

## Chapter Nine

# David's Story: Writing toward the Podium

"I like free writing . . . it's a meditation, trying to open up the mind and go for it."

David Chamberlain

David Chamberlain began cross-country skiing at the age of 5 in the foothills of western Maine. At age 7, he began racing. Like the parents of countless young athletes, the Chamberlains shuttled their son throughout New England from one ski race to another. A blonde-haired wisp of a boy, David fused superb technique with a titanic engine. Even back then, people knew that David had the tools to go far.

And he did. By the age of 31 in the midst of his ski-racing prime, David boasted a résumé that placed him among the world's elite skiers. A two-time NCAA All-American, two-time North American SuperTour Champion, and three-time World Championship competitor with the U.S. Ski Team, David raced across our planet's snow belt. Sponsored by sports companies and the Maine Winter Sports Center, David worked as a full-time athlete with his sights set on the Winter Olympic Games.

World-class cross-country ski racers train year-round and use April as a recovery month. Known for their cardiovascular fitness, Nordic skiing athletes compete in two techniques: classic (looks like running on skis) and freestyle (looks like ice skating on skis). Races range in distance from sprints of 1 kilometer (.6 of a mile) to marathons of 50 kilometers (30 miles). “Physiological testing shows cross-country skiers to be some of the fittest athletes in the world. The Norwegian champion Bjorn Daehlie, for example, has the highest oxygen uptake of any athlete ever tested” (Nash and Loomis, 2000). And when ESPN gathered a panel of experts to rank sixty sports for their degree of difficulty, Nordic skiing landed among the four toughest in the distance endurance sports along with rowing, cycling, track & field distance events (ESPN, 2011).

To complement and inform his life as an athlete, David wrote in a journal and training log. He kept blogs for Maine Winter Sports Center and FasterSkier.com, an online ski-racing magazine. He also exchanged email and letters with coaches and advisors (e.g., physical therapists, doctors, ski technicians). In the following section David’s writing and his insights reveal the role writing can play in an elite athlete’s career.

## David’s Writing

After graduating from Bates College, David settled into life as a full-time athlete at the age of 22. Ten years later, at the height of his career, he trained 850 hours a year and constantly packed and unpacked his equipment to travel throughout the world (Figure 9.1).

Even without the big-money endorsements of prime-time professional athletes, David’s life would pique almost anyone’s wanderlust—training in a Norwegian indoor ski tunnel, racing in Europe in front of thousands of passionate fans, and skiing the early snow at Yellowstone. David’s athletic life focused on training and competing, traveling and eating. In a journal entry on the first training day of the year, David reveals one constant challenge: finding the capacity to fully rest on recovery days (Figure 9.2).

For my trip:

Equipment	Protecting Clothes	Casual Clothes	Nutrition	Electronics	Books
Skis (2)	Socks (8)	Jeans (2)	<del>Sport Drink</del>	Computer	<del>Books</del>
Boots (3)	Windchills (3)	Sunshirts (2)	Endurox	I-pod	<del>Books</del>
Poles (4)	Long underwear/bottoms (2)	T's (3)	Bumblebees	<del>Phone</del>	- ? -
Yoga Mat (1)	Long underwear tops (3)	Nice shirt (2)		Cell	Writing
Pillow (1)	Suits (2)	Underwear (2)		DVD's	Stuff -
<del>Ball</del>	Jackets (2)	Long Sleeve shirt (1)		Tapes	
Sunglasses (3)	Gloves (3)			Tape player	
Drinkbelt (1)	Tops (2)				
Running shoes (2)	Nike Pants (1)				
Leaving shoes (1)					

?

Waxes

To Buy

→ DVD's

→ Books

Figure 9.1 Packing List for Europe

David's journal entry could serve as an engaging prompt for young athletes to read and write about.

Looking at the variety of writing that David undertakes throughout a year reveals the different ways his words provide support and complement his athletic and personal lives. Among the most important writing activities any athlete undertakes are training plans and training logs.

