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Torger Tokle

Born: 1920 Died: 1945

Torger Tokle is, without a doubt, the most famous ski jumper in history. He took the jumping world by storm from the day he, a youth of 19, arrived in the United States from Norway. In a career spanning six short years, he won 42 of 48 sanctioned tournaments he entered, and in doing so, set 24 hill records.

Torger Tokle was born in Lokken Verk, Norway, in 1920, one of six Tokle brothers. The Tokle family was quite poor, but their father made skis from barrel staves for them, and Torger was skiing at age three. At age six, Torger was competing on the forty-meter hills. Something about this youngster stood him above the rest, even at this early age.

Torger came to the United States on January 29, 1939, a stocky five foot six and one-half foot youngster. Eighteen hours after stepping off the boat from Norway, Torger set a record at Bear Mountain Park Tournament, the first achievement in a sensational series of achievements he would accomplish in his all-too-short skiing career.

It is difficult to forget Torger Tokle's first winter in America. Although he was classified a class "B" jumper due to a quirk in the National Ski Association rules, he soundly thrashed all the class "A" riders, winning seven of eight tournaments.

Tokle settled in Brooklyn, New York, and when the top jumpers in the country converged on Berlin, New Hampshire, for the international tryouts amidst a throng of 30,000 spectators, he asked that he be allowed to compete in class "A" at the Eastern Championships at Laconia, New Hampshire, the following week. Here was the opportunity for Torger to compete against his idol, Reider Andersen, the most stylish jumper in the world at the time. The duel was settled in a most satisfactory fashion, a dead heat for first between Tokle and his fellow countryman.

The following year, 1940, he won everything but the national title, where his inexperience caused him to bow to the then perennial ruler of the ski jumps, Alf Engen. He proved later to be the master by never losing to Alf again.

A power jumper, Tokle won the national title in 1941. He did not have the form of a Reider Andersen or Aif Engen, but what Tokle lacked in grace he made up for in distance, setting hill records on nearly every hill he competed.

Torger entered the United States Army in October of 1942, serving first in the infantry, later transferring to the 10th Mountain Division. He was proud to serve his adopted country, and paid the ultimate price by giving his life in action against the Germans in Italy on March 3, 1945.

A top-flight sportsman to the very end, Torger was the kind of person everyone was proud to call his friend. He was honored by election to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in Ishpeming, Michigan, in 1959. His career, shortened by war, robbed the world of the opportunity to determine just how great he could have been at his sport. As history records it, there has never been a person who so completely dominated ski jumping as did Torger Tokle. He has been referred to as the "Babe Ruth of Ski Jumping" a title which cannot be far from correct.



Torger Tokle, "man-bird" of the oaken staves, is shown as he soared to a new North American ski jumping record of 288 feet in the national tourney which was held high in the Cascades near Seattle.