

USSA Penalty, Race Points, and Seed Points

USSA Seed points are used to determine the starting order in almost all USSA scored races for athletes 14 or 15 years and older. Lower seed points will provide a favorable (earlier) start position and provide a fairly accurate method of comparing the skills of one athlete anywhere in the country with any other athlete. All J2 and older athletes may participate in any USSA scored race except invitational championships. Second year J3 athletes may participate in “open” scored races (races that are not part of a series such as the PA Cup). As you will see, it is advantageous for all second year J3's to begin earning points as soon as possible.

One of the difficulties in understanding points is that “points” can refer to several different types of numerical indicators or calculations that are all used to derive a single athlete's USSA seed points. Seed points are the average of the points earned by one athlete from his two best results. They are used to determine start order in a scored race. Athletes who have not earned any points in previous scored races start with 990 points. Like a golf handicap, the object is to lower your points.

The 15 athletes with the lowest seed points start in random order in the first 15 positions of the first run. All other athletes (after the top 15) with seed points start in the order of their points. So, the competitor with the 16th lowest seed points will start 16th, the 17th lowest will start 17th and so on. All competitors with 990 points are randomized and start after all the seeded competitors. You can see why it is beneficial to earn points as quickly as possible so you are not starting at the back of the pack.

Points earned in one race are calculated as the sum of the “penalty” for the race plus the “race points” earned by each individual competitor. In general, the better the quality of the field (based on their seed points), the lower the penalty. Remember, the lower, the better. Race points are calculated based on the percentage of time that an individual competitor is slower than the race winner. The winner always earns 0.00 race points. So, if the race penalty is 80.00 and an athlete earns 20.00 race points, that athlete earns 100.00 seed points for the race. If, in his next race in that same event, he earns 120.00 points (and these are his two best results), he will have 110.00 USSA seed points (the average of his two best results).

Points are not DEDUCTED from current seed points. As soon as an athlete has two or more results, his seed points are simply the average of his two best results.

There are a few adjustments made by USSA to each athlete's points. A small number of points are added to every competitor at the beginning of each season. If an athlete has no results in a full season, a large number of points are added to his seed points. There are also rules that can change the penalty under certain unusual circumstances. These rules are not explained here.

Points lists are updated 13 times per year – about every 3 weeks during winter. See the USSA Alpine Competition Guide for these dates (page 7 of the 2008 Guide).

Attached are two Excel spreadsheets. One explains the points calculations in more detail. The other is an example that you can manipulate to see how the quality of the field and finish times of individual competitors affect the points earned in a race.