

#120

Paul Joseph "Joe" Perrault

Born: 1924

Through hard work and concentration Joe Perrault became American's most stylish power jumper.

Paul Joseph Perrault, known to everyone as Joe, was born in Green Bay, Wisconsin, on December 3, 1924. Moving to Ishpeming, Michigan, at a very young age, he began skiing. Joe was a perfectionist and realized early that the Europeans, particularly the Finns and Norwegians, were the most competent of the world's ski jumpers, not only because they could jump great distances, but could do so with great grace and style. Joe's goal became being able to leap great distances with the style of the Europeans.

Joe, like most of the skiers of his day, joined the military during World War II. He joined the 10th Mountain Division, going to Camp Hale, Colorado, for Ski Troop training in skiing and mountaineering, later serving with the 10th Mountain Division in the Po Valley in Italy. During the action in Italy, Joe was awarded the Silver Star for carrying his wounded sergeant to safety under fire in the heat of battle.

Joe resumed his jumping career after discharge from the army and his return from Europe, and skied once again for his hometown club, the Ishpeming Ski Club. He won several tournaments, setting hill records as well as the North American distance record.

Joe was a member of the Olympic Teams of 1948 and 1952, competing for the United States in 1948, but bad luck prevailed in 1952. After winning the Olympic tryouts, Joe suffered one of his infrequent injuries, a badly sprained back, and was unable to compete in the 1952 Olympics.

His greatest day in skiing, and one of the first triumphs for American ski jumping took place on Saturday, February 26, 1949, at giant Pine Mountain Ski Hill at Iron Mountain, Michigan. A fine field of European and American jumpers had gathered there, hoping to see the North American distance record come back to Iron Mountain's Pine Mountain from where it was taken just three weeks earlier by a fine Norwegian jumper Sverre Kongsgaard at Hyak, Washington. Some 20,000 spectators watched anxiously as a fine field of Europeans and Americans stood by for the assault on the record. Beside Joe, Americans' Art Devlin, Walter Bietila, Ralph Bietila, Eugene Wilson, and the 1948 Olympic Champion Petter Hugsted from Norway, as well as Matti Pietikainen and Leo Laakso, Olympic team members from Finland were on hand to give it their all. Everyone at the meet felt that a fourth place finish was the best the Americans could hope for.

However, all others fell short that day, leaving only Paul Joe Perrault to take the North American record away from Pietikainen. As Joe sprung from the takeoff, 20,000 fans watched in awe as he sailed, seemingly forever, toward the bottom of the hill. When he landed, everyone knew that the North American distance record was back at Pine Mountain, and in the hands of an American, Joe Perrault. It took a while for the announcement to come, but when it was officially announced, it was 297 feet, a new North American distance record, just three feet short of the elusive 300 foot barrier. This was one of the most exciting days in American ski jumping history.

This honor could not have happened to a more deserving person than Joe Perrault. For, despite his "devil may care" attitude on the jumping hills of Europe and America, Joe in reality has both feet planted firmly on the ground. Joe also organized the Ishpeming Junior Ski Club in 1946 at the old Ishpeming Ski Club house. Two of the junior skiers at the time were Rudy Maki and Dr. Jack Bietila. There were about thirty-five junior skiers in the Club at the time.

After the feat of February 28, 1949, the people of his hometown of Ishpeming honored him with a "Joe Perrault Day." There were many speeches and good food was in abundance. After the speeches had concluded, a quote by an individual and friend of Joe's said it all, "It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy." Paul J. Perrault was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1971.