### Training Plan and Training Log

A training plan is an athlete's road map for the year; a training log is a record of that yearlong journey. Often designed in 3-week training cycles that build upon one another, an effective training plan for a Nordic skiing athlete guides the racer toward peaking at the most significant races of the season. In David's case, World Cup events and

05/01/06

*The first day of training for 06/07! I am doing something a little different this year. The first day of training is going to be a recovery day. Something that I have noticed over the years is that I have absolutely no trouble motivating myself for hard training days. It is the rest days that I need motivation for. Rest days are for staying inside and putting up the feet with a good book. And not only that, they are for emotional rest. The athlete that is good at simply doing nothing and validating that activity is the athlete that has a training edge. The spaces that are carved out in the day to do nothing are the times that real recovery takes place. That means putting aside the stack of bills, turning off the phone, closing the email program, and tune out all the mental conversations that happen inside the head. The most important thing is being able to push aside the nagging feeling that no “progress” is being made while I am wrapped up in my covers watching Groundhog Day on DVD. Although any good sport scientist will tell you that is when the progress is made.*

**Figure 9.2** Journal Entry “Rest days”

the U.S. National Championship week often stand out as the critical competition periods.

A training plan is not a monolith. Such plans may be tweaked and revised according to an athlete’s performance in training and competition. Moreover, if David is injured or laid low with an illness, his training plan is adapted. At the end of each day, David records his actual training numbers, activities, and notes in his training log.

Figure 9.3 shows David’s training log for the first week of the 2006–2007 training and competitive year. Notice that the exercise times are listed in the different training levels. These training levels are based on David’s heart rate (e.g., L1 = Level 1, working heart range of 120 to 145 beats per minute; L2, Level 2, working heart range of 130 to 155 beats per minute). In the right-hand column of the training log, David writes notes at the end of each day to record what he did for exercise, how he felt (“F–legs tight” = Feeling–legs tight), and who he worked with. To further capture the effectiveness of a training day, David uses the symbols + (good), 0 (normal), – (not good). It’s interesting to note as he explained during an interview that he continually adapted his training log throughout his career:

Week #18	Time		Methods				Levels				Comments		
	Session 1	Session 2	Total	Run	Ski classic	Ski free	Run Sp.	Bike	L1	L2		L3	+/0/-
Mon		1:30	1:30					1:30	1:30			0	AM-off PM-L1 bike ride with team
Tues	2:00	1:00	3:00				2:00	1:00	2:30	:30		0	AM-pole running L3 intervals w/speed warm down PM-recovery bike ride on rollers
Wed	1:30	1:15	2:45		1:30			1:15	2:45			+	AM-RC with DP PM-recovery ride on rollers
Thurs		1:50	1:50					1:50	1:50			0	AM-off PM-easy long bike
Fri	1:00	1:30	2:30	2:30					2:30			-	AM-easy run with BethAnn PM-run with Will and group. F- legs tight and tired, moving into the house today
Sat	1:15	1:00	2:15	1:45			:30		1:45	:30		0	AM-treadmill test PM-recovery run with BethAnn
Sun		2:45	2:45					2:45	2:45			+	AM-off PM-easy long bike F-long week this week, moving a lot, driving back and forth to close on house
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5:45</b>	<b>10:50</b>	<b>16:35</b>	<b>4:15</b>	<b>1:30</b>	<b>0:00</b>	<b>2:30</b>	<b>8:20</b>	<b>15:20</b>	<b>0:00</b>	<b>1:00</b>		

**Month of May Comments:**

Not feeling good about the last two weeks of the month. Not enough hours, we'll see. Trying to move and finish up at Gould and settle our summer plans has taken a toll on training. My hope is everything will settle for a good June, July, and August. When all was said and done, I had too many hours, oops, not by much and some of the hours that I counted in there were very easy recovery yoga sessions. So I hit the nail right on the head with training hours.

**Figure 9.3** David's Training Log, May 1-7, 2006.

*Every year I change how I keep my training log. I might do it on the computer or I might have a little notebook . . . or a three-ring binder—I don't think I have had two years in a row where I've done the same thing. I don't know why that is, but I think I am always looking for a different way, something that works. I don't quite know why I haven't found it; each way is fine, but . . . I think part of it might be that each year, it is nice to have a fresh start. It's like buying a new notebook, you know.*

(Personal interview, April 17, 2006)

Both the training numbers and the words in David's log provide him with the necessary information to assess the ongoing season and, at the end of that season, to plan for the next.

