### *Binding*

Ski

Standard safety binding (recommended)

Snowboard

Standard binding

#### Boots

Both ski and snowboard riders use standard boots (recommended)

#### Poles

Adjustable, slightly bigger baskets

#### Protection

Helmet\*

Back protector\* (not included in backpack)

#### Safety Equipment

Backpack\*

Modern avalanche transceiver\*

Metal avalanche shovel\*

Probe\*

Phone

#### Optional

First Aid Kit\*\*

Avalanche airbag\*\*\*

Bivy bag

Radios

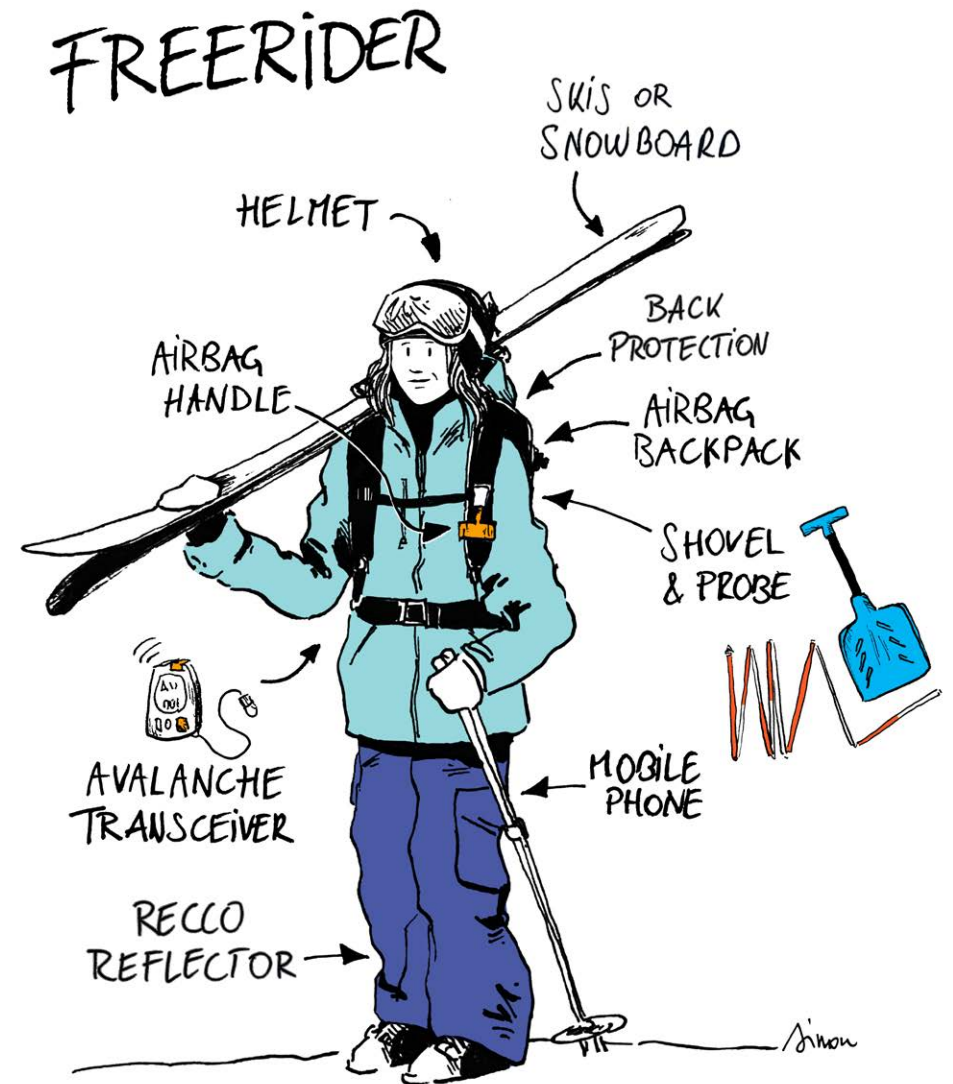
Mouth guard

Mandatory equipment requirements might be different at some FWT Region 2 events.

\*mandatory at all FWT events

\*\*mandatory for coach

\*\*\*mandatory at FWT Pro and Challenger competitions



# ***COSTS***

## Costs to consider

- Coach(es). The costs for the coaches depend on their qualifications
- Equipment
- Lit tickets
- Transport and accommodation costs for training camps and contests
- Entry fees
- FWT registration fee
- Insurance

## **Partnerships**

Developing (long-term) partner- or sponsorships is an option to consider. This can apply to individual athletes, the team or the whole club, and depends on the socio-economic situation of the region or ski area.

