

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Competitive Skiing for Women in the United States

By: Patricia M. Peterson
University of Southern California
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In 1923, a group of eastern colleges in the United States organized themselves under a governing structure called the Intercollegiate Winter Sports Union. This group was the equivalent of the National Collegiate Athletic Association ski coaches' committee. It was through this organization that alpine racing was introduced to the United States. Previous to this time, usually only nordic events had been conducted. The intercollegiate ski union was responsible for the rules of slalom racing and for adopting it as a timed race in 1927. However, the slalom had earlier beginnings with Matthias Zdarsky of Switzerland in 1905. Zdarsky, using shorter skis than customary, introduced a crouching stance in running and did a good deal to develop turning with his idea of the snowplow. Arnold Lunn, the famed Britisher, developed the flagged gate, and the modern form of slalom racing was created.

The impact that Dartmouth College of Hanover, New Hampshire, had on skiing is a story by itself, for Dartmouth is a "fountainhead of the skiing spirit". The mother of Olympian Ted Hunter brought her skis with her when she moved from Maine to Hanover in 1904, but the story generally starts with Fred Harris. As a Dartmouth junior, he began the Dartmouth Outing Club; he later helped organize the United States Eastern Amateur Ski Association and became its first president. In 1911, Dartmouth's first collegiate inter-class ski meet was held in conjunction with a winter festival. McGill University, in Canada, held the first intercollegiate event in 1914; Dartmouth returned the invitation the following winter. February 12-13, 1915, at least four colleges entered the first intercollegiate ski meet in the United States. In 1924, downhill racing was an event of the Dartmouth Outing Club and in 1929, the slalom was included.

Women were included in Dartmouth Outing Club activities, from its early days. Around the 1930-1931 season, races were held on Dartmouth's Mt. Moosilauke Carriage Road and women raced in divisional and National Ski Association sanctioned events as representatives of the Dartmouth Outing Club. Ruth-Marie Stewart, Susan Neidlinger (Hudson), and Anne Dodge (Middleton) were among the proteges of the Dartmouth Outing Club in the 1940's.

The United States did not become conscious alpine events at the national level of competition until 1933, when the first national downhill championship was run at Warren, New Hampshire and H.S. Woods, Dartmouth, was the winner. Hannes Schroll, in 1935 at Seattle, Washington, became the first United States national slalom victor.

United States' men competed, as we know it, since the beginning of the Winter Olympics in 1924. However, skiing was given its greatest impetus in this country by the 1932 Winter Olympics held at Lake Placid. This marked the first time that the United States played host to the Games.

Period of Informal Participation

Willy Schaeffler, ski coach of Denver University, related that in Bavaria in the 1920's, only three or four of the most daring women would allow themselves to be seen skiing. The development was slow in the United States, too. One of the causes was felt to be the restriction on intercollegiate competition. Undoubtedly, another reason that "it was not the thing to do" was that to ski in stockings long skirts, and heavy coats was not very comfortable.

In 1920, the Lake Placid Club in New York State began emphasizing winter sports for women of all ages and conducted special events for college women. These were not organized as intercollegiate events, but in 1922 the Mrs. M. S. Maclay Trophy was awarded to the college woman who won the most points in the week's events. In 1930, the victor's cup was the Helen Louise Taylor Cup, given by Helen Taylor, the winner in 1927, 1928, and 1929. Helen Taylor as a student of Bryn Mawr College, retired the Maclay 3-win trophy.

As early as 1925-1926, the University of Wisconsin began a definite program of winter sports for the women students. Included, were snowshoeing, skiing, and skating. The women also played ice hockey but not as a requirement of the sport program. "A hill near the women's gymnasium provided an excellent skiing ground with gentle slopes for the beginners, and a series of two or three steep terraces for the more expert and venturesome".

Around 1926, more women began asking why they could not promote interest in winter sports as the men had done. The early advocates viewed skiing as a form of exercise corresponding to tramping in the summer. Ski-joring was to hold great joy and although ski jumping could not be recommended as a universal sport for women, it was seen as a test of skiing efficiency to practice on short hills which would give flights of from ten to forty feet.

An Austrian, Colonel Anton Diettrich, was brought to Dartmouth to teach and coach skiing. Among his contributions to the town, he conducted a ski class for ladies.

Colleges which were situated where weather conditions permitted soon began substituting winter sports for the required indoor physical education. At Smith College, where sport participation was "the thing to do," the winter term of physical education consisted of basketball, swimming, diving, life saving, clogging, rhythmic dancing, folk dancing, and Danish gymnastics. During the winter of 1927-1928, the winter sports program moved "out-of-doors" and was considered to be more strenuous than gymnastic exercises.

Mt. Holyoke, another women's college, incorporated skiing and snowshoeing on the campus through the college outing club. Following the example set by Dartmouth College, they also conducted a winter carnival on the rolling terrain of the golf club grounds. Each week, ski and snowshoe hikes were planned by and for the students. A toboggan slide and skating facilities were also easily accessible and centers of campus life.

In the December 8, 1932 edition of the New York HERALD TRIBUNE, an article stressed the need for accessible ski trails for beginning, intermediate, and advanced skiers. The first ski tow in the United States began operation in January, 1934 at Woodstock, Vermont. This was the first of many lifts that launched a new era in winter sports.

When races were introduced in the United States, separate races were, at times, held for men and women. In these cases, separate courses were laid out for the women, or at least, the courses were shorter than those of the men. However, women and men often entered the same event.

In 1919, in the first international ski races, two of the British team of eight were ladies. Judgement and skiing ability were not differentiated for the two sexes. This first venture into international competition was indicative of women's interest in the sport and in competition of high caliber.

At Lake Placid, in the 1932 Olympic Winter Games, the United States had the largest team entered and took six out of the fourteen places on the table of honor. At the conclusion of the Games, the committee made the following statement: