



35th WORLD NORDIC SKI CHAMPIONSHIPS

Seefeld, 17th to 27th January 1985

BY MATTI SALMENKYLÄ

Ski skating was the name of the game during the World Championships in Nordic Skiing, held 17th to 27th of January in Seefeld in Tirol (AUT). Ski skating was the highlight of discussion at these 35th FIS anniversary Championships in which 29 countries from four continents participated.

Approximately 180,000 spectators attended the Championships in a lovely alpine village, Seefeld, also the host of the Olympia Winter Games for Nordic Ski events in 1964 and 1976.

Ski skating - or the Siitonen step, named after the man who invented it, Finland's Pauli Siitonen, the winner of numerous ski marathons - did not come unexpectedly, use of one-sided skating kicks meant gained speed and use of two-sided skating kicks enabled skiers to skiskate uphill to the top.

This new form of ski technique naturally affected traditional waxing principles. Now only gliding paraffin was spread onto the bottom of the skis. Wax was no longer needed and unwaxed skis

meant that the whole race had to be ski skated, faster than ever before.

The FIS cross-country Committee had looked in advance into different possibilities to limit the use of ski skating (snow walls, fences and forbidding ski skating on the uphill tracks), but in the end the Committee decided, after hearing the contradictory standpoints of the team managers, not to ban the use of ski skating in any part of the trails.

As a result, these World Championships will go down in history as the first Ski Skating Championships, which in turn only goes to show how everlasting the development of skiing is. In fact, ski skating is no new technique. In days long ago one ski was shorter than the other in order to maximize the use of the skating kick.

A hundred years ago, and even later, the skating kick was commonly used during races held on icy roads and frozen lakes. Ski skating has also always been used in ski-orienteeing competition.

Before the World Championships in Seefeld, which developed into highly exciting and high standard competition, I felt that most people involved seemed unsure about how this new

technique, which sprung up in such a short time, would alter traditional standings between countries.

Funnily enough, it hardly did. Traditional ski countries from Scandinavia came out on top as always before. The Soviet Union was the only strong ski nation which clearly suffered a blow. For the first time since 1954 the Soviet Union did not take a single medal in the men's events and in the women's events ; their only triumph was the relay, in which they took gold.

I see the Soviet Union's weakness as a result of two factors. Firstly, the Soviets were the ones who opposed ski skating the most, and did not believe that it would be permitted to the extent it was. Secondly, the Soviet skiers are clearly encountering a change in generations. The top skiers from the previous Olympics therefore did not adopt, they did not want to adopt, a completely new form of technique and the younger generation is not yet ready for the world elite. Personally I feel that the Soviets will not be the underdog for long.

The success of the Italian men was a fine reward after many years of work, which has been strongly supported by both the Italian Ski





Federation and the National Olympic Committee. Italy's medals were not purely a result of ski skating.

Norway was the best country overall. West Germany, traditionally strong in the Nordic combined, took both gold medals (individual and team). In the ski jumping the top was divided : Norway, GDR and Finland took gold (P 90, P 70, team). The host country, Austria, was also strong, taking a medal in both P 70 and team events.

The king of the skiing event was undoubtedly Gunde Svan of Sweden, who won gold in both the 30 and 50 km events, took the bronze in the men's relay and was 5th in the 15 km event.

The title of Queen went to Anette Boe of Norway. She was crowned World Champion in the 5 and 10 km events, she took bronze in the 20 km event and was part of the relay team placed second.

In my opinion, a positive development in jumping competitions was noticeable : the jury did not try and make the competition one where records were to be broken, therefore the

jumpers' speed was kept under control, enabling jumpers to perform their best since they did not have to contend with the risks of over-jumped flights.

The results of the World Championship also show clear signs that skiing is spreading.

The following countries were placed among the ten best in the different events : AUT, CAN, GDR, FIN, FRG, ITA, JPN, JUG, NOR, POL, URS, SUI, SWE, TCH and USA, in other words, over half of all the countries which participated.

Eight countries took medals. The traditional homeland of skiing, Norway, was the best :

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
NOR	5	5	5	15
FIN	2	3	4	9
SWE	2	1	1	4
FRG	2	0	0	2
GDR	1	0	2	3
URS	1	0	0	1
ITA	0	2	1	3
AUT	0	2	0	2

FIS has, in my view, to take a stand on two serious matters as an outcome of these 35th World Championships. Firstly, FIS must decide whether ski skating will be the predominant form of skiing in the future, whether it will only be one technique among others or whether it will be completely banned from skiing. FIS has already appointed a commission to draw the outlines for the future of ski skating. The FIS Congress will discuss the matter in Vancouver (CAN), next May.

At this point I feel it worthwhile to point out that 80 % of the active skiers are against ski skating as a predominant form of skiing, though they approve of it as one form of skiing.

The final decision on ski skating will undoubtedly be a difficult one to make. It will also effect millions of skiers who ski as a hobby and also youngsters who are beginning their climb to the top.

The second important issue at hand is the vast amount of races in the FIS calendar. Both nordic events and alpine events are of great interest to the general public. This year the Nordic Championships were held at the same time as several important alpine events and in the same area, only some tens of kilometres from Seefeld.

