

Sweating the details: Full thoughts from the coaches with Mansfield Pro Nordic

Perry Thomas, head coach of Mansfield Pro Nordic, and Adam Terko, Mansfield Nordic Club Executive Director, were both kind enough to reply to a writer's questions with thoughtful, expansive emails. Rather than edit these down, we thought that readers would appreciate the full monty. Their complete thoughts are below.

Perry Thomas:

“Starting a team from scratch is hard! Lots of moving parts. With that said, gathering a group of folks interested in the project to help with the creation and sustainability of the team in the form of an advisory committee was important to establish early on. They have been instrumental in the creation of this team, and continue to be an immense help. We owe them, and the Mansfield Nordic Club board (who have also been a huge help and asset) a massive THANK YOU for their continued involvement. As they say, it takes a village, and that is absolutely true here.

“This speaks to a strong theme for us with this program — community. We have a goal to really immerse ourselves in the community here, and have a strong positive presence in that regard. Casting a broad reach allows us to connect with many constituents, and we're looking forward to creating fun and unique ways to engage with the community. This past Thursday, we had 30+ athletes skiing together on the rollerski track all doing the same workout. We had a wide range of abilities and ages from 14-year-olds all the way up to the 26-year-old professionals, which is just super cool and fun! In a few weeks, we'll all get together again to rollerski in our local 4th of July parade to celebrate the day, and expose the community to what we do!

“I'm incredibly excited to have a talented group of ten women here for the summer. I realized early on in the recruiting process that we had a lot of women interested in training with us. What a cool opportunity to have a summer training program focused on women! With the four women on the Pro team, that's 14 of the total 17 athletes we have here training together. Looking forward to all 17 getting better together — no doubt the 14 women will have a lot to offer the three men, and vice versa. It's one of the beauties of what we get to do — work together to get better.

“Collaboration amongst various organizations, clubs, ski brands, strength and conditioning consultants, physical therapy and massage therapy consultants, and endurance sports stores has also been a large aspect of what we're doing. We're

fortunate to have incredible relationships with many of these constituencies. Fostering these bonds in this way can be beneficial to all parties.

“It’s also great to have many like-minded individuals working to solve this puzzle together. Just this morning we got invited to join a [Vermont Green FC](#) practice to meet the team and to find ways to engage with another program from another sport. They were in a similar position a few years ago when they first started, so also great to connect and share information and ideas in that regard.

“Another strong theme for us is ensuring that the athletes have a collective voice in the creation and say of this team. Once athletes started to come on board, we presented them with opportunities to serve additional duties. Including athlete representatives on the advisory committee, athlete representatives on the events/fundraising sub-committee, as well as additional involvement with apparel design, social media, and coaching. We want the athletes to have a say in what we do and how we do it because after all, they’re the ones that all of this affects the most. For the fundraiser at Cochran’s, the athletes all got together a couple days before and screen printed the shirts themselves that we then sold at the event.

“One aspect of the program that we discussed early on was being open to expanding the program to include other sports outside of cross-country skiing — i.e., biathlon, nordic combined, running, biking, etc. Much of those conversations were under the assumption that this would happen ‘down the road.’ I was pretty psyched when a few biathletes expressed interest in the program right away.

“We’re excited to have biathletes on the team, and to work with them and learn from them. It hasn’t been too complicated to integrate their training alongside everyone else so far. They have the resources available to them to continue working on their shooting, and I think it’s great having additional perspectives on skiing, racing, and training. Additionally, it’s been a pleasure working with the USBA coaches to ensure we’re all on the same page, and they have been helpful for me in particular in navigating this new-to-me aspect of coaching biathletes.

“Lastly, as we were cleaning up after our event at Cochran’s, Adam and I looked up and saw all of the pro team athletes hanging out by the fire together. They were the last ones to leave, and some of them barely knew each other up until then, but they were just hanging out with each other having a good time. To me, that’s a sign that we’re doing something right!

“I’m looking forward to continuing to work together with the athletes and the community here to develop this program into something really cool. No doubt there will be challenges along the way, but that’s part of it. I’m confident we can

find success on the race trails this winter, as well as within our engagement in the skiing and Vermont communities.”

Adam Terko:

“I’d say the conceptualization is hard to pinpoint: years ago, Murray Banks used to always say the club should have a ‘cradle to grave’ approach of connecting with all skiers. To that end, our mission statement has been, ‘ski coaching, training, and playing in the shadow of Mt Mansfield for all ages and abilities.’

“Early in my work with the club (this would be around 2015) we tried to connect collegiate skiers with program offerings, but did not see that specific subset of athletes really take off until Perry began leading a specific collegiate summer group in 2022. This was when Perry was coaching at UVM, and living in the area.

“For the next two summers, Brandon Herhusky (then coaching at UVM) continued to build the group into an even more structured and engaged collective of athletes. It was at a weekend training camp for this collegiate group in 2023 that the topic of a pro team came up in a team meeting. I believe a question asked was along the lines of, ‘What do you want to see from this club?’ And the response from a number of the skiers was, *a way to continue pursuing skiing after college, in the Burlington area.* [emphasis in original]

“The growth and consistency of that collegiate group, which we colloquially refer to as ‘MNC University/MNCU,’ led to me bringing the idea of a Pro Team to our Board. In the winter/spring of ’23/’24 these discussions grew into approval to explore the potential for this team, and a small advisory group was formed to lay out what this could look like. Brandon and the MNCU group were thriving, but in the fall these athletes went back to their respective schools and our focus as a club turned to providing what we could for our BKL, Junior, and Masters members with impending construction projects cutting off access to the trails at the Camp Ethan Allen Training Site in Jericho.

“Progress on starting up a Pro Team only really took off again after U.S. Nationals. I was staying a few extra days to help with race support for Emma Crum, who skis for Bowdoin and is an MNC alumna. Perry was also staying a few extra days to support Lauren Jortberg. Both were competing in the final sprint event, and Perry and I teamed up for testing on race day. When I learned Perry was going to be living in Williston and hadn’t settled on a coaching role for the future yet, the wheels started turning. That’s what led to possibly the busiest March and April I’ve ever experienced, but also possibly the most exciting and inspiring May and June, too!”