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Sepp Benedikter

Born: 1911 Died: 1982



No newcomer to radio and television, Sepp Benedikter appeared on hundreds of shows as a guest star. Later, he produced and starred in his own TV production "SKI MASTERS."

Sepp Benedikter was born June 4, 1911, in Badgastein, a Spa high in the Austrian Alps in the district of Salzburg, famous as the locale for F.I.S. and World Cup competition. He began skiing at 2½ years of age and the following year entered a race for children under 6 years of age and won his first of over 200 trophies. He began national and international competition when he was 10 years old. Sepp placed and won in most major events here and abroad during his racing and jumping career. He held race card Class "A" in all events, jumping, cross-country, downhill, slalom, and giant slalom. He was on the Austrian national team for the downhill at the 1933 F.I.S. and on the Austrian National Team for the first 100 meter hill in Planica, Yugoslavia, in 1936.

In the summer of 1936, Sepp succumbed to the lure of America when Governor Averell Harriman, then chairman of Union Pacific Rail Road, offered him the opportunity to teach skiing and help open the fabulous resort of Sun Valley. Unknown to most people, the first chairlift was built in Sun Valley and designed by Union Pacific Rail Road Engineers. Sepp taught the first pupils of Sun Valley when this resort opened its doors on December 21, 1936.

Shortly after this, Paramount studios arrived to film *She Met Him in Paris* starring such notables as Claudette Colbert, Robert Young, and Melvin Douglas. Sepp did his first skiing in an American production. In later years it was followed by such films as *Sun Valley Serenade* with Sonya Henie, John Payne, Milton Berle, and the Glen Miller orchestra. Sepp doubled for Milton Berle as a beginning skier. In 1940, Sepp skied in a training film for the U.S. ski troops produced by Twentieth Century Fox.

Having fallen in love with America, he returned to Austria in the spring on 1937 to liquidate his business. Returning in the fall to Minneapolis, Minnesota, he became a technical advisor in buying at Dayton's Department Store's ski department. Training the sales personnel, he demonstrated the virtues of skiing on an indoor ski slope in the ski shop surrounded by the latest ski equipment and clothing of that time. In the evenings, Sepp taught skiing on lighted slopes until midnight at Moon Valley, 18 miles from downtown Minneapolis. It was from this area that Sepp organized ski parties to take to Sun Valley by special trains known as the "Sepp Benedikter Houseparty."

Courtland Hill invited him to spend Easter Vacation with him and his family in the High Sierra where Mr. Hill had organized the Wooden Wings Ski Club consisting of the California social set and movie stars. Sepp became their private instructor.

The same year, under the auspices of the California Ski Association and the guidance of Courtland Hill, Dr. Joel Hildebrand, and Dr. Frank Howard, the first ski instructors' examination for unified instructors was held. This same association was incorporated in 1947 and was named "The Forest Ski Instructor's Association."

The winter of 1940-41 saw Sepp back full time on the Sun Valley Ski School staff. That year the weekly Standard Race from top of Mt. Baldy, "The Diamond Sun" was inaugurated and he was the first to win this prestigious award. This event was canceled some years later as being too dangerous.

In 1946, Sepp came back to Southern California. On the 4th of July at the Inferno Down Hill race on Mt. Laseen, Sepp made the spectacular jump over the highway which received much publicity. One less skilled tried to imitate this maneuver and didn't succeed, dropping 50 feet on the top of a car.

One of his greatest achievements as far as the general public interest is concerned was the construction of a 60-meter jump hill at the Los Angeles County Fair Grounds in Pomona. Stationed by the Far West Ski Association, the U.S. Olympic ski team competed twice daily from Sept. 14 through Sept. 30, 1951.

During his term as president of the Far West Ski Instructors, dry land adult ski lessons were started. In 1958, Sepp organized a ski tour for the F.I.S. which was held in his home town, Badgastein; continuing on to Kitzbuhl, Carmish, Germany; St. Anton, Austria; St. Moritz and Davos, Switzerland; Megeve and Charmonix, France; and Sestriere, Italy. This was the first of the annual tours.

In 1964, Sepp purchased a rundown ski area, Rebel Ridge, and converted it into a successful operation which he sold in 1969.

Sepp Benedikter was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1977.