The form of partnership can be goods, services or paid partnerships, or a combination thereof.

Typical partners are local businesses, including the home resort or equipment providers. As exposure grows, looking for sponsorship outside the industry becomes an option.

# ***ELEMENTS OF FREERIDE COACHING***

Experienced and skilled skiers and snowboarders, particularly freeriders, possess a wide range of abilities. This expertise ranges from exceptional proprioceptive and physical skills to remarkable psychological and intellectual strength. Developing such competence is a long and exciting process that should be started at an early age and continues through most of their adolescent and adult life.

## ***MENTAL ASPECT***

The mental aspect of freeriding, especially on a competitive level, is massive. Athletes face an enormous amount of crucial decisions every day. A wrong decision can have extremely dire, even fatal consequences.

### **Decision Making vs. Decision Taking**

Making a decision is a conscious process. Athletes base the decisions they make on their experience and their knowledge of a situation and their consequences, they evaluate their options in a calm and reflective manner.

Taking a decision is a subconscious process that happens very quickly. Taking a decision also means there is no turning back on their choice (“committing”).

Freeriders regularly have to take split-second decisions that are often

instinctive. Building up that instinct that hopefully leads to correct decisions is a lifelong exercise.

### *Examples*

#### *Making decisions*

What to do

Where to go

Adapt to conditions (snow and individual physical condition). In a competition, possibly adapt or change first line choice depending on new observations or information from first riders.

#### *Taking decisions*

Quick adaptation of the chosen line

Turn size and speed, adapt body position

Trick and intuitive adaption of trick depending on take-off and landing conditions

These are obviously just a few examples of decisions a freerider faces every day.

## ***SOCIAL ASPECT***

Despite its public image, freeriding is above all a team activity. The main reason is safety - which is why the old saying "No friends on powder days" is a very outdated concept.

Freeriding happens in pairs or small groups. Freeriders develop and actively train a sense of responsibility for their companions from an early age; that codependence is often the basis for long-lasting friendships. Another important social element is the fact that freeriding is an often unpredictable sport, where things might not go as planned. Joint problem solving and mutual support is a daily and ever-present mission.

Most importantly, shared experiences in the mountains and a common passion for the sport - both in competitions and just freeriding casually with your friends - is the foundation for a strong connection that spans over different generations and cultures.

## ***PHYSIOLOGICAL TRAINING***

Competitive freeriding follows a different seasonal cycle than other competitive winter sports. With the exception of the southern hemisphere winter, the main competition season starts in January and runs until April. Accordingly, the seasonal training cycle correlates with the competition cycle and extends into early summer in higher altitude ski areas.

On-snow training depends on natural snowfall. (Hardly any training is done on the glaciers, resulting in both a more environmentally friendly and less costly training cycle.)

### **Season training / on-snow training**

Consists of

- **Technical riding on and off piste.** Understanding the biomechanical and physiological foundation of skiing and snowboarding, using drills and repetition to solidify strong technical riding. The goal is to consistently ride fast and in control in a balanced and flexible position through varying conditions and terrain.



- **Cliffs and jumps.** Being able to navigate natural features of any size and form at the necessary speed and in control, to ride these features fluently, apply the correct take-off technique and land jumps safely and in control. This includes mainly cliffs and other natural features.



- **Freestyle elements off piste.** 180, 360 (half-, respectively full rotation around the vertical axis in both directions), back- and front-flip (full rotation around the horizontal axis). It is the coaches' responsibility to choose the appropriate terrain and snow conditions to train these elements safely. More freestyle elements of increasing difficulty are included in the off-piste training sessions as the riders' level rises.



- **Freestyle elements park.** The park allows a high repetition of freestyle elements and an automation of difficult movements. Proprioception training can also be done in the park when snow or weather conditions don't allow training off-piste.



- **Line training.** Scoping lines from different angles, planning individual lines - including interesting features, and executing them with strong riding technique, fluidity and control. Line training should include filming lines to analyse both riding and line choice for video training sessions.



