

#252

## Debbie Armstrong

Born: 1963

*Debbie Armstrong flashed through the giant slalom gates at the 1984 Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, bringing home the gold medal. She was a U.S. national champion and competed on two Olympic and three World Championship teams.*



Debbie Armstrong won a single major international ski race in her career. However, she chose one of the biggest, the Olympic giant slalom at the Olympic Games in Sarajevo in 1984, to write her way permanently into skiing's history books. She led the U.S. Ski Team to its best ever result in a single Olympic event.

Born in Salem, Oregon in 1963, Armstrong started to ski at the age of three at a family ski area called Alpentel. Located about an hour from Seattle it was known for deep heavy snow that put a premium on strength and survival as opposed to style. Her focus was not entirely on skiing as she excelled at several sports. Her skiing career was also interrupted when she was in the seventh grade. Her father, a psychologist and later head of the University of Washington, took the whole family to Malaysia for a year.

Eventually Armstrong started to show promise largely through her core athleticism and positive attitude under pressure. When she won the U.S. junior giant slalom title in 1981 the U.S. Ski Team quickly promoted her to the national team and at her first race in Europe, opening the 1982 season, her first place in the initial training run in the downhill caught the attention of the international skiing fraternity. While her hard charging style could take her to the front it had its costs. At the 1982 World Championships she broke her leg while training, the first of a series of injuries that would plague her career.

Fortunately, everything came together on February 13, 1984 when she stood at the start of the giant slalom at Sarajevo's Jarhorina ski area. Psyching herself up by chanting, "Have fun, have fun..." Armstrong charged out of the gates and into Olympic history with two near perfect runs to win the event. Teammate Christin Cooper was second and Tamara McKinney was fourth, the best result to date in a single Olympic event by the U.S. Ski Team.

The magic did not last. Cooper retired at the end of the season and most of the coaches departed too as did Alpine director, Bill Marolt. The next several years would be ones of frustration as Armstrong struggled with injuries, a lack of first class technical support and coaching changes. Still she managed many top seed placements and accumulated 258 World Cup points at a time when points were only credited to the top 15 finishers. In 1987 she won the U.S. national GS title. Armstrong retired after competing at her second Olympics in 1988. She was also a member of three World Championship teams with a fourth place in the GS in 1985 being her best result.

Following her retirement Armstrong initially worked with youth and disabled skiers. She participated in a tree planting project to help reforest the bombed out hills around Sarajevo. She completed a degree in history at the University of New Mexico, became a skiing ambassador for Taos and, in 2004, was appointed to the PSIA Demo Team

Debbie Armstrong was elected to the U.S. National Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame in 1984.