

## **Fis Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti 1938-1989 Broadcast Live to Home Audience**

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On Feb. 15th, 2001, Lahti Radio and TV Museum opened an exhibition presenting the history of radio broadcasting and telecasting at the past Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti, from 1938 to 1989. The exhibition clarifies how radio and TV broadcasts have been carried out at different times.

### **The first official Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti in 1938 – “Radio makes all Finns sports maniacs”.**

The first Nordic World Ski Championships were actually held in Lahti as early as 1926. However, at that time the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE had only recently started its operation and was not yet capable of broadcasting the World Championships. Despite the lack of radio documentation a very interesting film by an amateur cameraman exists from these “Congress Skiing Competitions. The first official Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti were organized in 1938. From these Championships YLE, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, transmitted many broadcasts. Radio transmissions from Lahti Ski Games had already started in 1929. For the few first years of broadcasting the ski competitions, there was however a special rule set by Lahti Ski Club: the commentators were not allowed to mention the names of the competitors on the radio, but only their competition numbers. Lahti Ski Club then sold program leaflets, which revealed the names behind the numbers.

The agreement for broadcasting the World Championships was however closed only at the last moment. The Finnish Ski Association and YLE had difficulties in reaching a consensus on the broadcasting remuneration. In November 1937, the Finnish Ski Association applied from YLE for a remuneration of broadcasting the World Championships in Finland. YLE rejected the application, justifying its decision by the international nature of the event.

YLE had already suffered great expenses from organizing many foreign broadcasting companies the opportunity to broadcast from the Worlds Championships. Back then, the national radios of Norway, Sweden, Germany and Estonia came to the World Championships. Finally, the two discussing parties did compromise, making the broadcasting of the World Championships possible. “Radio drives the Finns sportst maniacs” was the slogan advertising YLE before the 1938 Worlds Championships. Among the many commentators on site, there were the first Finnish sports commentator Pekka Tiilikainen and reporter Eero Salovuori. The Swedish summaries were presented by Enzo Sevón.

Sports competitions are in most cases transmitted live to the audience. People want to have real-time information of how their fellow countrymen and own favourites do in the competitions. In the early years of radio broadcasting, live broadcasting was actually the only alternative. YLE purchased its first sound recording system in 1934. The system used lacquer coated metal discs, with a recording capacity of 3 minutes / disc. Recording from field broadcasts were usually made in a reporting vehicle.

At the early stage of radio broadcasting, even the carbon microphones had to be connected to a harness, to enable their use. In 1938 capacitor microphones had already been introduced. Field broadcasting required, in addition to the commentator and the microphone, special mixer amplifiers and transmitters. Through this equipment the program was transmitted to the broadcasting stations, for example the longwave broadcasting station in Lahti. The competitors' interim times from certain timing point along the ski tracks were given to the commentator by telephone. Telephone cables for the purpose were drawn from tree to tree.

Since the 1936 Olympics, radio merchants also discovered the importance of big international sport events for their business. For example in 1938, radios were advertised with this kind of a slogan: "...your firsthand sports commentator and transmitter of other radio programs... Helvar – the happy radio".

### **Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) in the 1958 Nordic World Ski Championships**

The 1958 Nordic World Ski Championships were a big success for Lahti. The total number of visitors at "Salpausselkä" was 67 000 people. Renovations had been made at the Ski Stadium in 1954. In addition, a new office building was constructed at the stadium in functionalistic style. The radio commentators had their own broadcasting center on the flat roof of the building. Pekka Tiilikainen, Jorma Lundén and Paavo Noponen, together with their foreign colleagues had their work base at this center. From the roof, they had an excellent view all over the Stadium. The great overlook was also taken advantage of by TV-cameramen.

Telecasting was recent innovation in those days. In addition to the Finnish Television, East Germany, Poland, Sweden and Norway sent their telecasting personnel to the World Championships. There were about 15-20 radio reporters on site, West Germany alone sent 5 and East Germany 3 commentators to these games.

The Championships were a success for Finland. Pekka Tiilikainen and Paavo Noponen had all the reason to enthusiastically boost the Finns' spirits. The most exiting moments were obviously experienced during men's ski competitions (Veikko Hakulinen won the 15-km competition) and the ski jumping competition (Juhani Kärkinen's victory).

#### **The Legendary Blue-and White Voices of the Finnish Broadcasting Company**

The first Finnish sport commentators who created the ground to the commentating in YLE were Martti Jukola and Pekka Tiilikainen. Their commenting style to comment was very patriotic.

Martti Jukola started his media career in 1922, as a journalist for the Finnish sports magazine Suomen Urheilulehti. He officiated as the magazine's chief journalist until 1931. Jukola was a very productive writer throughout his life. He was also a scientist and a doctor of philosophy. His doctor's thesis from 1930 was on the production of the author J.H. Erkko.

