

# All guns firing at ritzy Northstar

By Susan Wood

It is only fitting that "æstar" is in its name.

As well as hosting the opening of the Lake Tahoe region's first 5-star resort with expanded lift access and more snowmaking, Northstar-at-Tahoe gets in on Olympic action by launching the 2009-10 season with a biathlon course and instruction by competitive athlete Glenn Jobe at its Nordic center.

Weather permitting, the season will start Saturday.

It may be a year to mark the return of the Olympics to the West Coast in Vancouver, but Tahoe's own Northstar brings the only permanent biathlon range to the West. Appropriately so, the sport of biathlon has returned to Tahoe where it was introduced in the 1960 Olympics hosted by nearby Squaw Valley.



Northstar is ready to open.

Photo/Bill Stevenson

One of the oldest winter sports, biathlon's roots come from the military when troops skied then shot at the enemy. Now the tracks range in distances from 7.5 to 20 kilometers, with

points added depending on the scores of the shots. Cross country skiers glide to each target. Five targets have been installed near the caboose warming hut on Northstar's cross country trail network. Half are shot at lying down and the others standing up.

It's one of the most watched sports in the Olympics. It's huge in Europe, but it hasn't been popular in the United States because of the lack of permanent courses," said Jobe, who competed in the 1980 Olympic Games in Lake Placid, N.Y., before becoming a cross country ski coach and instructor. He will provide private, three-hour lessons Monday through Friday for ages 13 and older at \$199 per person. Two people may get lessons for \$249.

The Sierraville resident admits to being extremely excited about Northstar installing a range and course, which will be on display for a mock race and demonstration at the resort on Jan. 10 for Olympic Heritage Week.

From gold to red

Stein who? Destination skiers who travel the globe to stop in the likes of places like Stein Eriksen's Lodge in Park City, Utah, may find more competition in luxury accommodations based on Northstar's mid-mountain. The Ritz-Carlton Highlands rolls out the red carpet next month, featuring its own Highlands Gondola to carry guests from the Village to mid-mountain where the ski-in, ski-out mountain valet experience awaits.

"The lodging pace for this winter is looking positive," Northstar spokeswoman Jessica Van Pernis said of the Ritz inquiries.

The hotelier built the conglomerate with 170 guest rooms, 23 private residences and 25 fractional ownership units. When the guests aren't skiing or boarding, a 17,000-square-foot spa and fitness center and restaurant run by Executive Chef Traci

Des Jardins is sure to keep most busy and satisfied.

On the slopes, Northstar beefed up its snowmaking capacity at the beginner teaching area located in the Highlands region. Early season conditions will play less of a factor for those itching to slide or skate out of their room or even discover how to do it. The snow surface enhancement coincides with more teaching programs and beginner terrain about twice the size as last year to further the family-oriented experience the resort is known for.

And this year, young boarders ages 4 to 12 will no longer be bored with instruction from a family member because the Burton Snowboard Academy is opening. Plus, a special development program from the introductory Northstar Training Lab can get many a skier out of the rut of bad habits.

First timers will have more to cheer about when making turns with a package for ages 13+ that includes a 2½-hour lesson, lift ticket and rental equipment for \$99. A handful of programs for novices at bargain prices have been added to increase the number of people coming on board the snow sports and to keep the interest going amid challenging economic times.

“When the snow flew, people still came skiing, despite the economy. We saw a lot of (close by booking) and visits from our drive markets — Reno, Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area,” Van Pernis said, echoing many resorts’ observations.

Still considered a bargain at most standards, season pass rates held their own in sales last year into this season. Adult daily lift ticket prices remain the same this year at \$79.

Northstar is located off Highway 267. Information may be obtained via [www.NorthstarAtTahoe.com](http://www.NorthstarAtTahoe.com) or by calling 800-466-6784 or 800-GO-NORTH.