

DEMONG, BILLY (676 words)

As an athlete and a team leader, Olympic champion Billy Demong won the first gold medal by an American nordic skier, inspiring Team USA to an unprecedented four nordic combined medals at the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games.

Growing up in the Olympic region of Lake Placid, he was inspired by the culture emanating from the 1980 Games. In an international racing career that spanned 16 seasons, he won Olympic gold and silver, four World Championship medals, including one gold, and earned 21 World Cup podiums with nine victories.

Eight months pregnant with her son-to-be during the 1980 Olympics in Lake Placid, Demong's mother, Helen, had a premonition he was destined to be her 'Olympic baby.' Young Bill was born just a month after the Games, growing up in the small town of Vermontville, a half hour north of Lake Placid. It was a golden period for nordic athletes in the Olympic region, with Demong training often with friends like biathlon world champion Lowell Bailey.

The Olympic region provided Demong with ski jumps and world-class cross-country trails at his fingertips. He grew up as a nordic combined skier training with the New York Ski Education Foundation (NYSEF) club program and attending the National Sports Academy in Lake Placid.

Demong's career blossomed as a teen. He began to stand out at a 1996 national development camp in Lake Placid when he was only 16. He was named to the 1998 Olympic team at just 17, his first of five Olympic Winter Games. Blessed with great aerobic capacity, he was a threat on the cross-country trails from the start. Once he figured out ski jumping, he found he was ideally suited for nordic combined.

He and his teammates foreshadowed the future at the FIS Junior Nordic World Championships in 1999 and 2000. At Saalfelden, Austria, in 1999, Demong anchored the USA to its first-ever relay medal on a team also featuring Hall of Famer Johnny Spillane.

As his young career progressed, he moved to Steamboat Springs, Colo. to join a U.S. Ski Team residency program under coach Tom Steitz. In the leadup to the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City, Demong won his first World Cup in Liberec, Czech Republic, leading four Americans in the top 20.

In the summer of 2002, he suffered a serious injury that kept him out of the 2002-03 season. But he fought his way back, and in 2007, he took silver at the World Championships in Sapporo Japan. In the 2008-09 season, Demong won five World Cups, along with gold and bronze at the World Championships in Liberec, Czech Republic, combining with teammate Todd Lodwick to win an unprecedented four medals and a USA sweep of all three individual events.

In 2010, at Whistler, B.C., he led a stunning four-medal performance in nordic combined by Team USA. In the relay event, Demong anchored as the USA won silver for its first-ever team medal in nordic combined. Just a few days later, he won gold in the large hill individual event.

In what was truly a golden era for nordic combined in America, Demong rose up as one of its biggest stars. He grew up in an environment where nordic combined thrived. He was surrounded by talented athletes who lived and trained together, with Demong providing inspiration as a team leader.

Teammates knew Demong as a humble leader, always leading by example. He always showed up at training ready to grind, often pushing workouts longer and harder. After his historic gold medal at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, he was chosen by his athlete peers across all sports as the Team USA flag bearer at the closing ceremony in Vancouver.

After a career that saw him compete in five Olympic Winter Games, Demong left the sport as an athlete in 2015. He went on to lead the fledgling USA Nordic program, retiring in 2022. He and skeleton athlete Katie Koczyński married in 2010, choosing to raise their family in the shadow of the ski jumps in Park City, Utah.