### *Making Meaning, a Writing Activity*

To help David think more about his Training Plan, I led him through a writing activity called "Making Meaning" (Kent, 2000, pp. 41–43). This activity helps athletes unpack and make sense of issues like training, coaches, or losses that they may face; such activities can also frontload team or athlete–coach discussions. Notice how this activity builds to a statement about training plans that helps David express his thinking:

#### *Making Meaning of Your Training Plan*

**Step one:** Using single words name some of what a training plan is to you. Place those words on the left-hand side of your paper.

*Structure*

*Guide*

*Order*

*Log*

*Challenge*

*Future*

*Results*

*Rigid*

*Overwhelming*

*Cumbersome*

**Step two:** Name the opposite of those words to create a dialectic. This is important because reconciling (i.e., merging) opposites or reasoning contrary arguments helps us arrive at the truth (i.e., there are always two sides to everything):

Structure . . . . .	chaos
Guide . . . . .	lost
Order . . . . .	disarray
Log . . . . .	unrecorded
Challenge . . . . .	easy
Future . . . . .	past
Results . . . . .	content
Rigid . . . . .	flexible
Overwhelming . . . . .	simple
Cumbersome . . . . .	light

**Step three:** Place some of the opposing words in a true sentence about training plans:

*If I do not have my training plan as a **guide** I feel **lost**.  
I would like to enjoy the **content** of the training plan as well as the **results** it can give me.  
A training plan should feel **light** rather than **cumbersome**.*

**Step four:** In the final step, we use strict form to help us make meaning. Write one paragraph of five sentences about your training program using the following guidelines:

- Sentence 1, a five-word statement
- Sentence 2, a question
- Sentence 3, two independent clauses combined by a semi-colon
- Sentence 4, a sentence with an introductory phrase
- Sentence 5, a two-word statement

*Training plans are sometimes stifling. When do they become this? On the days my body feels good the training plan seems fine; on days when my body feels bad I am scared that the training plan is too much for me. In July and November and sometimes the end of January, these are the months that I feel this the most. Must change.*

–July 27, 2006, Pineland Farms

Making Meaning focused David's attention by identifying the issues he faces with his training plans. That kind of organized thought can only help him as he designs his next training plan.

Of the writing David accomplishes during his year, journals address both the day-to-day issues and the larger career-centered concerns.

Reading David's journals creates a vibrant picture of one elite athlete's journey—his accomplishments, disappointments, and demons.

### *Journals*

Some athletes write daily journals as if these entries are simply one more training activity to check off during a training day. As for David, he wrote daily training log entries, but when it came to his journal, he explained, "Sometimes two weeks go by and I don't write anything. Sometimes two weeks go by and I write something every day. It's more [about] curiosity . . . why am I feeling this way?"

Those "whys" continually surface in his writing. "All those other things that happen outside of the training session, those are probably equally important as what I've done during training . . ." like if he's had a real stressful week. He goes on to explain that "There are certain things that just kind of throw you off" and these topics often motivate this athlete's journal writing.

In a 570-day period, David wrote 300 entries. Those entries were as short as a few words and as extensive as multi-paged entries with hundreds of words and sketches. Generally speaking, David's journal entries can be categorized as either personal or technical. Looking at the themes of his entries, as well as how often he writes about those themes, presents an idea of this athlete's physical and emotional needs as well as the benefits journals might provide.

### *Themes: What Does a World-Class Athlete Write About?*

In David's case, just about anything. . . . Throughout his handwritten journal books and typed entries, a reader finds David's menu for a game-day football party and drawings of Yoga poses and stretches (Figure 9.4). Readers would not be surprised to see journal entries that focus on heart rate and health (Figure 9.5).

There's also an experiment in seeking balance suggested by a massage therapist. David called the experimentation "The Left Hand Project." Figure 9.6 shows a small section of the entry. The central paragraph of the journal reads,