## Off-season training / off-snow training

Consists of

- **Strength.** Preparing the body to withstand the forces and physical challenges of freeriding. Functional strength training is essential to execute tricks correctly, ride safely and in control at high speed, and prevent unnecessary injuries. Freeriders spend a significant time at the gym to cover a wide range of stability and strength training.
- **Endurance training.** Freeriding requires an enormous amount of physical endurance and mental stamina, a fact that is often overlooked. Freeride days usually include periods of hiking, long runs in demanding terrain in high altitude and need a lot of concentration - competition days even more so.
- **Coordination.** Impressive air and style mastery requires significant proprioceptive abilities. These skills need to be trained continuously from an early age and will get more specific as the career progresses. Balance and coordination training include parkour, (trampoline) gymnastics, downhill MTB, surfing/skateboarding, cliff/high diving.
- **Mobility and flexibility.** Maintaining a flexible body with a wide range of movement prevents injuries, accelerates regeneration and expands the range of motion needed for freestyle tricks. Warm-up and cool-down exercises, yoga and pilates are elements of flexibility training.
- **Mental strength.** Building up and maintaining self-confidence allows freeriders to ride proactively, visualise movements correctly and reduce mistakes. Reaching that level of mental strength can be done by both repetition of complex movements and setting and completing personal challenges.

Freeriders are inherently on a quest for new challenges, which makes this sport even more curious and fascinating.



# ***FREERIDE SAFETY TRAINING***

Safety is an important part of freeride training. It is crucial to educate the riders in alpine awareness and personal risk management from an early age on.

Getting skilled in these topics is an ongoing and neverending process. Training these elements has to be done in the right methodical and didactic way to always fit the cognitive and social levels of the riders.

## ***BEHAVIOURAL SAFETY***

- How to move on the mountain
- Buddy system
- Terrain evaluation
- Weather
- Orientation
- Snowpack
- Interpreting an avalanche bulletin



## RESCUE SKILLS

- Understanding how to effectively use an avalanche transceiver
- Learning how to probe and dig
- Following a safety protocol
- First aid
- Deploying an airbag

Parts of these training elements can be implemented in every training session. For example, the transceiver check and many of the behavioural aspects (avalanche bulletin, terrain evaluation, orientation and weather observation) are an inherent part of a day in the mountains.

Some of the training can be repeated whenever the occasion arises. Examples are transceiver search when conditions don't allow safe riding, snowpack analysis and digging exercises when the conditions are interesting.

Some safety training has to be done and tested pre-season, specifically the safety protocol and rescue skills, and the discussion about behavioural aspects when riding in a group.

## COACHES PREREQUISITES

Teaching alpine safety to young riders has to be done by professionals and in a playful way to create interest and engagement. Apart from the formal skills and qualifications, trainers also need to possess the didactic skills to educate young, energetic riders with often limited attention spans. The FWT offers clinics to freeride coaches and qualified guides that focus on how to specifically set up alpine safety training scenarios for young freeriders.



15<sup>TH</sup> EDITION

# 2022 FREERIDE WORLD TOUR

## XTREME VERBIER WITZERLAND



***FREERIDING***  
***A TESTIMONY***  
***OF SUSTAINABILITY***  
***(AND FUN)***

*“The local hill with a bit of snow and a few friends by your side is often enough to experience the joy and exhilaration of freeriding. Freeriding is for everyone.”*

*Nicolas Hale-Woods, Founder FWT*

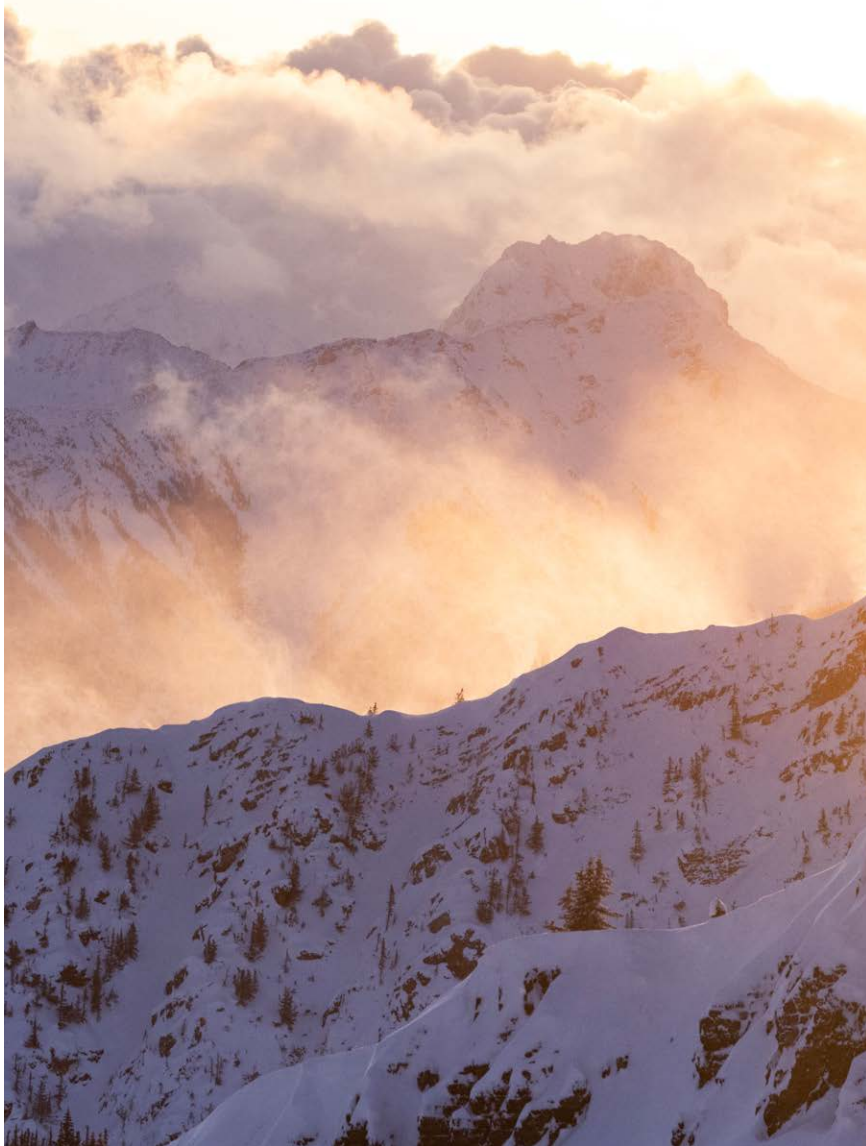
From the outside, freeriding may simply look like a thrilling way to spend a winter’s day, done by excitable and suntanned people with little regard for their own safety.

