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BUILDING BETTER SKIERS

ON-THE-ROAD FITNESS

This Picnic Table Will Kick Your Ass

Get ski fit with six exercises you can do in a campground. —BY ERIC MINKWITZ

Pro freeskiier Jessica Sobolowski travels more in a winter than most people do all year. Between December and May she's filming for companies like Warren Miller Entertainment, skiing for Völkl, and tagging first descents in the Chugach. Though her travel time is offset by ski action, all those road miles could make even the fittest person flabby.

Not so for Sobolowski, a self-proclaimed outdoor fitness junkie. Whether she's holed up in a bus station or hitchhiking outside Cordova, she uses her environment to develop and maintain the explosiveness, stability, strength, and reactivity needed to charge the biggest mountains after days of downtime. And that's a good thing. "Every skier needs to practice ballistic moves to develop lower-body strength and power," says Chris Graham, owner of Sports MedicineInstituteLosAngeles, which specializes in injury prevention and knee rehabilitation. Sobolowski accomplishes this and then some, all without setting foot in a gym.

This month we issued Sobolowski and Graham an on-the-road training challenge: Come up with a workout that primes the entire body for ski season—using nothing but a picnic table. The result, says Sobolowski, is "an awesome, half-hour, ass-kicking workout with a view."

WHO'S KICKING ASS NOW, PICNIC TABLE? SOBOLOWSKI STEPS IT UP IN LAKE TAHOE.



THE WORKOUT



THE MOVE: STEP-UPS

[Three sets of 30 seconds leading with right leg, followed by three sets leading with left leg]

Works: Glutes, quads, hip flexors

Ski Benefit: Step-ups strengthen and condition the hip muscles, improve dynamic stability, and enhance range of motion to allow for greater control and balance while arcing turns.

Do It Right: Stand in front of the picnic-table bench. With your eyes forward, abs contracted, and arms bent at 90 degrees, plant your right foot on the bench. Step up, and raise your left leg so your quad is parallel to the ground. Pause; then step down with your left leg. Continue for 30 seconds and switch lead leg.

Raise the Bar: Increase time to 60 seconds per set per leg.



THE MOVE: TRICEP PUSHDOWNS

[Three sets to burnout]

Works: Upper arms, upper back, rotator cuffs, deltoids, and pecs

Ski Benefit: Tricep pushdowns strengthen your scapular stabilizers (the muscles that connect your shoulder blade to your back) and deltoids, allowing you to ski diverse terrain and make lightning-quick pole plants.

Do It Right: Place your palms shoulder-width apart on the edge of the bench. Stabilize the muscles surrounding your shoulder blades by squeezing them together. Bend your elbows to 90 degrees, dropping your body toward the ground. Be sure to pull your navel in toward your spine—i.e. suck in that beer gut.

Raise the Bar: Balance both feet on a rock with legs straight but not locked. This makes it harder to stabilize your body.



THE MOVE: THREE-SIDED PLANK

[Three sets, 30 seconds in each position]

Works: Core, spinal erectors, glutes

Ski Benefit: These deep spinal and pelvic stabilizers play a vital role in dynamic stability, which you need when carving fast turns on ice and then immediately hitting a patch of soft crud.

Do It Right: Start with your hands shoulder-width apart and toes on the table in a pre-push-up position (see photo 1). Tighten your core and push up. Hold for 30 seconds, and then rotate your body 90 degrees to the left so that you're balancing on one arm, hips lifted and side muscles contracted, with one foot stacked on (or in back of) the other (photo 2). Hold for 30 seconds, and then switch to the other side.

Raise the Bar: Raise one foot (the top one in side plank) off the ground in each position.





THE MOVE: BENCH JUMPS

[Three sets, 16 to 20 reps]

Works: Fast-twitch muscle fibers

Ski Benefit: These double-leg jumps attack the entire lower body, both when the muscles are stretched and loaded to decelerate and when they are subjected to a high-force contraction. They mimic any forceful GS-type turn or a tight mogul run.

Do It Right: Face the table with your feet shoulder-width apart. Explosively jump onto the bench and then immediately bound onto the top of the table, making sure you land in a smooth, controlled fashion. Step down to the ground and repeat.

Raise the Bar: Hop from the tabletop to the ground, landing on both feet (shoulder-width apart) in a soft, springlike fashion.



THE MOVE: SINGLE-LEG SQUATS

[Three sets, 15 reps at a controlled pace]

Works: Quads, glutes, core, hip flexors

Ski Benefit: "Single-leg squats are perfect for skiers because they build balance and control while training the deep rotators of the femur and developing the key power producers: the glutes and quads," says Graham.

Do It Right: Rest the top of one foot on the bench, step forward with the other leg, lower your body until your knee reaches 90 degrees. Be sure your glutes initiate the movement, your spine stays long and balanced, and your weight remains centered over your front leg. Keep your knee behind your toe.

Raise the Bar: Lower for three counts, and then explode back to standing.

THE MOVE: INCLINE PUSH-UPS

[Three sets to burnout]

Works: Core, pecs, triceps, deltoids

Ski Benefit: A bomber core and upper body are vital for maintaining control on the slopes. This move is crucial for the skier, says Graham, because "your core and upper-body muscles help initiate a turn."

Do It Right: Place your hands shoulder-width apart on the bench, feet on the ground and torso in a plank position. Stabilize your upper back with a slight shoulder squeeze, bend your elbows to 90 degrees, and lower your chest toward the bench. Be careful not to sag in the shoulders.

Raise the Bar: Turn around so your feet are on the table and your hands are on the ground.

