

Hank Tauber

Achieving the summit on three lofty playing fields—ski racing, hardgoods and FIS leadership—the ‘durable, nimble, (and) debonair’ Tauber moved mountains for 50 years.

By Andy Bigford

Hank Tauber reached the highest level in three different corners of the ski world, first as a coach leading the U.S. women to Olympic gold medals and their second-best team finish in history, and perhaps even more importantly as the alpine program director driving a much-needed, ground-up overall of the entire organization.

For his next act, he took a technologically solid but tiny German company, Marker, and built it into a global powerhouse, focusing on doing one thing very well: ski bindings. Its market share rose fiftyfold from an initial 1 percent as revenue reached \$150 million, eventually representing half of the binding sales worldwide.

After Marker was acquired in 1999 and Tauber left, he played a critical role, much of it behind the scenes and out of public view, in leading the International Ski Federation (FIS), which is arguably the strongest of the 50-some organizational bodies that oversee the Olympic family of sports.

Hank Tauber was born and grew up in Gloversville, N.Y., which back then was the glove manufacturing capital of the country, with 300 brands in its heyday (including ski-specific brands like Swany and Grandoe). Tauber’s multi-lingual Swiss parents had moved there in 1936, with his father intent on spending just three years abroad to establish the U.S. subsidiary of the family’s leather and wool business. World War II intervened, and the Taubers never left, except for frequent family trips back home.

Tauber attended Vermont Academy in Saxtons River on the New Hampshire border, then skied four events at Middlebury College. He raced against and became friendly with Buddy Werner, Billy Kidd and Jimmie Heuga, and he took notes. He fondly recalls Werner slowly taking him through the strategy for handling the five top turns of Stowe’s notorious Nosedive downhill, watching the champion nail it, and then flailing through the section himself. “I just couldn’t execute,” he laughs, though he was a strong alpine and Nordic athlete, and occasionally finished in the top 10 of national-level events.

Tauber was not planning to become a ski racing coach while attending grad school in Boulder at the University of Colorado; his Master's was in Geography. But the timing was right: Beside him were those same friends (Kidd, et al), plus another colleague, the coach who started it all, Bob Beattie. At the time, CU was home to most of the U.S. Ski Team members, and Beattie was busy with his talented male skiers. He asked Tauber to oversee the dryland training for the women. Tauber eventually coached the U.S. women's team through the 1968-69 season, when Marilyn Cochran won the first U.S. World Cup season-long discipline title in GS, and several other racers, including Judy Nagel and Kiki Cutter, made valuable contributions to a second-place team finish in the women's Nations Cup. Tauber's reward for that landmark season was to be fired in the then politics-driven, often-bankrupt, revolving door world of the U.S. Ski Team.

After a short stint with the Head Ski Co., Tauber returned to lead the women as Barbara Ann Cochran won slalom gold and Susie Corrock took the downhill bronze in the 1972 Olympics at Sapporo. His next move was his most substantial: to reboot the team as the alpine program director of the USST, finally putting the organization on a strong, stable foundation based on business guidelines, not politics. In a February 1978 profile for *Skiing*, Bill Tanler (then the publisher of *Ski Racing*), described Tauber as "durable, nimble, debonair, Brooks Brothers casual, world traveler, blue-tinted glasses, and easily the most effective administrator in the history of U.S. Ski Team." It helped that Tauber was fluent in five languages, including Schwäbisch, the German dialect that drives the international ski racing world, and intuitively understood that the team needed to communicate its plans and successes, both internally and externally.

Not long after he left the team in the 1979, he stumbled into what he considers to be good luck, but which seems to be the residue of design. He'd become friends with Hannes Marker, who had founded the binding company in Garmisch in 1951. Tauber was given the opportunity to create and lead Marker Ski Binding's U.S. subsidiary, initially running it out of his basement before opening an office in Salt Lake City.

