

## #323: BIRGER RUUD- SKI JUMPER

Image: Norwegian ski jumpers at the 1932 Olympics in Lake Placid. Back from the left: Hans Kleppen, Hans Beck, Sverre Kolterud, Reidar Andersen. Front from the left: Birger Ruud, Kaare Wahlberg, Sigmund Ruud.

Birger Ruud (1911-1998) is remembered as a pioneer of Norwegian skiing. He was well-known during Norway's golden age of ski jumping between 1924 and 1952. As a world champion at age 19 and Olympic gold medalist at age 20 Ruud became an ambassador of Nordic skiing across Europe. He remains a legend in the world of skiing and ski jumping.



Birger Ruud © BY-SA 3.0 ([license](#)).  
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The unique sport of ski jumping launches skiers down a take-off ramp into midair where they attempt to fly as far as possible on two large skis. Skiers have to be elegant as they soar through the air as long and as fast as they can in order to land on their feet. In fact – elegance is a key word when talking about Birger Ruud. He had that natural elegance which looked so instinctive and casual, but which was actually only acquired with great strength and training.

Norwegian Ole Rye was credited with the first ever successful ski jump. By no surprise, ski jumping was developed in Norway and in 1808 Rye launched himself 9.5 meters off a jump just to entertain some buddies. Little did he know, his skiing stunt would become an international phenomenon. Soon after, Sondre Norheim was recognized as the first ski jumping competitive winner in the 1860's. Sixty years later Birger Ruud became the pioneer who propelled the sport in a whole new direction.

In 1932 Ruud won the gold medal in ski jumping at the Lake Placid Olympics. He miraculously earned 1st place in both ski jumping and downhill skiing at the 1936 Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen; something which would be nearly impossible today as athletes are typically fine-tuned for one specific sport.

Like so many Norwegians during WWII, Ruud actively resisted the Nazi occupation. His anti-Nazi sentiments sent him to Grini Concentration Camp. Following his release and the end of the war he returned to skiing. Remarkably, in 1948 he coached and participated in the Olympics at St. Moritz and won a silver medal in ski jumping.

His contributions to the sport were significant, both for of his record breaking achievements as an athlete and his influences to the sport as an innovator and a coach.

Birger Ruud was born and raised in Kongsberg, Norway, a city located in Buskerud County, just an hour southwest of Oslo. It is a mining city with an active ski tradition. Birger and his two brothers, Sigmund (1907-1994) and Asbjørn (1919-1989) grew up in a great sporting family. The brothers dominated international ski jumping in the 1920's and 30's, but Birger was the only Olympic champion.



Birger Ruud has remained one of the biggest names in ski jumping history. Along with his brother, Sigmund, he developed training programs which revolutionized their sport by creating a standardized technique. He changed the sport by examining new ways to maximize speed and distance. To acquire perfect control of the body, the Ruud brothers devised acrobatic stunts which prepared the body for the new ski jumping pose.

The Kongsberg Technique was developed and the Ruud brothers dominated the sport, leading by example. They figured out that by leaning forward on their skis while bending their hips, arms straight ahead, they could aerodynamically fly further. They were ski jumping trail blazers that gave the sport a method. Before the Kongsberg Technique jumpers took their leap of faith and landed by any means possible. Modern ski jumping has since advanced and the V-technique is now the most effective method. Landing the jump requires skiers to use Norway's Telemark style of skiing where one foot lands in front of the other while both legs are bent. The Norwegian influences still remain.

In 1991 Ruud was awarded with the *Egebergs Ærespris* (Honorary Prize of Egeberg), a prize started in 1918 and given to Norwegian athletes who excel in more than one sport. Ruud was truly a natural born ski phenomenon. A statue of him can be seen in Kongsberg where he will forever be soaring above the ground.