

# Aksel Lund Svindal

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This World Cup season saw the crowning of a new overall champion, Aksel Lund Svindal, in a nail-biting finale that read more like a Hollywood script than real life. The drama of his close fight with Benni Raich for the title kept me logging on to the Ski Racing web site every race morning of the season's last few weeks to see what was happening. With the smart money betting on Benni Raich to take the overall going into the World Cup Finals in Lenzerheide, Svindal pulled a hat trick, winning the downhill, super G and giant slalom, then clinched the title with the slimmest of margins possible by placing 15<sup>th</sup> in the slalom - the lowest place finish he could have made and still win the overall title.

Physically, Svindal can be described with a single word: big. At a height of 6'4" and weight of 210 lbs., he's the biggest man to have won the World Cup, extending a progression that began with men of smaller stature and has progressively favored bigger men: Killy, Thoeni, Stenmark, Zurbriegen, Girardelli, Thomba, Maier, Miller and now Svindal.

Svindal's style, which falls somewhere between the classicism of Benni Raich and the radicalism of Bode Miller and Ted Ligety, has some interesting elements.

His shoulders are always ahead of his hips and his feet never get far ahead of him going into the turn. He rarely appears upright from the waist, with his entire body stretched out. Rather, he is very careful and deliberate in judging the movements he must make to stay in contact with the snow through the transition. In turns where others get popped, Svindal's skis stay close to the snow, ready to engage and work the arc. As a result, the range through which his fore-aft balance moves is smaller than many of his competitors. In these respects he is similar to Benni Raich.

Svindal often makes wide lateral steps in the transition. Sometimes he does this to make line corrections. But more often he makes these steps, without a lateral push-off from the old outside ski, to quickly establish a high degree of inclination and edge angle in relation to the new outside ski. Mario Matt is another notable practitioner of this technique.



Finally, Aksel is a leading practitioner of a technique I see being used more and more on the World Cup that could be called a “super stivot.” (“Stivot” is a term that’s been around for a while, used to describe a combined steering and pivoting movement at the start of the turn.) Sometimes, when faced with a tight turn that’s coming up quickly, he will pivot his skis dramatically early in the turn. Once they’ve bitten the snow, redirected and even slowed him a bit, he pivots them back outward to the line he wants to carve.

Aksel Lund Svindal is the third man from Norway, the country that rightfully regards itself as the “cradle of skiing”, to win the overall World Cup title. I’m hoping to see him have as long and illustrious career as his predecessors, Kjetil Andre Aamodt and Lasse Kjus.