



Lyle F Swenson

Induction Class of 2021



Lyle Franklen Swenson was born in Cottage Grove, WI (just outside Madison) on July 31, 1939, and his family moved to Westby in 1943. Lyle put on his first pair of skis when he was just six years old and, in 1947, he started learning to jump on the hills at the Fremstad farm. The Westby Snowflake Ski Club had been inactive during WWII. Members of the community started to reorganize in 1947 and held their first ski jumping tournament Feb 1948, causing a flood of interest in the sport. Lyle would always credit Leif Mikkelson, a Life Member of Snowflake and the club's junior ski coach, with encouraging him to take up jumping.

In 1949, the Westby Junior Ski Club was formed and joined the Central United States Ski Association. Lyle was one of the youngest and most active members. Working hard and traveling throughout the Midwest, Lyle gained experience, medals and trophies at various local tournaments. By 1957, he placed first in the Boys Central U. S. Championships in Duluth, MN, and seventh in the Boys National Juniors Tournament in Reno, NV, as the only WI skier to place in this event. In January 1958, Lyle was the winner of the Junior Division at the Blackhawk Ski Club tournament in Middleton, WI.

By 1959, Lyle had worked hard enough to develop his skills and won the National Junior Championship at Leavenworth, WA, with jumps of 277 and 265 feet for a total of 212.1 points. Of all his medals and trophies, his parents were often quoted as saying they were most proud of their son's win at this tournament.

While training for the 1960 Olympics, the ski jumping team came to Westby. For several weeks, from December 28 through mid-January, Lyle was able to ride with the team at the Snowflake Ski Club Anderson Hill.

In 1961, the Snowflake Ski Club finished construction of a 90-meter hill and on January 29, Governor Gaylord Nelson helicoptered into Timber Coulee to serve as Master of Ceremonies of the tournament and watch as Lyle was the first-ever skier to ride the new hill. On February 19 of that same year, Lyle competed in the National Ski Championship in Brattleboro, Vermont, after which he participated in the Lake Placid Winter Carnival as one of only 25 to be invited to the event.



1962 was an exciting year for Lyle. Though he never did win a tournament at his Snowflake home club, in January, he placed third before leaving for Europe as part of the Federated International Ski Team. After competing on Feb 18 through 25 in Zakopane, Poland, Lyle traveled with the team to Austria, Sweden and even Finland where he placed 7th and received a trophy. Lyle often said that one of the highlights of his skiing career came on March 18th during that trip when he was able to compete on the Holmenkollen Hill in Oslo, Norway.

In 1963, Lyle was rated as the fourth best ski jumper in overall performance on the national circuit. He competed in 14 tournaments throughout the country while attending the Minneapolis School of Art, majoring in graphics. In January, he placed second in the Eau Claire tournament with a 199' jump. February got him closer to the big trophy at Snowflake with a second-place finish of 217.2 points, just behind Gene Koltarek with 218.5 points and Ole Tom Nord with 216.2 points. John Balfanz, who set the North American record jump of 317 feet at Snowflake in 1962, fell on his final ride for a penalty that moved him to fourth place.

Lyle did not go back to school in the fall of 1963 so he could concentrate on training for the Olympics. Working with weights on his feet, doing tumbling, track and other conditioning exercises, Lyle worked a rigorous schedule to prepare for the Olympics. On Thanksgiving Day, 1963, he left Westby and headed for Europe to begin more specialized training in Munich, Germany, and on the 60-meter and 90-meter hills in Austria with the rest of the team. While still in New York City, Lyle was named Captain by the other members of the Olympic team. They competed in 7 pre-Olympic tournaments before appearing in Innsbruck on January 29 through February 9.

According to Art Tokle, their Olympic Team coach (and winner of the 1948 Snowflake Class A tournament, 1952 Olympic jumper and 1970 National Ski Hall of Fame inductee), Lyle had a "fierce competitive spirit and is one of the most coachable skiers." After the Olympics, Lyle and the team continued skiing in Europe. On March 1, they competed in an international contest in Oslo, Norway where Lyle impressively placed 29th.

Returning to Westby and the Snowflake Ski Club after the Olympics, Lyle continued his passion for ski jumping. He served as a board member at Snowflake and worked on various committees until his untimely death on February 6, 1982, at the age of 42, from complications of pneumonia. At the 1982 Snowflake tournament, members of the club noted that Lyle was a very friendly man with a natural and graceful jumping style. During his career, Lyle won more than thirty trophies and many more medals that his parents proudly displayed.

Thanks to the Westby Area Historical Society for providing this biographical info!
<https://westbyhistory.com/>

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