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Paul Bietila

Born: 1918 Died: 1939

Paul Bietila native of Ishpeming, Michigan, was the fourth son of the famous Bietila Family. He was the nation's top jumper at the time of his death.

An example of the caliber of Paul Bietila is reflected in the fact that, at age twelve, on February 22, 1931, he set the Junior Boys' Jumping record of 185 feet. In the 1938 National Jumping Tournament, he placed immediately behind the Great Birger and Sigmund Rudd of Norway. On February 5, 1939, while performing a practice jump at the U.S. Nationals in St. Paul, Minnesota, he crashed into a restraining post at the edge of the outrun and fatally injured himself. He fought hard for three long weeks, but died on Sunday, February 26, 1939.

"Paul Bietila rode his skis for the last time on February 5, 1939. In a practice jump that morning at the American National Ski Meet in St. Paul, he established a record for the day. Later he seared off the scaffold on his last flight, then crashed into an iron restraining post at the edge of the runway. For three long weeks after his accident, Paul Bietila fought hard to live. On Sunday, February 26, he died.

Paul Bietila, a native of Ishpeming, Michigan, was the fourth son in a family of seven, nearing his twenty-first birthday. In the School of Physical Education he was respected as a clear, logical thinker and keen scholar, but like his Finnish ancestors, he was first of all a man who enjoyed the outdoors. He loved the snow and the winter and the cold. He loved best of all to ski. His devotion to skiing subordinated every other interest to the mastery of his love. He had to be a champion!

He represented Wisconsin at the International Intercollegiate Ski Meet at Brattleboro, Vermont, in 1938, and won first place. He held nine individual hill records. He was the best ski jumper in America at the time of his death. A sincere gentleman, Paul Bietila was an honor to his University.

And so to the memory of Paul Bietila, champion, scholar and gentleman, the 1939 BADGER dedicates its sports section."

--The University of Wisconsin Badger 1939

"Paul Bietila leaves behind him an impressive record that will stand out in United States ski jumping circles as an accomplishment which will be difficult to equal and Herculean to surpass.

On February 22, 1931, at the age of twelve, Paul climbed permanently into the spotlight by setting a new boys' record - perhaps a world mark for youngsters - a successful jump of 185 feet. Seasons skipped along as Paul set a series of hill records. Records show Paul's greatest feat was accomplished in the 1938 National Jumping Tournament when he placed behind Birger and Sigmund Rudd of Norway.

At the time of his death he was our outstanding American-born jumper, and everybody liked him."

--The American Ski Annual 1939

Paul Bietila was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1970.



*The Bietilas
L to R: Paul, Walter, Roy, and Leonard*