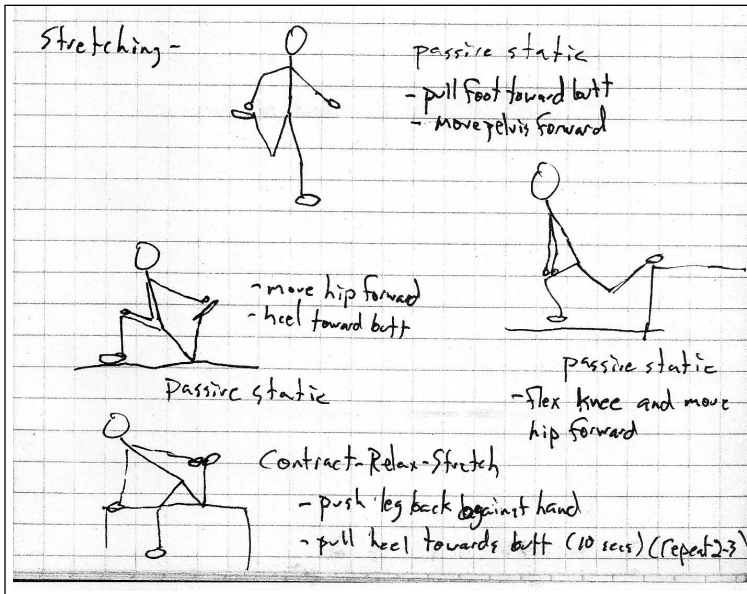


Figure 9.4 Journal Entry “Yoga poses and stretches”

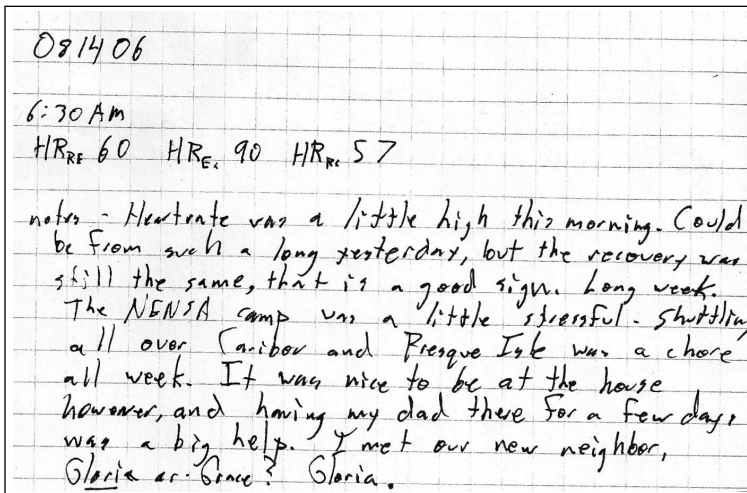
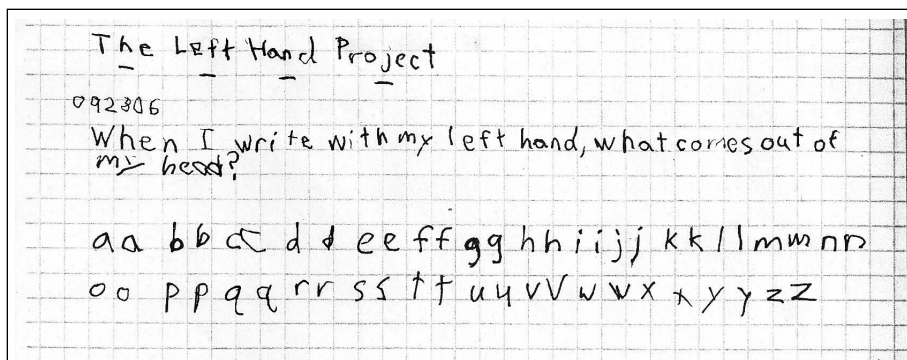


Figure 9.5 Journal Entry “Heart-rate”



**Figure 9.6** Journal Entry “The Left Hand Project”

*When I write with my left hand, what comes out of my head? The left hand project means only to write with my left hand all the time I am working on the left hand project. To write with my left hand may allow me to work on producing better alignment in my body. I have also heard that sometimes it allows the mind to open up a little [more] to address parts of me that remain hidden. Plus, it looks cool, like I am six years old again.*

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Twenty-eight central themes emerged in a year and a half of David’s journals (Figure 9.7). The most commonly addressed themes reveal a balance between his personal life and his athletic life.

Naturally, some journal entries included multiple themes; in addition, certain major themes incorporated a series of subthemes. When David wrote about his emotions, for example, he also wrote about meditation and Tarot card readings.

What seems central in all of this is that David is thinking and writing about issues that matter to him as a professional athlete and as a person. He writes about corporate sponsorships and his training, being a husband and a friend. Here are two examples from David’s journal. One is a *personal* journal entry and the second is an *athletic* journal entry.

