

Opinion: Tips to make last run of the day not be trip to the ER

By Warren Withers

Wintertime in Tahoe means skiing and snowboarding for visitors and locals. Few other places in the world have the abundance of snowsports opportunities that we enjoy in the Tahoe basin. With all the excitement and fun, many of us tend to sometimes forget a few simple safety measures that can help prevent the occasional, but largely avoidable injuries that can dampen our day.



Consider the following when you're headed out to your favorite resort, so your après ski plans do not include a trip to the emergency department:

1) Wear a helmet. It is interesting to see the evolution of the use of the helmet in snowsports. It is such a simple device, but still used and thought of perhaps similarly to seatbelts in 1965: interesting, but optional. Like a seat belt, it does not protect against all forms of injury, but may change the degree of injury you endure if you do hit your head. A moderate head injury without a helmet may lead to a minor head injury if you're wearing one, and so on. Remember, once you start wearing a helmet, you will never go back. They're comfortable and keep you warm. Just like your seatbelt, you will begin to feel naked and unprotected without it.

2) Wrist guards. These simple and inexpensive devices can be purchased at any sports shop, and like the helmet they can

make the difference between a normal fall and a trip to the emergency room. Wrist guards are especially useful for snowboarders who are just learning to ride.

3) Resort boundaries and backcountry access gates. This subject, too, has evolved considerably in recent years. Today, there are designated gates that you can go through at some resorts and access the “backcountry” or un-roomed terrain. This can be an amazing experience, but it is clearly an activity left to experts who know fully the risk involved. When you cross these gates it’s imperative that you know you are entering unpatrolled areas and if you are injured or become lost, rescues take longer than hoped for and are quite expensive.

4) Resort boundaries, no go areas. Resort staff members are experts at identifying when an area is safe and when it is not. When they mark an area off, usually with a rope or ribbon, it is for your safety, not because the skiing or snowboarding is so great there that they want to keep you away from it. This is a simple concept, but we see these boundaries ignored, often to the regret of those who do so.

5) Avalanches. This subject gets a lot of media attention when it happens and for good reason. If you intend to venture into the backcountry, you must first know what you are doing. Taking an avalanche course and wearing and knowing how to use a beacon is a must. These will reduce, but not eliminate your risk of injury. Avalanches inside resort boundaries are very unlikely, but just beyond that boundary line, the slopes of “steep and deep” snow call out to the powder hounds in all of us. Again, see No. 4 above for boundaries.

Keeping these safety measures in mind can help you have enjoyable and safe spring on the slopes!

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