

## **Cold weather just another challenge of Super Bowl week**

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California's governor has confirmed what we've known for a while: 2013 was the driest year in recorded history.

And 2014 isn't starting out any better.

While this is bad news for all of us, the ski industry is taken a major hit this winter.

Mammoth Mountain continues to stay open, with the modest claim to fame of more top-to-bottom terrain available than any other resort in the state. But this is a year when snowmaking has allowed daily operation and a consistent base of perhaps 15 to 20 inches of snow. Often in the past, you would have changed inches to feet when talking about the snowpack at the end of January.

Skiers and boarders are starting to focus on other activities, especially in light of the recent warm spell in Southern California.

So how dry is it? January has seen just 2½ inches of snowfall in Mammoth with the month nearly finished. Over the last 10 years, the average snowfall in January at Mammoth has been about 105 inches (or 8½ feet).

It's another boring beautiful day. Again.

The last two years have been sub-par, with 308 inches of snow last year and 263 in 2011-12. Last year was saved by a massive dump in December that produced 147 inches.

The two years prior to the current dry spell were super-normal, at 558 and 668 inches. A normal year for Mammoth Mountain is in excess of 400 inches of snowfall, if normal is a viable term.

Mammoth's marketing crew tried something different this year, offering a bargain pass for the month of January, but any product is tough to sell when the base depth never increases beyond what was offered on opening day.

Mammoth's massive snowmaking machine, coupled with the ability to move and farm snow, allowed the mountain to rescue the snowboard Olympic trials last week when several other mountains could not produce.

So what's ahead? Everybody is watching weather maps and hoping. But the damage has been done economically with subpar crowds over the holidays, including Monday's MLK three-day weekend.

The next big weekend is Feb. 15-17. If the skies don't open up before then, it will be an early confirmation for a season that never got going, no matter what the snowfall in spring.

## **Olympics preview**

We'll offer a handicap of the skiing events at Sochi in the Feb. 7 column, with former U.S. Ski Team guest coach John Armstrong offering insights into the chances for U.S. and other skiers. Did anybody notice Bode Miller placing 25th and picking up his first points in slalom in more than a decade earlier this week? The longtime king of speed events is hoping to do well in the combined, which involves skiing the high-speed downhill, then competing on a tight, turny slalom course for a combined time.

The combined remains Ted Ligety's second-best event, following the giant slalom. He figures to be America's most talked-about skier with Lindsey Vonn sidelined by injury.

## **Price breaks**

Never Pay Retail Day in the ski industry is normally Feb. 1, when shops in most mountain towns resurrect the sale signs and start marking down hard and soft goods. With the slow snow season in California, the expectation was for an early break on prices.

Certainly those who shop online have seen some sales. Soft goods (clothes) are usually the first to get marked down, while the hard goods (skis, boots, bindings, helmets, snowboards) come a little later.

But the markdowns are coming.

## **Trade show**

The annual Ski Industries of America (SIA) show is Jan. 30-Feb. 4 in Denver and this is where manufacturers showcase their new products for retailers. It is the biggest trade show for the industry each year and millions of dollars of goods are consigned for the following season. Every major manufacturer has a presence, and the atmosphere is typically festive. Considering this year's drought in the west, things may be a little subdued.

For the last two decades, this show was held in Las Vegas, but it recently moved to Denver and added an on-show demonstration component for those who wanted to try the skis, boots, etc., that they were committing to buy.