

#262

Martha Rockwell

Born: 1944

Information taken from a nomination letter to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame written by Ennis Duling, Nordic Editor, SKI RACING

Martha Rockwell was voted the top U.S. ski competitor in 1974 by the U.S. Ski Writers Association. She was also named co-recipient of the USSA Finlandia Trophy for that year and was twice named SKI RACING's U.S. Nordic Skier of the Year.

Martha Rockwell was one of the first American women to race cross-country, and her records largely remained unchallenged. She began racing in 1969 at a rather late age of 24, and is one of the pioneers of cross-country racing in the United States. Her career spans the era from when American cross-country racers had no chance of placing well in international events.

Competition was not as high as it would become in the next decade. "The first year I went to Europe, with no training and technique, I did respectably well," Martha commented in one interview.

Over the next few years, Rockwell's level of training and skills grew while she continued to win national championships.

In 1972, she was a member of the first women's cross-country team to attend the Olympics placing 16th in the 10-km and 18th in the 5-km.

Martha won her first international race in 1973, the 7.5-km at Castelrotto, Italy. In 1974, she was 10th in the 10-km at the World Championships in Falun, Sweden, despite being knocked down by a course official. Early in the 1974-75 season, she won five of six European races. She also raced in the 1976 Olympics but because of illness, her result were far less than she'd hoped. She retired at the end of that season.

Martha was virtually unbeatable here at home, and lost the 5-km national title only once between 1969 and 1975, and won the 10-km title all those years. At one point, she had won 18 of 19 national championship titles.

She retired from racing at the end of the 1976 ski season. Martha then went on to coach the Dartmouth women's ski team.

Martha Rockwell was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1986.

Martha was unable to attend the induction ceremony due to prior commitments, but wrote the following in a letter to the ski hall: "The sports heroes of my young life were Babe Ruth, Joannie Hannah, Andrea Mead Lawrence, and Penny Pitou, among others. It wasn't too tough for me to discard major league baseball as an option, but I couldn't let go of the grit and determination and triumphant of beating-the-odds that those skiers communicated to me. I still admire them, and I am honored, and frankly humbled, to take their company. There are many others, too, that you have honored and who were forces in my own development. Once such is Al Merrill, who has quietly done more for American Nordic skiing than anyone I can think of. He has been a friend and kind mentor to me."

