



Benjamin Raich

Ron LeMaster

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Precise and consistent. That's how I think of Benjamin Raich's skiing, both tactics and technique. The precision and consistency make for consistent results. Add big doses of desire, hard work and talent, and you get speed that propels those results to the top of the finish order. Up to the time of the World Championships, he had finished in the top ten of every slalom this season, and every giant slalom but one, Val d'Iserre, where he still finished in the points. He was on the podium in four of the seven slaloms, and two of the six giant slaloms. A close examination of the interval times in those races reveals a similar consistency from section to section of every course he raced.

Raich's precision and consistency in the course begin with his tactics. He is always ahead of the course, making his turns where he decides they should be, not where he happens to find himself at the time he needs to turn. Like the legendary Michael Von Gruenigen, he usually chooses to place his turns on a line that is just slightly less aggressive than many of his strongest competitors. As a result, he rarely finds himself in a situation where he has to improvise technically or make extreme movements.

The precision and consistency of his technique begins with a solid, hip-width stance that rarely strays from parallel, and arms that are always ahead of him, rock steady, in a position from which he can plant a pole at a moment's notice without having to move a hand first. Other than a characteristic upward movement of his left hand at the initiation of many turns to the right (frames 1 & 2), those arms barely move.

Raich's style has a constantly forward-moving character to it that attests to his superb fore-aft balance, accomplished through finely coordinated articulations at the ankles and waist. Going into the carving phase of the turn he flexes at the ankles (frame 3, 4 & 7), putting pressure on the fronts of his boots and moving his center of gravity forward over his skis. As he completes the turn, the ankles straighten, bringing the pressure back to the middle of the skis (frames 1, 5 & 6). But he always keeps his shoulders well ahead of his hips, preventing them from dropping too low and his feet from getting out ahead of him.

Benjamin Raich's technique is not exotic, and his line is not radical, but he skis them fast and clean, turn after turn, section after section, run after run, and race after race.