

[Without much snow, Mohawk Trail cross country ski team has to get creative, and stay flexible](#)

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While many around Franklin County were displeased shoveling out after the storms over the weekend, one person was smiling from ear-to-ear: Mohawk Trail cross country ski coach Mark Pollard.

After all, it's impossible to have a cross country ski season without snow. The Warriors were forced to postpone a pair of meets already, as unlike a typical winter in New England, it's taken longer for snowfall to drop.

An experienced coach like Pollard has been through it before, however, and knows how to get his team prepared for the season when the snow eventually falls.

"It's certainly a challenge," Pollard said. "It's definitely not the first season we've had with late snow. The name of the game is being flexible and ready to adapt to whatever happens."

When your sport is determined by weather, flexibility is key. As is innovation, which Pollard has plenty of experience with.

For cross country skiing, conditioning and endurance are paramount. Pollard has his Mohawk Trail team up in Craftsbury, Vt. during the Christmas break every year, where they go to train at a mountain that produces snow on a cross country ski course.

Typically, Berkshire East Mountain Resort in Charlemont allows the Warriors a chance to train on the mountain and their produced snow during weekend mornings. That hasn't been possible this year, as it rained every weekend Mohawk Trail had attempted to go to practice.

Since those haven't worked out, the Warriors have mainly been practicing by roller skiing. What is roller skiing? It's exactly what it sounds like: putting wheels under what is essentially a ski to simulate cross country skiing. Road tips are applied to the ski poles.

"It's exactly the same motion as skiing," Pollard said. "It allows them to build up their technique and skills while working on conditioning. You strap right into this aluminum tube with wheels on them. It has regular bindings so you can put your ski boots in. Strap in and you're good to go."

Another training exercise without snow involves simply preparing like it's a cross country running season. Pollard has the Warriors run in the woods on the cross country trails with ski poles, mimicking the same ski motion while conditioning.

After coaching for many years, Pollard has learned the area well. So much so that's he's learned the spots in the Hilltowns where snow seems to always be abundant.

"One of my skills is finding places where we can ski on small amounts of snow," Pollard said. "It hasn't worked out this year but last year we were able to ski at a lake. You only need three-quarters of an inch of snow to ski. We've used the Ashfield Golf Course before.

"It's all about finding the secret snow and I know all the spots," Pollard added. "If I was a superhero my secret power would be finding places with snow."

After the snow this weekend, Mohawk Trail was able to kick its season off on Monday night at Ski Butternut in Great Barrington.

The Warriors, which have 15 athletes on the team, showed well in their opening meet. Vincent Gauthier and Augustus Niswonger impressed on the boys side while Charlotte Niswonger and Noa Nabut competed well on the girls side. With numbers low, Mohawk Trail is once again coping with Hampshire Regional this winter.

With no snow in the region prior to last weekend, every team has been dealing with the same preseason conditions, tasked with finding innovative ways to get ready for the season.

"None of our competition has gotten any snow either," Pollard said. "It's an even playing field. Every year gets more challenging with getting kids out. We get a lot of kids from Hampshire. Without them we wouldn't be able to have a program."

While the rain that dropped on the area on Tuesday night washed away a lot of the snow, Pollard said it will actually make for better conditions when the Warriors compete again. They are currently scheduled to race at Mount Greylock on Saturday, but as Pollard says, you have to be flexible and ready for change in this sport.

"The rain didn't wash away all the snow so it's not as bad as it seems," Pollard said. "The snow absorbed a lot of the rain and it will make for fast, icy snow. If Greylock can't have the meet on Saturday we'll go to Butternut again on Monday. You just have to be flexible. They make the call on the conditions a few days before. You have to be ready and prepared for anything."

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