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Erling Heistad

Born: 1897 Died: 1967

Erling Heistad's ski teams were legendary in New England. He was a strong advocate of safety and conditioning, and kept his boys in tip-top shape.

He was a small man to look at, but a mighty giant in skiing development. That sums up the late Erling Heistad of Lebanon, New Hampshire. Born in Tonsberg, Norway, in 1897, the "Father of Lebanon Skiing" came to New England at the age of 15 and remained a rugged Yankee with a still pronounced Norwegian accent until death claimed him at 70.

In his lifetime, Erling possibly did more than any person in New England history to develop enthusiasm for the outdoors and especially for skiing. In his time, this quiet "Norske," as rugged as the native terrain of his homeland, developed some of the country's foremost skiers and coaches made them, created them and sent them forth to colleges as top men in all four events. The Hansens, Curtises, Tremblays, Dions, Gignacs, Densmores, Townsends (Paul, Ralphie, and Ira), Lacasses, Stones, and many others made records that reflect Erling's teachings. It was said that any of the boys who made Heistad's Lebanon High School's first team could easily make any varsity college team. For nine straight years, his Lebanon High ski teams, for nine straight years, won the coveted Triple Crown in Eastern school circles.

During his 25-year reign as a successful coach, not one of his lads suffered a fracture in interscholastic competition. Erling was a firm believer in safety. He kept his boys in tip-top shape year-round by making them work on ski trails and ski jumps from the first sign of fall until winter set in. A mechanical engineer, the small, wiry Heistad designed and supervised, without charge, the building of thirteen ski jumps, seven of them in Lebanon. Others included those at the University of Vermont, Holderness School, and New Hampton School. He also designed the steel structure erected in 1954 by the Lebanon Improvement Society and dedicated to Heistad.

This rugged Norwegian believed that all of his skiers should be proficient in alpine and classic events. On one occasion, four of his Lebanon O.C. teams competed in four outstanding Eastern events and won them all. On another occasion, the Lebanon O.C. was permitted to compete in the Lake Placid College Week Games. Although they finished behind Dartmouth and Middlebury, they might have won easily had the ski jump not been called off.

Much more could be said about the little man with the big achievements in skiing. He was active on the Eastern Committee to run a school for amateur ski instructors, served on the National, Eastern, and New Hampshire State Junior Committees, was a national and Eastern jumping judge, and officiated at the 1960 Olympics in Squaw Valley.

Erling Heistad was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1966.

