

#364: STEIN ERIKSEN



In Stein Eriksen's family, there was a tradition of athleticism. His father Marius Eriksen had competed as a gymnast in the 1912 Olympics, and his brother Marius Eriksen, Jr. competed in the 1948 Olympics in slalom. Born in Oslo on December 11, 1927, Stein grew up alpine skiing and by the age of 22, was the best slalom racer in Norway. He became the Norwegian Champion six times between 1949 and 1954. Making his international debut at the 1950 World Championships in Aspen, Colorado, he earned a bronze medal in slalom. The 1952 Olympics were hosted in his hometown of Oslo, and Eriksen made his country proud, winning gold in the giant slalom and silver in the slalom category. He became the first male skier hailing from outside the Alps to win Olympic gold. In that same year, he was awarded the Holmenkollen Medal, Norway's highest skiing award for athletes in the Nordic events. In 1954, he came home from the World Championships in Sweden with three gold medals for slalom, giant slalom and alpine combination.

Since retiring from racing in the mid-1950s, Eriksen has lived in the U.S., working as a ski instructor, ambassador and ski school director at a handful of resorts in Vermont, Colorado, California, Michigan and Utah. Currently he has a lifelong contract as Director of Skiing at Deer Valley resort in Utah, as well as host at the five-star Stein Eriksen Lodge, which was named in his honor. A black diamond run in Deer Valley was also named for him: Stein's Way. At one point, the ski lodge would post a replica of Eriksen's ski clothing each day, so that visitors would be able to spot him gliding down the slopes. Today, a life-size statue of Stein is displayed outside Deer Valley's Snow Park Lodge.

Due to his charisma, personal style and good looks, Eriksen is considered the first "superstar" skier. He taught Johnny Carson to ski on *The Tonight Show*, demonstrating his flawless style on a portable ski slope to the amazement of the audience. Johnny played his own attempts to maximum comedic effect, flailing wildly and clinging to the handrail. He has taught other celebrities such as Chelsea Clinton, Bruce Springsteen and Barbra Streisand.



Stein Eriksen at the 1952 Olympic Games in Oslo. Photo credit: Olympic.org

In spite of his fame, Eriksen's personality remained very down-to-earth. He is quoted as saying, "Be tough, be confident. But you will never be a whole and happy person, if you aren't humble." He has remained in the public eye for over six decades promoting his favorite sport, and his smooth technique has inspired countless skiers. His famous move, "The Stein Turn" was an impossibly graceful turn that others tried to imitate. Eriksen is credited with pioneering aerials as a freestyle ski event and for transforming alpine skiing in the U.S. He combined his background in gymnastics with skiing, and would impress resort-goers by demonstrating flips on skis.

In 1997 King Harald V honored Stein Eriksen, knighting him with the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit for his contributions to Norway. This is the highest honor that the Norwegian government bestows on people living outside Norway.

In 2013, on Eriksen's 86th birthday, the former governor of Utah declared December 11th to be Stein Eriksen Day.

