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Willis “Bill the Kidd” Olson

Born: 1930



“Bill the Kidd” Olson's ski jumping career began as a teenager with record-shattering performances, and carried through every class championship of the USSA, Class “C,” Class “B,” Class “A,” and Veterans Class.

In 1950, a teenage ski jumper from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, outclassed an international field at Iron Mountain, Michigan, and stole the show by leaping 297 feet to equal the then current North American distance record.

That was the beginning of a brilliant career for Willis S. Olson, better known as Billy (The Kid) Olson, who during the next 20 years compiled one of the most consistent ski jumping records in the American history of the sport. Probably no other ski jumper in the United States has won so many championships in so many areas of the sport or can show a record of such consistency through the years.

Olson won national championships in four classes. He won the national Class “C” title in 1948, the Class “B” title in 1949, and the coveted Class A championship in 1958.

When Olson reached the 32-year-old bracket, he competed in the Veteran's Class. In 1965 he went through 12 straight tournaments without being defeated and won his first Veteran's title. He repeated as champion in 1966 and in 1968 won his third Veteran's title.

But, that's not all. Olson skied in two Olympic games in 1952 and 1956 as a member of the U.S. Olympic team and also was a member of the United States F.I.S. teams in 1950 and 1954.

While his longest leap in American competition was the 297-footer at Iron Mountain, the longest jump he ever achieved was 393 feet at Obersdorf, Germany.

In addition, he won three straight NCAA jumping championships as a member of the University of Denver Ski team. He went through three seasons of collegiate ski jumping without being beaten.

That is briefly the story of Billy (The Kid) Olson, a man who carried Eau Claire's colors around the world in championship fashion for over 20 years while compiling one of the most outstanding records in U.S. ski-jumping history.

Willis S. Olson was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1972.