### *To Ski or Not, a Personal Journal*

Near the end of the 2006–2007 competitive year, David writes fourteen pages of journal entries over a four-day period about whether to keep

<b>Personal Journal Themes</b>	<b>Athletic Journal Themes</b>
Loneliness . . . 18 entries	Training Sessions . . . 15 entries
Family . . . 13 entries	Focus . . . 13 entries
Emotional Self . . . 12 entries	Physical Conditioning . . . 13 entries
<b>Journal Themes and Frequency of Entries</b>	
Loneliness . . . 18	Understanding the human body . . . 10
Training sessions . . . 15	Writing . . . 9
Family and friends . . . 13	Bettering oneself . . . 8
Focus . . . 13	Need for accomplishment . . . 8
Physical conditioning . . . 13	Self-esteem, playfulness . . . 8
Emotional self . . . 12	Schedules and lists . . . 8
Food . . . 12	Equipment and company sponsors . . . 8
Dreams . . . 11	Balance, alignment, and symmetry . . . 7
Body tension . . . 10	Asserting oneself . . . 7
Colors and visualization . . . 10	Need for fulfillment and satisfaction . . . 7
Awareness of body and mind . . . 10	Optimism, personal goals, and self-encouragement . . . 6
Relaxation and breathing . . . 10	Questioning career and life plan . . . 6
Preparation, control, routine . . . 10	Frustration with training or body . . . 3
Yoga . . . 10	The world (environment, economy) . . . 3

**Figure 9.7** Themes and Frequency of Entries for David's Journals

ski racing or not. He's 32 years old, has nearly 200-sanctioned ski races to his credit, and has an offer to coach and teach at a well-regarded independent school. In his first entry on the topic, David organizes his decision making in a step-by-step process. Next, he thinks through his future plans by posing central questions (Figure 9.8).

Like many of us during decision-making times, David creates a side-by-side comparison in Figure 9.9 as part of his process. Notice how the theme of "giving up" pervades the opening lines on both sides of the comparison. It's also interesting to see how David creates a foundational statement near the bottom of the journal that reveals other peoples' influence on him.

On day four, David devotes an entire page to a sketch showing where he stands with his decision making (Figure 9.10). David looks to be a deep hole.

\*What is it I am trying to accomplish with skiing?

Where do I even start? There is so much there, so many emotional trails, I have no clue which one to start on first? Why do I want to give up on the path I have chosen?

Do I feel that paths are closing in on me?  
Yes (money, money, money)

Do I feel that I truly desire to go in a different direction?  
No

Do I feel that I don't have the energy for another season?  
Yes, but that can change quickly.

Do I feel helpless in finding the energy for another season, how do I do this?  
Yes

Do I feel that I actually have no clue what I am doing with anything?  
Yes

Why have I been a skier, why do I want to be a skier?  
I really don't know.

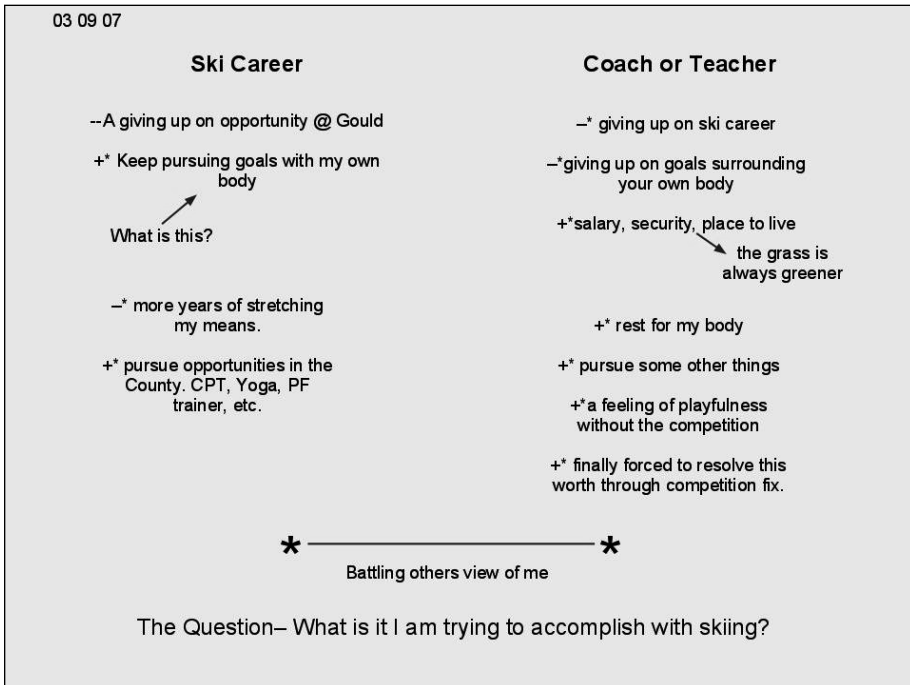
Is all this on a body level, the feeling that my body is pooping out on me?  
Could be.

