

Joe Nowak Cloquet



If you have ever driven through Cloquet and seen the ski jump or had the opportunity to ski at Pine Valley you have been touched by the work of Joe Nowak. Joe, a 1946 graduate of Duluth Cathedral High School (now the Marshall School), had his skiing roots at Duluth's Chester Bowl. Joe's competitive ski jumping highlights are many. They include: 1946 - 2nd in U.S. Nationals in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, 4 time Duluth City Ski Champion, 2 time Duluth Invitational Champion (Fond du Lac 70 meter) 1954 hill record of 226 feet, 1951-1959 - top 10 finishes in U. S. National ranking.

Near the top of Joe's list is winning the 1951 Central U.S Championships held in Chicago, and in doing so out pointed the Norwegian, Arfinn Bergman. The next year Bergman won the Olympic Championships in Oslo, Norway. Joe competed in three Olympic trials, but his bids to make the team fell short. He also skied in three World Team tryouts.

After graduating from high school, Joe attended Duluth Junior College. After two years of schooling he joined the military. While stationed in Germany, Joe was able to continue his jumping career winning the Army Championships in Germany, setting a hill record in the process. After his discharge, Joe returned to Duluth and enrolled at UMD. He graduated in the spring of 1958 with a science degree. UMD placement personnel informed him that Cloquet was looking for a science teacher and also had a ski coaching vacancy. Joe was hired in the spring of 1958 and started his coaching career the next winter. He coached all three disciplines. He would coach jumping and cross-country after school and then return in the evening to coach slalom. Not having a warming house, his car would run from 7:00 P.M. until the end of practice at 9:00 P.M. many evenings.

Soon the program outgrew the facilities that Cloquet had, and Joe began looking for a site that would bring all of the skiers together in one place. In the fall of 1961, Joe and officials of Northwest Paper (now Sappi) toured a 40 acre tract of land on the south side of Cloquet. Joe determined part of the land could be used for downhill, a landing area of about 110 feet could be used for a ski jump, and the hilly terrain would make a challenging cross-country trail. The land was donated to the park system, and Pine Valley was on its way to reality. In October of 1962 the footings were poured for the chalet. Using his science and jumping background, Joe designed the inrun of the 20 and 35 meter jumps. Working with city officials, all of the steel for the jump was donated by the DMIR Railroad.. The area would open in 1963 with Joe taking the first ride off the new jump. Pine Valley hosted the jumping and cross-country portions of the State Meet from 1971-1976. Lack of snow moved the meet to Ely in 1977; Sugar Hills and Coleraine hosted in 1978.

The opening of Pine Valley in 1963 coincided with Cloquet High School winning its fourth state championship in skiing, but the first for Coach Nowak. Scores were based on the performance of slalom, jumping, and cross-country teams. Cloquet would go on to win titles in 1965-1971, 1973-1976 and the jumping titles in 1977 and 1978. The high school league dropped jumping in 1979. Joe coached individual state jumping champions in 1965, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1972, 1976, 1978, and a state cross-country champion in 1963. He also was the jumping coach for Cloquet's 1984 Olympian Mike Randall. In October of 1964, Mike Marciniak was hired to take over the cross-country, and John Loumala was hired to coach the slalom in 1965. Joe divided his \$300 coaches pay with Mike and John. Joe now had more time to coach his specialty, jumping. In the early 70's Joe was considered for a U.S. ski coaching position but chose to continue his teaching and coaching career in Cloquet. As budget restraints hit the Cloquet district, the school put the ski program on the cut list. To keep the program alive, Joe donated his coaching salary back to the school for two seasons. He retired as a teacher in 1983, and his high school coaching career ended in 1984. He continues to coach jumpers in the Cloquet Ski Club with long time coaching companion, Les Johnson. Joe formed the Cloquet Ski Club in 1962 to develop skiers in Cloquet.

For those of us who skied on Joe's team, his influence did not end when the snow melted. Many of us shot our first duck or landed our biggest northern while on a trip with Joe. Friendships formed during those days are just as strong today. Joe is very deserving of his 1978 induction into the Minnesota Ski Coaches' Hall of Fame and the 25 year club of the Minnesota Coaches' Association in 1984.