

Park Smalley: A Legacy of Leadership and Excellence in Freestyle Skiing

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Legendary freestyle coach, Park Smalley, considered by many as the “Father of Freestyle,” played a pivotal role in the sport’s early growth. In his 25 years as coach, Smalley worked with more than 3,000 athletes, including many Hall of Famers. Widely revered for his leadership, Smalley earned the affectionate nickname “The General” from his athletes due to his commanding presence, strategic insight, and ability to inspire excellence.

Born and raised with a passion for skiing, Smalley’s journey to becoming a leading figure in freestyle skiing was shaped by his early competitive experiences. From 1972 to 1975, Smalley competed on the Freestyle Pro Tour, performing in shows with prominent teams like Marlboro and K2 Ski Teams. These formative years not only honed his technical skills but also deepened his commitment to the sport.

In 1976, Smalley founded the Great Western Freestyle Ski Camps in Steamboat Springs, Colo., and Mt. Hood, Ore. These camps quickly became go-to destinations for freestyle skiers, offering safe and structured environments for athletes to develop their skills before hitting the slopes. In 1978, he took his commitment a step further by founding Steamboat Springs’ first freestyle team, an initiative that would later grow into a significant force in the sport.

Smalley’s success as a coach began to crystallize in the early 1980s. In 1981, he was appointed head coach of the U.S. Junior Freestyle Team. His impact was immediate, leading the team to victory and setting the stage for his appointment as the first-ever head coach of the U.S. Freestyle Ski Team in 1983. Over the next seven years, Smalley would lead the U.S. team to unprecedented heights, cementing his legacy as one of the most influential figures in freestyle skiing.

Under Smalley’s leadership, the U.S. Freestyle Ski Team achieved remarkable success on the World Cup circuit. From 1984 to 1990, the team won the prestigious Nations’ Cup every year—seven times in total—demonstrating unparalleled dominance. During this period, Smalley’s athletes accumulated 114 World Cup victories and 332 podium finishes. Notably, Smalley coached his athletes to multiple World Cup titles in moguls, aerials, and other freestyle disciplines, making the U.S. Freestyle Ski Team a formidable force on the world stage.

The 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary marked a historic milestone for freestyle skiing. Thanks in no small part to Smalley’s leadership, freestyle skiing was included in the Games as a demonstration sport. The U.S. team delivered outstanding performances, securing one gold and two silver medals, a testament to Smalley’s coaching acumen and the athletes’ remarkable skill. Smalley’s influence extended beyond his coaching role. His efforts culminated in the successful bid to include freestyle skiing as an official Olympic event in 1992 with his athletes Donna Weinbrecht and Nelson Carmichael winning. He continued to serve as a color analyst for CBS’s

coverage of Olympic freestyle events in 1992, 1994, and 1998, further contributing to the sport's visibility and growth.

In addition to his coaching achievements, Smalley's legacy is marked by his pioneering work in professional freestyle skiing. He helped establish the International Freestyle Skiers Association and the first professional freestyle tour, which provided new opportunities for athletes to compete at a high level. His efforts in promoting freestyle skiing globally helped elevate the sport's profile and attract new fans and participants.

Throughout his career, Smalley mentored a generation of athletes, many of whom went on to achieve international acclaim. Notably, Smalley authored *Skiing Freestyle: Official Training Guide of the U.S. Freestyle Ski Team* in 1986, co-authored with World Champion Hilary Engisch, providing invaluable insights for aspiring athletes and coaches.

Even after retiring from coaching in 1996, Smalley remained deeply involved in freestyle skiing. He continued to serve as a consultant for the Steamboat Springs freestyle team and provided expert commentary for television broadcasts, ensuring that his expertise and passion for the sport were passed on to new generations.

Smalley's contributions to freestyle skiing have been widely recognized. In 2003, he was inducted into the Colorado Snowsports Hall of Fame, a fitting tribute to a career that had transformed the sport. Steamboat Springs, where Smalley's career began and flourished, honored his legacy by naming two freestyle ski venues after him: one at Mt. Werner and another at Howelsen Hill. These venues serve as a lasting reminder of his impact on the sport and the community.