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Harry Lien

Born: 1896 Died: 1978

As a member of the 1924 United States Olympic Ski Team, Harry Lien was among the small group of former professional skiers and amateur skiers selected by the National Ski Association, to represent the United States at the first Winter Olympic Games at Chamonix, France.

Harry Lien was born in Tvedestrand, a small town in Norway, on April 5, 1896. According to Harry he could not recall a winter as a youngster when he did not have skis on his feet. In fact skis were a necessity in order for him to attend school, some two and one half miles away.

At the age of twenty, Harry immigrated to the United States, and in 1917, at the age of twenty one, joined the United States Army and served twenty months during World War I.

After his discharge in 1919, Lien returned to Norway for an extended visit. While he was in Norway, the winters of 1919 and 1920, he participated in a number of ski jumping tournaments, winning first or second prizes in Tvedestrand, Risor, Ardenal, Grimstad, Amlie, and Treangen.

In 1921, Harry returned to the United States and settled temporarily at his brother's farm near Stevens Point, Wisconsin. He left his skis in Norway, but, being a carpenter by profession, quickly fashioned himself a pair of jumping skis. For Harry to be in snow without skis was unthinkable. He built a jumping hill on the farm, and to the consternation and amusement of the "locals," Harry managed jumps of 40 to 50 feet in training for the bigger hills.

In November 1922, homemade skis in hand, Harry arrived in Chicago and applied for membership in the Norge Tournament on January 23, 1923. There was some reluctance on the part of many of the members to enter this relatively unknown youngster in the prestigious Norge Tournament, but finally they accepted him as a "Dark Horse from Telemark." This began a credible career of a great skier.

Harry did not win the Norge Tournament that first year, but did win "most graceful" and first "long standing." He did win first at Madison, and placed second, incredibly in a 10-mile cross-country race on borrowed skis, and fourth in combined.

In 1924, Harry represented the United States at the first Winter Olympic Games at Chamonix, France. Harry skied actively until 1933 and then retired. This retirement lasted three years. In 1937, after three years of inactivity, Harry took his skis down from the attic and participated in the Norge Annual Meet, placing second, and ended his skiing career for good.

There are some lighter moments in Harry's career. He developed into a promoter and showman of sorts. In 1927, at the Leif Erickson Festival conducted by the Norwegian League, Harry conducted a ski slide at the Navy Pier in Chicago, and instead of snow, greased it with lard, and the participants jumped into Lake Michigan. Harry had the longest jump and stayed longest, so Harry laid claim to being the first water ski champion.

In 1946, Harry moved to Hayward, Wisconsin, and the winter of 1947 made three ski hills near his place of business. One hill was capable of producing 90 to 100 foot jumps, the second 30 to 100 feet and the third for small children, capable of 10 to 15 foot jumps. These hills drew skiers from Chicago, Minneapolis, Duluth, and Iron Mountain for training.

Harry was elected to the National Ski Hall of Fame in 1969.

