

Thumpers, Turn Shape, and Leapers: Notes on My 2023/24 Season

So far, it's been a very warm year in the Midwest. We didn't get all runs open until mid January, there was a 21" dump of snow, and then it got cold for about a week. Since then, there has only been small bouts of snow falling. Cascade closed last Sunday (one week early), and what we skied on the last weekend was as skimpy as I've ever seen the snow there, but what they had for us to ski on was decent considering the temps.

My focus in beginner and intermediate lessons this year has been turn shape. I try to get my students to understand making "C" turns instead of "S" turns, which tend to get a bit "snaky" and speed increases. I explain that when our skis are across the hill, we not moving, but when our skis point downhill, we move. That's essentially all there is to skiing when you boil it down. Adding speed is easy, but moving across the hill to burn off speed is a good focus as it can get you down any run: green, blue, or black.

When I first started as a ski instructor, they kept saying I didn't finish my turns and I didn't understand it – it was turning and moving down the hill. I went from a left turn to a right turn, so of course I was finishing my turns. Nobody bothered to explain this to me – they just used this ski terminology that I didn't understand and left it as that (not cool). Now, I understand that's turn shape (I figured this out a while ago). It's making "C" turns. Think of each turn as a "C" turn.

Level 3 Work: Leapers

- My focus with beginning skiers is mainly turn shape.
- My focus with intermediate skiers is often thumpers and turn shape.
- My focus with expert skiers has been stork turns and leapers.

After working with getting people ready for PSIA Level 1 for 5 years (or more), I finally handed that off to others so that I could work on getting my Level 3 certification. I went to clinics on Wednesday nights when we focus on certification. There are even instructors from other hills who pay to attend. Some even travel 5 hours or more (wow), but I get it for free since I'm an employee at Cascade Mountain. This actually inspired me to create [my books](#) because I had to pass this incredible training on to others.

I saw a video on Instagram about "braquage" which means "hold up" (like a robbery) but in skiing, it's taking a hop or upweighting to initiate a pivot slip. This intrigued me because I keep being told to not hop or pop up in transition. I like breaking the rules to see what happens.

Here is what braquage looks like:

Here's another video explaining it:

So it's not a hop, but it's a hip movement. It's good for short-radius turns and bumps. Another video I saw, had it in a real hop, but he keeps his upper body in about the same place, just unweighting his skis and absorbing them. It's just that movement – along with pole usage – that makes things happen. That's easy, which I love.

OK, so there's that, but in the Level 3 lessons I got to teach, I instead started with a leaper. My intention was to move into these, but since leapers were helping everyone so much, I just stayed there (adapted). So I haven't really been able to teach braquage yet, but I'm playing with that in my skiing.

In another one I taught, we wanted to make better short radius turns. With the feedback I got, they said how I started the lesson was genius – I simply said, "Who would like to work on their short radius turns?" and they all raised their hands. And then I added in a "Youbetcha" here and there after Kyle in my group said that (which made the lesson more fun).

"I Made Dem Leapers Ova There"

Doing a leaper (changing edges, mid-air, when taking a hop at transition) is really helpful. It's kind of like a reset – you get re-centered from your last turn and you're instantly on your new edges at the beginning of the turn... which is "wow" when you have great snow!

I'm calling leapers my Level 3 thumpers. ?

Most of the lesson was really just doing leapers and giving feedback, but I did add a focus in to get forward and angled downhill into the next turn, right after the hop. We then did 2 leaper turns and then did 3-4 more with no leaper but trying to get a quick edge change in at transition. Boy, did everyone's skiing change – including mine.

Intermediate (Non-Beginner) Lessons

With many intermediate lessons, we ended up doing Wedge Cristies with the focus of getting the skis on edge at the finish of the turn, into transition. They do that by with pressure to the pinkie toe of the inside ski to bring that ski in to match the other one. Coming across the hill helped them focus on turn shape ("C" turns). I have my students make that their focus: "wedge, big toe, bring it in, uphill edges, then wedge..." and they've really thanked me for helping them get the control they need.

From there, making the wedge smaller and smaller helped get rid of the wedge and we moved getting on edges (more pinkie toe pressure and tipping) higher up in the turn.

Conclusion

That's sort of a wrap-up of a few things I've focused on this season teaching. It's been fun. This has really been written for instructors more than students as I'm using the lingo we all use.

I was telling another friend the other day how all us ski instructors end our day talking about what worked and what didn't work in our lessons. I think I'm the one **who made Thumpers sexy again** as I had one season (pre-COVID) where that is what I used in beginner lessons with great success. Others started using them, too, and Jen even used them on her Level 2 teaching to pass. Now, I'm doing that with Leapers, it seems.

I didn't get a trip in out West, which would have been awesome, but maybe next season. I need to get that planned soon so that it happens.

Get out there and ski – if you have snow still!

-Tony

Original article: <https://www.skiwithtony.com/thumpers-turn-shape-and-leapers-notes-on-my-2023-24-season/>