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Wilbert Rasmussen**Born: 1930**

Information taken from a nomination letter to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame – proposed by Gary Rasmussen

Wilbert Rasmussen gained national acclaim on February 22, 1946, when at the age of 15, he smashed the record at Ishpeming, Michigan's notorious "Suicide Hill" with a jump of 250 feet, breaking the previous record of 236 feet made in 1941 by Roy Bietila. It was widely published that no ski jumper had ever accomplished this feat at this young age.



Wilbert Rasmussen, known to everyone as "Wil" was born in Negaunee, Michigan, on June 26, 1930. He began skiing at the age of three and in a short time his natural ability and deep love for the sport became evident. With no formal coaching or training, Wil rapidly progressed through his own self-discipline and competitive spirit. This competitive spirit was the hallmark of his entire career.

At the age of 17, Wil won the Class "C" National Championships on Suicide Hill, walking away with the "Long Standing Jump" of 209 feet and winning the "Most Graceful Rider" award. In this national meet Wil competed with 40 of the world's best ski jumpers, among them Norway's best national champions, namely, Arnholdt Kongsgaard, Ragnar Bakild, Gustave Raum and Harold Hauge and the 4-time Swedish National Champion, Erik Lindstrom.

In 1948, he affirmed the growing praise and recognition by besting his own record on Suicide Hill with a jump of 253 feet while still in Class "C." (This record remained for 5 years, until 1953, when it was bested by Norwegian great Arne Hoel with a jump of 259 feet.) Wil also won "Most Graceful Rider" award in this meet. At another event in 1948 in Class "C" competition, Wil placed second in the nationals at Snowqualmie Pass, Washington, with jumps of 201 and 198 feet.

A great human interest feature of note in Wil's career took place at Steamboat Springs, Colorado, when the Steamboat Club would not allow the 17-year old to jump on their largest-meter hill (a participant had to be 18). Amid protests from the Ishpeming Club, "You must let him jump – he learned on big hills – he's a 'Big Hill' jumper," Steamboat consented to let him ride – as an "exhibitionist." Wil modestly changed numbers with another dissatisfied skier who had pulled No.1 as the first starting skier, and thereupon not only broke trail for all the skiers of the day but had the "Longest Jump" of the meet, outdistancing the entire Class "A" field.

Making the longest standing jump (164 feet) in Class "B" of the Central U.S. Ski Jumping Meet in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, he broke the previous hill record of 152 feet, in 1949. Wilbert also took first place in Class "B" of the National Championships at Duluth, Minnesota., making the longest jump of the day, which elevated him to Class "A." Then in 1950, competing in his first Class "A" competition in the Nationals in Duluth, Minnesota., Wil had the longest jump of the day and placed second.

Wil won a berth on the 1950 F.I.S. Team and participated in the World Championships in Lake Placid, New York. Wil entered the service in October, 1951, but was granted Special Leave from the Army in order to participate in the Olympic tryouts in Iron Mountain where he and other Ishpeming ski jumpers dominated the U.S. tryouts. Wil came in 4th in the country and won a berth on the 1952 U.S. Olympic Team. He was granted leave from the Army to participate in the 1952 Olympics in Oslo, Norway (where he got to jump on what was still considered at that time by most of the great European jumpers to be "the testing hill of greatness"). Wil then returned to the U.S. Army and served in Korea as an Infantryman until October, 1953, when he was discharged.

In 1953, Wil was selected to the World Championship F.I.S. Team. In 1954, he captured the Central Ski Association Class "A" Title in January.

Wil placed 2nd in the Class "A" National Championships at Westby, Wisconsin, in 1956. In 1957, he won the Class "A" Title at Suicide Hill. Wil was selected to the F.I.S. World Championship Team that would participate in the World Championship games in Lahti, Finland, in March of 1958. He ranked an overall 4th in the United States.

In an era before the corporate and commercial sponsorship we see for today's Olympic-quality athletes, Wil was forced to withdraw from competition – at this, the very peak of his career – due to financial and family obligations.

Wil's contributions to skiing did not end here, however. He continued to promote the sport to youngsters and played a vital role in coaching junior skiers from 1964-1973.

Wilbert Rasmussen was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1988.