If I had everything I wanted in skiing, results, security, money to be a skier, the thrill of the big competitions, along with it the emotions of being at the top, the lights (Actually, what I really want is the feeling that me and my body actually belong there, with all that goes along with it.), the suits, the crowds, the cameras, would I simply rest on those laurels when I was done and not seek out new challenges? I am trying to put my finger on something here, and I can't do it. Maybe these emotional trails as I called them all lead back to the same place? Where is that and how do I get there?

**Figure 9.8** Journal Entry March 8, 2007

Also on day four, David writes a full page free-write on his decision, and then he identifies the central features of his decision making by writing the following:

- Healing
- Pro's and Con's of each direction
- Competition + Jealousy
- He wants something



**Figure 9.9** Ski Career v. Coach or Teacher

Ultimately, David makes his decision in his third March 12th entry:

*How did I put it? Mostly this decision is about whether or not I want to continue skiing at the same level that I have been. If I had been given this scenario 2 or 3 years from now, I would have jumped at the chance to run the ski program. But I do not have the sense of completion with my ski career, I don't know if I am dealing with*

It's interesting that David ends his 14th and final entry with an incomplete sentence that trails off, as if, in a small way, he continues the debate. But after 5 days of thinking and writing—and discussions with important others—his decision is made: David continues ski racing for another 3 years.

*Writing the Previous Season, an Athletic Journal*

As he completes one athletic year and begins planning the next, David reviews the data he has collected in his training logs, race results,

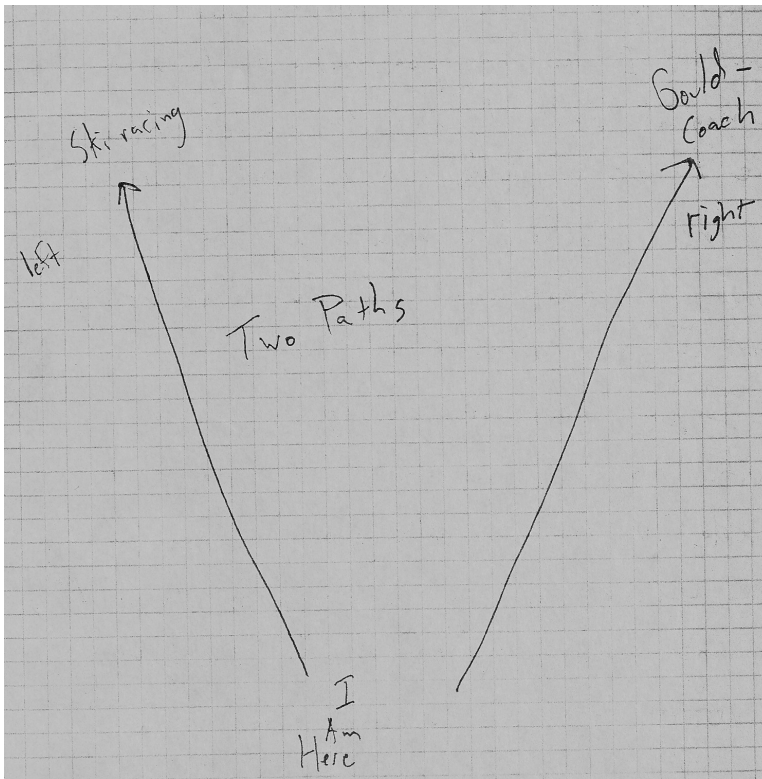


Figure 9.10 Journal Entry “I am here.”

journals, notes, and blogs. Then, he summarizes the year in a journal entry (Figure 9.11) and debriefs his initial thinking and new training plan with coaches and advisors. Writing this journal reflection helps David think more clearly about the previous year’s plan—what worked well and what didn’t. This year-end journal entry is like the Team Notebook’s Pre- and Postseason Thoughts—providing a place to look back in an effort to make sense of what happened.

