

Nordic History

Grand County Nordic History and Athletic Achievement

Grand County was one of Colorado's first areas to enjoy 'Nordic skiing'. Early settlers cross-country skied and snowshoed for sport, until the first ski jumps were built in Hot Sulphur Springs in 1920, and then the first tow lift was built on the top of Berthoud Pass in 1936. They have both been since replaced by the world-class slopes of the Winter Park Ski Resort, established in the late 1930's.

Winter Park Resort opened in 1940 with a three-day winter carnival. At that time, Nordic ski jumping was the most popular form of skiing. Alpine skiing evolved from a combination of both cross-country skiing and ski jumping, because participants sought more thrills and speed by gliding downhill.

In 1948, Gordy Wren became the only American in history to qualify for ski jumping, Nordic combined, downhill, and cross-country in a single Olympic Games. Wren, a native of Steamboat Springs, got his start at Winter Park Resort. At the time of his selection for the U.S. Olympic Ski Team, Wren was the director of the ski school at Winter Park.

In 1962, the Winter Park Competition Center (WPCC) started as a grass-roots organization with the formation of the Winter Park Ski Club. In 1979, WPCC took over the responsibilities of all competition events and athletic training programs, by absorbing the Winter Park Ski Club, the Grand County Ski Club, the Denver Post Winter Park Ski Jumping School. Plus, a new partnership was formed with the East Grand School District to develop a ski academy to further provide education and training to dedicated ski athletes.

In 1973, Harald "Pop" Sorensen was inducted into the National Ski Hall of Fame for his outstanding achievements and contributions to the sport of skiing. A Historical Trail Marker dedicated to Harald "Pop" Sorensen stands at the base of the Winter Park Resort jump hill. Pop, a former U.S. Olympic coach along with Steve Bradley and Jerry Groszold, started the Winter Park Ski Jumping School in 1959. For sixteen years, Pop devoted every weekend to teaching youngsters, many of whom found their way to national Nordic teams and international competition under his guidance and leadership. Olympians Landis Arnold, Dennis McGrane, Greg Boester, Bob Holme, Kerry Lynch, Todd Wilson, Dave Jarret, Ryan Heckman all started in Winter Park.

In 1982, Todd Wilson won the Colorado High School Ski Jumping Championship in the final year of the event; and in 1983, he won the Colorado Cross Country State Championship. In 1985, he represented the United States in the World Championships in Nordic Combined. He competed in the Winter Olympics in 1988 and 1992.

Bob Holme, who took up ski jumping at Winter Park because he was bored with Alpine, made his Olympic debut in 1992; in 1994, he was named the captain of the US Olympic Ski Jumping Team.

After many years of success, the jumping complex at Winter Park, where several Olympians made their first jumps, was removed in 2004 as athletes migrated to larger and more modern jumping

facilities. Tom Carey coached the Nordic Combined Team at Winter Park Resort from 1989 until the jumping complex at Winter Park closed in 2004.

In 2016, the Winter Park Competition Center reinstated the Nordic program at Winter Park Resort and organized a team that would train junior cross-country skiers to compete in the Rocky Mountain Nordic Division. With an annual snowfall of over 300 inches, Winter Park Resort today remains a mecca for Alpine and Nordic skiing, and continues to build a culture of Nordic skiing across the Fraser Valley.

About the Nordic discipline

Many people use “Nordic skiing” and “cross-country skiing” interchangeably, but that is not technically correct. Nordic skiing is a term used to encompass a number of skiing disciplines that stem from the Nordic region of Europe (Norway, Sweden, and Finland), including cross-country, skiing, biathlon, ski jumping, and telemark skiing. Nordic skiing is a test of skill, speed and, most of all, endurance. Nordic skiing has a free-heel binding system, different to the flat-foot bindings of Alpine skis. In terms of equipment, Nordic skis are much lighter and narrower, making them easier to maneuver and glide.

Nordic Combined is a winter sport in which athletes compete in cross-country skiing and ski jumping. Skiers start by taking two ski jumps, scoring points for distance and style. Next up is a 10-kilometer cross-country race. Competitors start based on their performance in the ski jumping: the best ski jumper takes off first, then the others follow in staggered fashion. The first skier across the line wins. Nordic combined has been part of the Winter Olympics since 1924 and the FIS Nordic Combined World Cup since 1983. The sport was not sanctioned for women’s competition until 2016.

Ski jumping may seem like an odd addition to the collection of Nordic ski sports, but the reasoning again comes down to the heel. Ski jumpers’ boots are attached to the ski only by a cord connected to the heel of the boot. This connection cord prevents the skis from wobbling while in flight. For this reason, the binding setup of a ski jumper more closely resembles that of the other Nordic sports.

Written by: Bruce Manske, Nordic Program Director

Sources: Tim Nicklas, author of Winter Park Resort, 75 Years of Imagining More
Tom Carey, Vice President, Experiences at Winter Park Resort
Bob Holme, Director of Mountain Maintenance