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WOLFF ARCHIVE

Greener pastures

Searching for sponsors and discovering life in the ABA

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Last weekend I tested the breadth of my quest to start a pro basketball team in Vermont -- from scaring up seed capital, to inspecting the quality of ball in the league in which we'll play -- over several strenuous days of skiing and hoops. If those two sports share anything besides a season, it's their status in my life as mutually exclusive pursuits, for I've always been too engrossed in covering one to learn the other.

Yet last Friday, at Vermont's Bolton Valley Resort, a local venture capital firm was hosting an event called Peak Pitch. In this upcountry twist on the proverbial elevator pitch, entrepreneurs shared a chairlift with investors and spent the ride up the hill trying to wheedle money out of them. My mother was horrified to learn that I planned to participate. "Why, you won't even have your feet on the ground!" she said, with striking literal, if not figurative, aptness. Indeed, news from Turin that **Bode Miller** had turned an ankle playing pickup hoops seemed to augur nothing good for a convergence of the two sports.

But the Vermont Frost Heaves have too much at stake for their president and GM to let a mogul come between him and, well, a mogul. So I got Vermont's The Alpine Shop to lend me skis, and a Middlebury College senior, **Tim Foley**, to give me a lesson. Then, along with several dozen other entrepreneurs, I pulled on a blue bib. As you'd expect, prospective investors wore green. Bolton marks its easiest slopes with green signage, so I incanted a mantra: Seek out the green. With Tim doing



Whether it be a magazine scribe or a retired 7-foot-7 NBA center, the ABA offers a chance to play for any and all capable of suiting up.

Mitchell Layton/SI

chaperone duty, I survived five runs, half as many as rivals who could zip heedlessly down the mountain.

After laying my pitch on a venture capitalist named **Matt**, I realized I'd committed a sin as much entrepreneurial as journalistic: I'd buried the lede. Before he could plant his poles, I called out, "Hey, can I add a 'P.S.' to my pitch?"

If mine had been an elevator pitch, Matt would have long since disappeared down the hall. Fortunately, he let me go on: "One out of every 12 users of the Internet has played some sort of fantasy sports. The Frost Heaves will do them one better! We'll let fans help run a *real* team over the Web!"

I think Matt got it -- although as I write this at midweek, I still hadn't fielded his request for wiring instructions. I do, however, know quite a bit more about the American Basketball Association, which features a promoter's dream of a rule, in which the home team may suit up anyone it chooses.



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