

1956 WINTER OLYMPICS

After having to cancel the 1944 Winter Olympics because of World War II, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy was finally able to host the Winter Games in 1956, January 26 to February 5. The town in northern Italy won the Olympic bid over; Montreal, Colorado Springs, and Lake Placid. Several aspects made these Games unique: all of the venues were within walking distance except one, for the first time in history the Games relied heavily on corporate sponsorship (Fiat was the "official car"), and this was the first televised Winter Olympics. Thirty-two nations arrived to compete, including the Soviet Union, competing for the first time and winning more gold medals than any other nation.

Twenty-two events were featured, in four sports, plus two new events: the men's 30-kilometer Cross-Country and the women's 3x5-kilometer Cross-Country races. A new aerodynamic style for Ski Jumping was introduced by the Finnish team, with arms flat against the body, instead of over the head in a diving position. Additionally, the men's Nordic Cross-Country 18-kilometer event was changed to 15 kilometers.

The U.S. finished sixth in the medal count, with seven medals (two gold, three silver, and two bronze). The four-man bobsled was awarded a bronze, and the men's ice hockey team won silver with the U.S. dominating the figure skating with a total of five medals in the sport. In the men's individual events, Hayes Alan Jenkins triumphed with a gold, while Ronnie Robertson earned silver and David Jenkins won a bronze medal. In the ladies individual events, Tenley Albright emerged victorious despite a serious injury two weeks prior to the competition, while Carol Heiss won a silver medal.

The Soviet Union was a powerhouse in the speed skating events, claiming seven out of twelve possible medals. Austria dominated the men's alpine skiing events; Toni Sailer won all three, and became the first alpine skier to ever win three gold in one Olympiad.

Gladys "Skeeter" Werner Walker, a member of the 1956 women's alpine ski team, was born in Steamboat Springs, CO. In 1954 she became the youngest member of the U.S. National Ski Team, and placed tenth in the downhill at the 1956 Olympics, but retired from competition in 1957. After helping to found the ski school at the Steamboat Ski Resort, Gladys spent the rest of her life in Steamboat Springs.

1960 WINTER OLYMPICS: GAMES RETURN TO NORTH AMERICA

Squaw Valley, CA hosted the 1960 Winter Olympics, which had not been held in North America for twenty-eight years. Located near Lake Tahoe, Squaw Valley was the first venue to be constructed from scratch for the Olympics. The vote to hold the Winter Games at Squaw Valley was strongly contested,

particularly by the Scandinavian nations, since it was such an unfamiliar and empty area. However, thirty



Figure 1 Ski jumping at Squaw Valley, 1960.

countries sent athletes to Squaw Valley to compete from February 18th to February 28th. South Africa joined the Winter Games for the first time (and also the last for many years, due to Apartheid controversies), and West and East German athletes competed together under the United Team of Germany from 1956 to 1964.

Prior to the Olympics, Squaw Valley had a typical twenty feet of snow, but due to a massive rainstorm that washed most of it away, including a temporary parking lot, the U.S. military was called in to repair the damage. Luckily, twelve feet of snow fell before the start of the Games.

For the first time, an Olympic Village was built to house up to seven hundred and fifty athletes, and at the entrance to the valley, a Tower of Nations was constructed, crowned with the Olympic rings and thirty flagpoles as well as crests of each competing nation. Walt Disney elaborately orchestrated the opening ceremonies that commenced with the release of white doves and starred Andrea Mead Lawrence, winner of two gold skiing medals in 1952, who carried the torch into the stadium.

Although the previous Winter Olympics were the first to be televised, 1960 was the first year the broadcasting rights were sold, to CBS for \$50,000. Additionally, electronic data processing was provided for the first time by an IBM computer.

No single event brought more exposure to the sport of skiing in America than the 1960 Winter Olympics, representing a new spirit of skiing to millions through television. The cross-country races were held at an altitude of 6,500 feet, which was felt to be too high (at least for those who practiced at sea level). The downhill course was thought to be dull, so the Americans built artificial bumps into the terrain. Frenchman Jean Vuarnet became the first skier to win a medal on metal skis, instead of the traditional wooden ones.

The undisputed stars for the U.S. Ski Team were the "Silver Queens" Penny Pitou and Betsy Snite. Penny finished one-tenth of a second behind gold medalist Yvonne Ruegg in the giant slalom, despite a severe cold that hampered her breathing. In the downhill, Penny placed second again, while Betsy won a silver medal in the slalom and narrowly missed a bronze in the giant slalom.



Figure 2 Anneliese Freeman, Linda Meyers, Joan Hannah, Betsy Snite (with Andrea Mead Lawrence in background) at Squaw Valley in 1960 during Downhill Training Day.

The U.S. placed third in the medal count, with three gold, four silver, and three bronze. The gold medals were won by David Jenkins in the men's singles figure skating; Carol Heiss in the ladies singles figure skating; and the U.S. men's ice hockey team. The fourth silver medal was awarded to Bill Disney in the men's 500-meter speed skate event. In the ladies singles figure skating, Barbara Roles was awarded a bronze, as were Nancy and Ronald Ludington for the pair's figure skating. Jeanne Ashworth earned the final bronze medal in the women's 500-meter speed skate event.

Chuck Ferries, who earned a place on the 1960 Olympic Ski Team, has a long list of skiing achievements. He was born in Michigan, but left school to ski and work in Aspen. After attending the University of Denver and winning the national collegiate ski championships, he dropped out of college and went back to Aspen, where he worked in a restaurant and on the Aspen Ski Patrol. Chuck amazed the Europeans when he won slalom races against the world's best in Austria and Italy, and in 1963, he went to a national Alpine training camp in Vail. Bob Beattie has called Chuck the "most unknown great ski racer in U.S. history," and he is considered a contemporary of Jimmy Heuga, Billy Kidd, and Buddy Werner. Although he retired from skiing at age 24, Chuck became a representative for Head Skis, coached the women in the 1968 Olympics, and helped K2 develop their first racing skis. While president of Scott USA, Chuck also brought recognition to Colorado and the ski industry. He was inducted into the Colorado Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame in 2008.

A number of Vail locals were involved in the 1960 Winter Olympics, including Renie and David Gorsuch, who met in Jackson Hole, WY at the National Junior Olympics when they were 15. They were married at age 21 in 1960 after the Winter Olympics (Renie placed ninth in the slalom and David placed fourteenth in both the downhill and giant slalom). In 1962 the ski racing couple founded Gorsuch Ltd., a ski and retail store in Gunnison, and then moved the shop to Vail in 1966. As early leaders helping to establish Vail, Renie and David assisted building the hospital, Vail Mountain School, and Ski Club Vail. They are both members of the Colorado Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame. Another Vail resident at the 1960 Winter Games was Anneliese Meggl Freeman, from Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. A member of the German Ski

Team, she narrowly missed a bronze medal in the downhill in 1960, and also competed in the giant slalom and slalom events. Anneliese currently resides in Vail.

Figure 3 David & Renie Gorsuch before the 1960 Winter Olympics.

