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Allison Merrill

Born: 1921 Died: 1990

It is in the role of a "local" coach where Allison Merrill's extraordinary ability comes to light. He not only designed the program to develop American athletes into top international athletes, he developed the athletes through his coaching, and over ten of his students have gone on to Olympic competition. Al Merrill served the Olympic movement for several years as an official and a member of Olympic Skiing Committee.

C. Allison "Al" Merrill was born in Andover, Maine in 1925. He was a graduate of the University of New Hampshire.

Al began his coaching career in 1952 at Lebanon (N.H.) High School and went on to become Head Ski Coach at Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H. in 1957, where he remained until 1972. His teams, always an Eastern powerhouse, never finished lower than 5th in the National Collegiate Championships, and in fact were first once, second three times, third several times, and only once lower than fourth. It is in this role as a "local" coach that another facet of Al's extraordinary ability comes to light. Not only did Al design and create a national program to develop the top U.S. Athletes into international competitors, but he also developed many athletes from a local program into national caliber athletes, either of which alone would satisfy a normal coach. Over 10 men from Al's high school or college program went on to become Olympic skiers.

Al Merrill was instrumental in the U.S. Nordic Skiing effort, particularly during the late 1950s and 1960s. He was coach of the 1954 F.I.S. Nordic Combined Team and the 1956 Olympic Team. Al was Head Nordic Coach for the U.S. Ski Team from 1962-68, and he was the USSA's first Nordic Program Director from 1968-1970. In these capacities, he was Team Leader and Head Coach for the 1964 and 1968 Olympic Nordic Teams and the 1966 FIS World Championship Team. Al was also the 1973 U.S. Nordic Combined Team Coach.

During this time, many significant strides forward were taken by the U.S. Nordic Program. National training camps were first held; national coaches, beyond coaches for specific events, were hired, giving continuity and a structure to the U.S. Nordic Program; like-wise, national teams and training squads for a given year, as opposed to for specific events, were also introduced. Such innovations as these helped elevate the U.S. to at least respectability and credibility in international Nordic competition, as evidenced by such highlights as John Bower's victory in the 1968 Homenkollen Nordic combined.

Al was Chief of Course (cross-country) for the 1960 Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley, California and F.I.S. Technical Delegate for cross-country at the 1972 Winter Olympic Games in Sapporo, Japan. He was a long-standing member of the F.I.S. Cross-Country Committee and he was also a member of the U.S. Olympic Ski Games (now skiing) Committee. He was a member and past chairman of the U.S. Collegiate Sports Council Ski Committee. He also served the U.S. Eastern Amateur Ski Association (now the Eastern Ski Association) as a member of its Board of Directors and as its President in 1964-65. Al was the 1967 recipient of the Julius Blegen Award for outstanding service to the sport of skiing during that year.

He was the Director of Outdoor Affairs for Dartmouth College, in charge of over 30,000 acres of the College's wilderness lands, incorporating use of these lands into the academic curriculum through Environmental Studies Programs, as well as overseeing Dartmouth's extracurricular outdoor programs, including the activities of the world-famous Outing Club.

These are the skeleton facts which show the positions of influence Al Merrill had in the sport of skiing, but his true greatness lies more in the impact he had from these positions on all the people who came in contact with him and walked away from the encounter somehow enriched by the experience. He had an openness to others that allowed the warmth and enthusiasm he held for the sport or nordic skiing, which was his life, to freely radiate to others and in turn add a dimension to their lives.

C. Allison Merrill was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1974.

