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## James Flaa

Born: 1894 Died: 1983

*James E. Flaa was an exceptional athlete who was a high school football and basketball star, and had a particular love of skiing, and a deep interest in the contributions Norwegians made to the sport.*



It was pre-ordained that James E. "Leave it to Jim" Flaa would become involved in winter sports, particularly skiing. He came from sturdy Norwegian stock, the product of the great American melting pot. His father came from Trondheim, Norway. A few years later he sent for his girl and they were married in the great new country of America, settling in Ishpeming whose hills, sturdy Norse population, and winter season reminded them so much of their native Norway.

Jim was born September 17, 1894, fifth in a family of six. An outstanding athlete in school he was a football and basketball star, played with semi-pro teams, enjoyed skiing, and was intrigued with the great contributions Norwegian skiers were making to the American variety of the ski sport.

A hitch in the Navy interrupted his enjoyment of the sport, but he returned to his native city and opened an insurance office with the slogan "Leave it to Jim." It was to be more than a business slogan; it became a personal creed and one which the community adopted. Many things were left to Jim and he discharged his responsibilities with plus performance.

Jim became a member of the Ishpeming Ski Club. It was small, bound by Norse traditions, satisfied to be unto themselves. Jim's influence as a member became apparent and he was named secretary at a time when that office was the brain center of the organizations and the secretary the man who really ruled the club. Jim brought prides and prejudices together, welded them into an effective team, and the Ishpeming Ski Club was on its way to greatness.

For 17 years, Jim Flaa was secretary of the Ishpeming Ski Club. In that time Ishpeming became the mecca for skiers in the Midwest. The Flying Bietilas, among so many others, went out from Ishpeming under the direction of Jim Flaa.

He witnessed the formation of the National Ski Association. He was the man behind the scene for Harold Grinden as national historian. He was responsible for the resurgence of the Central Ski Association and served as its vice-president. At its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary Jim Flaa was honored with a specially struck gold medallion in recognition of his services to "Central" and to the skiing sport.

Jim Flaa was responsible for the development of junior skiing, and from these ranks have come the skiers who mastered the challenging slopes of America. It was initiated in Ishpeming and followed elsewhere. In 1945 Roger Langley, then National Ski Association President, named Jim Flaa first chairman of a committee to establish a ski hall of fame.

When other clubs faltered they looked to Jim and he did not disappoint them. Many a small struggling organization in the Central Ski Association can look to the assistance from Ishpeming, which Jim insisted upon, as a meaningful factor in their ability to continue. Many a master skier can look back upon his junior years and know it was Jim Flaa and the enthusiasm he engendered among his contemporaries for the junior ski program that Ishpeming developed. Whenever the socks are drying on the line and the ski chatter takes an upbeat in front of the fireplace, the memory of Jim Flaa lingers.

As he glided among the pines of his beloved ski country in the quiet of the forest, Jim Flaa recalled with deep satisfaction the memories of skiing and club activities. He read the newspapers of past days, and breathed deep of that pine-scented air he loved so much and he took his reward in the knowledge that he had a part in the development of a great sport, that he displayed a forward-looking attitude that helped develop the demand for recreational skiing as well as its competitive forms, that literally thousands in the past century had taken him literally "Leave it to Jim" and never did he let them down.

As true fame centered around him, James E. Flaa was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1974.