He didn't know it at that time, but the ever-innovative Marker had become obsessed with what seemed to be the next lucrative sport—windsurfing—spending two months of the year testing product in Hawaii and eventually securing 250 patents, most of which were, unfortunately for Marker, ahead of their time. With Marker's focus elsewhere and his

Marker financials heading south, the company came up for sale. Tauber instigated a series of complex (and somewhat highly leveraged) moves that would eventually land him as controlling owner of what would become the undisputed world leader in the binding segment, assuming the role of chairman and CEO in 1984.

Tauber initially focused entirely on bindings, which is admittedly the least glamorous of the hardgoods categories. He invested in R&D and technology, built his own full-time sales and technical rep staff that flooded the zone with cutting-edge video, and focused on retailer relationships and education at a time when certification and indemnification programs were in dire need. Then he went back to his roots to assemble what is undoubtedly the winningest stable of international race stars in the history of the sport: Franz Klammer, Ingemar Stenmark, Maria Walliser, and Marc Girardelli among them, plus U.S. champions like the Mahre twins, Tamara McKinney, Cindy Nelson, Deb Armstrong, and Picabo Street. He spent heavily on advertising, even as the industry said racing didn't pay and didn't matter in the U.S. The Marker brand overwhelmingly resonated quality with skiers and, just as importantly, with the retailers who stocked the reliable product in ever increasing amounts.

After leaving Marker in 1999, Tauber remained intimately involved in the highest reaches of the ski racing world and indelibly shaped FIS, which oversees what are essentially dozens of professional sports leagues in four diverse categories: Nordic (including cross-country, jumping and Nordic combined), alpine, freestyle and snowboarding, plus all the individual disciplines within, from downhill to boardercross. Out of sight of the skiing public, Tauber for decades shaped policy, and was a trusted confidante and often the "go-to guy" for FIS President Marc Hodler and his successor, Gianni Franco Kasper. He was a U.S. vice president with the FIS, and still serves as the longest standing trustee of the U.S. Ski Team.

On the resort side, Tauber is the veteran board member of John Cumming's POWDR resort conglomerate, which oversees 10 resorts (including Snowbird, Copper Mountain, Mt. Bachelor, and Killington) and the Woodward youth active sports camps. Tauber's tenure pre-dates the actual formation of POWDR; he was on the board of the company that Nick Badami had created when he owned Alpine Meadows and Park City Mountain Resort. This

was before the Cumming family got involved with the ownership and the transition to POWDR ensued in 1994.

When Tauber was running the U.S. Ski Team, he travelled 150,000 to 200,000 miles annually and worked roughly 365 days a year. He didn't slow down much when he committed himself to Marker. He credits great people for making Marker strong, both in the U.S. and abroad.

When Tauber finally caught his breath, he married his wife Sally in 1990. They continue to live in Park City, where Hank has resided since 1974. They have a summer house in eastern Canada, but prefer Park City winters, still skiing 40-plus days a year and typically tallying 2,000 miles on his road bike. They have two children, David, 28, who lives in Columbus, Ohio, and Kristina, 25, who resides in Denver.

Career Accomplishments

Born: April 23, 1941 (Gloversville, N.Y.)

1967-69: Serves as assistant U.S. women's coach under Chuck Ferries.

1972: Becomes head coach of medal-winning 1972 Olympic team.

1974-79: Rebuilds U.S. Ski Team as alpine director.

1980: Opens Marker U.S., subsidiary, then takes over leadership as chairman and CEO of Marker International in 1984.

1985: Receives the Julius Blegen Award, the highest honor from the USSA.

1988-2002: Serves as vice president and on the council of FIS.

1994: Transitions from Nick Badami's board to become director for POWDR board.

1997: Takes post on USST board, still serves today as longest standing.

2002: Marker LTD, the apparel company Tauber founded, serves as official clothing supplier for 2002 Salt Lake Olympics.

2004: Receives USSA's Bud and Mary Little Award for his services to the FIS and USOC.