

## **BIG SURPRISES IN THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS**

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I write this article February 11th, when an important part of the competition season 1984/85, the 61st in the history of the FIS, is behind us. Highlights have been the 35th World Nordic Skiing Championships in Seefeld (AUT) and the 28th World Alpine Championships in Valtellina (ITA). During December-January a great number of World Cup events in all disciplines have been staged, as have many national championships.

The Austrian and Italian WSC-organisers provided a guarantee that the two new chapters in the FIS, proud history of Championships would present excellent organisations, strong starting fields, dramatic fights with a number of surprising results – not to say sensations – thousands of spectators, a friendly atmosphere and last but not least, most imposing publicity in press, radio and TV, serving millions of ski fans all over the world.

The WSC-1985 introduced a new era in the history of the FIS World Championships. We now organise WSC every other, i.e. odd, year instead of every fourth year as earlier. The new order means that the Olympic Winter Games are no longer counted as official WSC of the FIS.

Whether the new timetable will further promote the development of skiing, it is still too early to say. One thing is clear, however : Olympic Winter Games every fourth year, World Championships every other year and World Cup events every winter comprise an extraordinary, severe programme for the racers – and will prove a financial burden to the national ski associations.

It was most interesting to see – in Seefeld and in Valtellina – how many and which of the Olympic medallists from 1984 would be able to defend their positions in the World Championships 1985.

In Sarajevo, 33 Olympic medals were distributed in 11 Nordic events. Only one man and no women at all, successfully defended an earlier title in Seefeld, namely Jens Weissflog (GDR) in jumping (70 m.). The big turn-over of champions and medal-winners is most gratifying ; it goes to show the extent of the popularity of skiing and the very high level of the performances. An old truth in competition sports was confirmed in Seefeld, as well as in Valtellina : to win a victory is difficult, to defend it even more difficult.

In Sarajevo, Marja-Liisa Hämäläinen (FIN) won 3 individual gold medals, in the 5, 10 and 20 km races. In Seefeld she won “only” two silver. In Sarajevo, the Soviet cross-country racers, male and female, together won 1 gold and 4 silver, in Seefeld one gold (ladies’ relay) ; for the rest nothing !

The “ski-king” of Sarajevo, Gunde Svan (SWE), successfully defended his title: gold in 30 km and 50 km, bronze in relay and No 5 in 15 km. Amongst the ladies, his counterpart was Anette Bøe (NOR), who won 2 gold, 1 silver and 1 bronze.

Amongst the nations, Norway was No 1 with 15 medals, before Finland and Sweden, a wonderful Norwegian revenge for the less brilliant results in Sarajevo. Italy proved a sensation : De Zolt won silver in 50 km, bronze in 15, and silver in the relay.

18 alpine Olympic medals were distributed in six events in Sarajevo. Two amongst these eighteen medallists could repeat their performances in Valtellina : Michela Figini (SUI), winning the downhill, and Peter Müller (SUI) No 2, also in downhill. For the rest, only new names. Two created a sensation : Markus Wassmaier (FRG) won the giant slalom before the big stars Zurbriggen and Girardelli, and the young Swede Jonas Nilsson (22), who managed to beat the all-time favourite Girardelli in the slalom race on the last day of competition.

Sweden was naturally jubilant at Jonas Nilsson's triumph. Just when the world's best slalom- and giant slalom-racer during the last decade, Ingemar Stenmark, is on his way to closing his magnificent career – with many victories in Olympic Winter Games and World Championships and not less than 79 World Cup victories (a record) – his countryman steps on to the stage.

The USA also provided a great surprise: the ladies in giant slalom (Diann Roffe No 1 and Ewa Twardokans No 3) and their countryman Doug Lewis No 3 in downhill.

France had occasion to applaud Perrine Pelen and Christelle Guignard, taking respectively gold and silver in slalom.

**T**he "Ski-king" of the Alpine slopes was the young Swiss Pirmin Zurbriggen (22), winning gold in downhill and alpine combined and silver in the giant slalom. He is also very good in slalom and will perhaps be as complete a skier as his famous fore-runners – Killy, Schranz, Sailer, Thöni.

Switzerland was able to bring home the greatest number of medals of all in Valtellina : 4 gold, 3 silver, 1 bronze. Next on this list were USA and Austria.



When it comes to cross-country racing, the FIS has met with a great problem: the acceptance or the non-acceptance of the so called skating-step. Officials and racers alike take up different stands when discussing the pros and cons of this technique which consists of taking skating steps with one or both skis (not waxed !) instead of – in the classic way – letting the skis follow the track. Would it be possible to say that skating is skiing ? The FIS has appointed a working group is to investigate the matter and inform the Congress in Vancouver in May this year.

On the alpine front, there is nothing corresponding to this most topical question on the Nordic programme. Perhaps that the new Super-G-event – a mixture of downhill and giant slalom – has not yet found its final form. But that will no doubt be the case, when the Super-G will be included for the first time in the Olympic programme in Calgary 1988.

The rules governing the Alpine World Cup are also being revised. The aim is to make the competitions more attractive for the spectators. This matter will also be on the programme for discussions in Vancouver.

The World Championships 1985 are over. The competition season continues with World Cup events as main issues.

S.B.