He undertakes this planning work during the recovery month of April and explains

*I look back to go forward. There are all sorts of emotions behind [planning for the next season]—it’s exciting, but there is also the element of wondering what to do and if you are doing the right things, thinking about the right things. It is a fun time but it is also a little bit . . . I tread really carefully with where I am looking . . . there is some*

April 2006

Thoughts on training for 2005–2006:

I started in May and early June with about 6 weeks of volume and only L3 workouts where I monitored my lactate very carefully, keeping it at or below 3mmol. I used long distance workouts in the afternoon for recovery and L2 workouts the day after, fitting in strength where I could. I did 2, sometimes 3, intensity workouts a week. This period went very well, I was rested, engaged and having a great time with the training.

Through June, July and the start of August, I did similar weeks to the period above, only every fourth week did a week of L4 and L5 interval sessions, 2-3 interval sessions. The one bump in the road was the last few weeks of July where I felt a bit run down. I backed off the volume a bit, took a few rest days and felt restored by the time I left for Italy in mid-August.

The next phase was an altitude camp in August, early September on Stelvio Pass. I felt great and got some very solid training in. The core of the training was easy volume, with some L3 sessions after the first week of acclimation. With help from the Nor. Biathlon Team staff I was carefully monitoring my intensity level through lactate levels. Despite crashing my roller skis in the last week, this trip was a success.

I took one week very easy with little training after Italy then started up with a 3-week block of intensity. I did 3 sessions of L4 or L5 each week with long distance workouts in between for recovery. I felt very good during this block, but looking back this may have been too much too soon. Two weeks of intensity, less intervals, more L3 in between 4–5, less interval sessions, less hours? These are questions I am asking myself.

October was spent at altitude, a very similar camp to Italy only a little less volume. I was run-down towards the end, this is something that continues to trouble me. I did reasonably high volume for the first week with no interval sessions. The second week there was volume, two L3 workouts and a time trial. The last week I did 2 L3 workouts and some recovery days. This camp ended the summer and fall training.

Through the winter months the focus was racing. Earlier in the winter, when I had a weekend off, I would put in a little more volume and some L4 intensity sessions. During the weeks with races on both weekends, I would do a short, easy L3 session to “repair the threshold”. During the two weeks before Nationals I did two L3 sessions, a time trial, and easy training.

Figure 9.11 Journal Entry “Thoughts on training for 2005–2006”. (*continued*)

The times when I felt the best were Yellowstone, US Nationals and the Midwest Nor/Am's. The times when I felt the worst were the Alaska races, the World Cups and the race after March 1st.

I got very sick in Europe, the sickest I have been in years, and I am tracing that back to too many races and a poor emotional state in late January, early February. Even with no racing the last few weeks of February, good rest and training, it was too much to overcome and pretty much ruined the rest of season. Spring series was a disaster; I was not feeling my usual self.

The last three weeks I have been taking a rest. Days off, and some short easy bike rides in the sunshine have helped me recover. I am feeling much better and am starting to feel the desire to train come back.

**Figure 9.11** Journal Entry "Thoughts on training for 2005–2006". (*continued*)

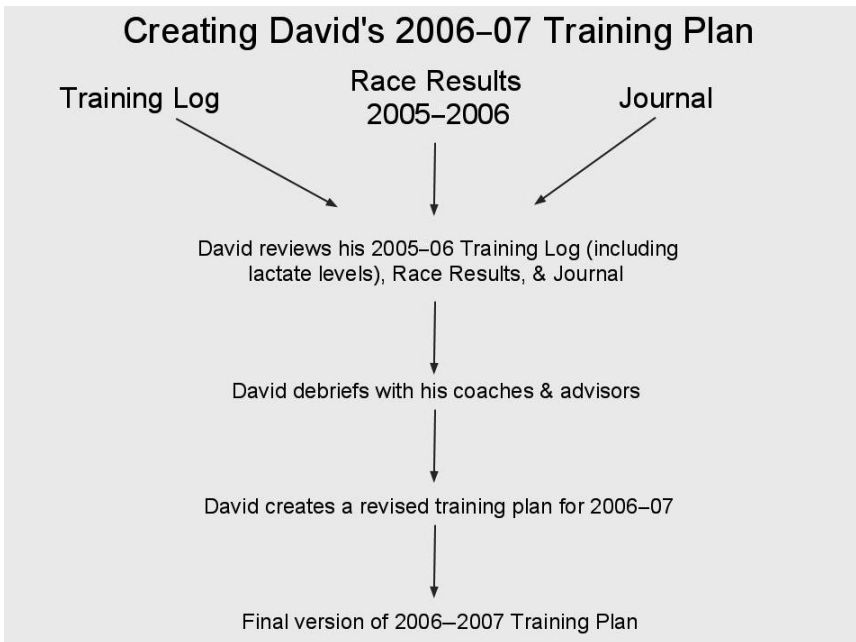
*anxiety there for sure. It's what I do; it definitely affects how I perform next season. Sometimes a little thing can make the difference between a great season and one that's less . . . It's an important time.* (Personal interview, April 17, 2006)