However, freeriding is much more than that.

As an outdoor activity with a global audience it fulfils an immense social responsibility. On its competitive stage it acts as an example for responsible human behaviour, in a coaching context it can show young people how to live a sustainable and socially healthy life.

By its nature, freeriding depends on a healthy environment. Looking after the planet and trying to live an ecologically balanced life helps maintain the natural resources needed for freeriding. Keeping a global perspective and acting environmentally friendly is essential for anyone calling themselves a freerider.

In a competition context this is done by offering educational workshops, focusing on clean travel and reducing the environmental impact as much as possible.



Equally important is understanding and pursuing sustainability on the social side of freeriding. Even though freeride contests are competitive by nature, every other aspect in the world of freeriding is egalitarian and communal - examples have been discussed in this book. It is even more important to stress gender equality in the current and future state of freeriding, as much as its internationality. On a local level, both freeride contests and freeride coaching open the chance for local communities to get involved and build strong regional bonds.

Freeriding offers a perfect way to experience cultural differences whilst discovering the common denominators that everyone, regardless of gender, nationality, race, age or economical background, enjoys - the pure happiness and deeply felt fun that riding down snow-covered mountains brings.



# ***ABOUT***

## ***AUTHORS***

**Stephan Skrobar** is an Austrian ski guide, examiner and lecturer on freeriding and alpine safety for various associations. Stephan is running the mandatory and advanced safety workshops for the riders of the FWT Pro and the FJWC.

**Stefan Häusl** is an Austrian ski guide, examiner and longtime FWT competitor. Stefan is the program director of the Austrian freeride coaching qualification and coach to a number of FWT Junior and FWT Pro athletes.



## ***FWT***

The Freeride World Tour was founded by Nicolas Hale-Woods in 1996 as the Verbier Extreme, and was a snowboard only contest until 2004.

The first event series under the Freeride World Tour name took place in 2008. For the 2013 season, the Freeride World Tour merged with the Freeskiing World Tour and The North Face Masters of Snowboarding, combining all three tours under one global championship series.

The International Ski and Snowboard Federation bought the Freeride World Tour in 2022 and recognised freeride as an official discipline in 2024.

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## **IMAGES**

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Hugo Schleicher, page 44

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Max Pflanzl, page 91 (below)

Mia Maria Knoll, pages: 22, 25, 27, 30, 31, 43, 63 (below), 67, 94, 97

Simon Charrière, pages: 55, 78, 83, 118

Vincent Reynaud, page 61

## **VIDEOS**

Video footage by Freeride World Tour, Open Faces, Nendaz Freeride, edited by Roméo Ceas.



# ***FREERIDING AS A COMPETITIVE DISCIPLINE***

Stephan Skrobar  
Stefan Häusl

This book serves as a guide  
to understand competitive freeriding.

It takes a close look at how freeride contests  
are structured, judged and organised.  
It gives an overview of important freeride coaching  
elements and different coaching systems.

Most importantly it explains how freeriding  
can bridge cultural and social gaps and how the love  
for mountains is a unifying global phenomenon.