David's 2005–2006 race results reveal the effectiveness of his previous year's training. During the year, his most successful race period occurred during January at Yellowstone, in the U.S. Nationals, and in the Midwest Nor/Am Championships. Next to these weeks in his training log he wrote, "Feeling very good." Figure 9.12 shows his race results from January 2006 as recorded on the International Ski Federation website ([www.fis-ski.com](http://www.fis-ski.com)). As David plans for the next season, he would certainly look closely at the training that led up to these superb performances.

Race date	Place	Nation	Category	Discipline	Position	Points
28-01-2006	Telemark	USA	Nor-Am Cup	10 km C	1	62.98
25-01-2006	Telemark	USA	Nor-Am Cup	SP 1 km C Final	2	
25-01-2006	Telemark	USA	Nor-Am Cup	SP 1 km C Qual	14	153.09
22-01-2006	Mt. Itasca	USA	Nor-Am Cup	10 km C	1	56.71
21-01-2006	Mt. Itasca	USA	Nor-Am Cup	10 km F	3	58.03
10-01-2006	Soldier Hollow, UT	USA	National Championships	2x15 km M Pursuit	4	80.77
08-01-2006	Soldier Hollow, UT	USA	National Championships	10 km F	6	97.40
07-01-2006	Soldier Hollow, UT	USA	National Championships	15 km C	6	75.25
03-01-2006	Soldier Hollow, UT	USA	National Championships	30 km F Mst	5	105.88
18-12-2005	Canmore	CAN	World Cup	6x1.2 km C Team Sprint	21	

**Figure 9.12** David Chamberlain's Results in January 2006





**Figure 9.13** The Process of Creating a Training Plan

David's process of designing a training plan is depicted in Figure 9.13. The amount of data he collects and analyzes with his advisors ensures a broad and careful look at the critical pieces of this athlete's year.

### *Blogs*

Keeping blogs helped showcase David's racing life and as a result promoted his corporate sponsors. Beyond the promotional benefits, blog writing provided David with another opportunity to reflect on his athletic and personal life. Such an activity serves as a unique approach for an athlete because he will write with an audience in mind. For David and most of us, adding a readership changes how we writers think and write. In a paragraph of a May 6, 2006, journal entry, David ponders his voice and audience:

*One question that I always seem to run up against when I write is where does my voice come from? And to whom am I writing? The obvious answer that jumps out is*

*from me and to me. With a closer look I am not so sure that is the right answer. . . . It would be my goal to have a writing product that is utterly my own voice, but how many influences do I have on this voice?*

Writing on a blog is different than writing in a private journal. In his private journal, David wrestles with the influence of his athletic posse—his coaches, advisors, sponsors, friends, and family. This group shares ideas, beliefs, and suggestions with David and can influence his thinking and decision making. However, when David writes on one of his blogs, he is mindful of both his posse and audience (e.g., fans, younger athletes).

Having an audience can stretch a writers' thinking in a variety of ways and create opportunities for athletes to be self-promotional or self-deprecating. Audience can make an athlete more guarded. For example, David did not debate quitting ski racing on his blog. An audience can also "motivate revision" (MacArthur, & Karchmer-Klein, 2010, p. 57) and sometimes such writing, especially when connected to sponsors, gets sanitized.

### And so . . .

Having competed in 258 races on the international circuit, David ended his ski-racing career with 39 podiums and 113 top-ten finishes. Although he did not compete in a Winter Olympic Games, David lived his athletic life without compromise and performed at his highest level. No sponsor, coach, or country could ask for more.