He started his radio career at YLE in 1931 and continued to work as YLE's radio reporter until 1952. Like so many of his colleagues, in his youth he had been a successful athlete himself.

Jukola's own sports interests were sprint and hurdlerace. During his active competition years, he won six silver medals and five bronze medals in different Finnish Championships.

Martti Jukola was the chief commentator of YLE at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and the 1948 Olympics in London. In Berlin, he was in fact the sole Finnish speaking commentator. In the early decades of radio broadcasting, a sports commentator had to master all different kinds of sports.

His legendary fame among the Finns as a beloved commentator is greatly based on the 1946 broadcast, when Finland achieved triple victory in the 10 000-meter race. Alike, his reports from ski competitions touched the Finnish audience.

Pekka Tiilikainen started his career as a sports commentator at the Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE, in 1935. Before this he had journalistic experience from writing sports lectures and newspaper articles. Tiilikainen's premiere in commentating was in Oslo, at the Nordic Swimming Championships. Tiilikainen had a successful past as a swimmer himself. He was the Nordic Champion of 1931 in 400-m and 1500-m freestyle swimming. In the 1930's he was also a longtime member of the Finnish Water-Polo Champion Team.

In 1939 Tiilikainen was nominated permanent staff member at YLE, officiating as the first radio commentator. His excellent knowledge in sports and natural talent to work as a commentator earned him the position, foreseeing the Olympic Games, which were planned to be organized in Helsinki in 1940. Tiilikainen was YLE's chief commentator from 1945 to 1971.

Tiilikainen was working already at the 1938 World Championships in Lahti, and in 1958 he was the chief commentator. For the Finnish people he was the beloved "blue-and-white voice". As a commentator, especially in skiing, he was unrivalled. Full of national spirit, he put all his soul in his work, letting the listeners share his deepest emotions, in the moments of loss but especially in the big moments of victory.

Paavo Noponen was the younger colleague of Tiilikainen. His career as a sports commentator started at a commentators' training course prior the Helsinki Olympics. Noponen worked as a sports commentator for YLE from 1952 to 1994. He and Pekka Tiilikainen soon formed a steady carriage and pair in the commentators' booths of international sports competitions. In the 1958 World Championships in Lahti, Noponen especially concentrated in commentating the special ski jumping competition.

The 1978 World Championships in Lahti were a very special occasion for Paavo Noponen, marked by his return from a long sick leave, caused by an injury he confronted at the time of the Montreal Olympics. Noponen was back and soon received public attention with his comments, for example the one which he stated while the Nordic countries were leading men's relay: "In the lead, the free North." Some people wanted to understand his statement as a gibe at the Soviet Union. Others in turn praised him for his patriotic, blue-and-white approach. In 1989 Noponen was still in the commentators' team of the Nordic World Ski Championships. That time his dearest assignment was probably when Harri Kirvesniemi won the 15-km competition.

Noponen sees three basic elements to be the most important characteristics for a good commentator: ability to stay calm, be resolute, and keep up enthusiasm. Enthusiasm and absoluteness have always been his virtues.

### **The color television transmissions in the 1978 World Championships**

The color television transmissions by YLE, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, offered the home audience an excellent opportunity to follow the 1978 World Championships. At the competition site, there were 16 color TV cameras in six field-telecasting vehicles. Color telecasting was still a rather new innovation. YLE had purchased its first field telecasting vehicles producing colored programs in 1974. The telecasting of the World Championships cost a total of FIM 2.5 million.

Aarre Elo produced the telecasting. Raimo Piltz officiated as the main director. Seppo Kannas, Anssi Kukkonen and Voitto Liukkonen formed the commentators' team.

The advertisements that appeared in the 1978 WSC-telecasts rose to the headlines. Rules for advertising had not yet been discussed and settled at international level, as they are today.

Eurovision threatened to cancel the telecasting rights just before the World Championships unless some of the advertisements lining the ski tracks were removed. The organizers of the World Championships should not have marketed spots for advertising by promising the customers good visibility on television. Finally the ads causing the biggest disagreements were removed and EBU issued its telecasting permission.

In the 1978 World Championships, a unilateral studio, which enabled color telecasting, was in use. The studio had two color cameras, two vidicon cameras and two studio video recorders.

“Kisastudio” – a summarizing program of the day's WSC-events was telecast on all competition days. The public was no longer satisfied with plain commentating and the quick interviews of the winners. People wanted to learn more about their favorite athletes' backgrounds and secrets of success.

Radio was an important means for following the 1978 Nordic World Ski Championships. The listeners followed the Championships live on radio, whereas some of the telecasting was transmitted to Finland as post transmissions. For this reason, some people living in Helsinki followed the live TV broadcasts from Tallinn while listening to the live radio broadcasts from the Finnish radio, presented by YLE's radio reporters Paavo Noponen, Raimo Häyrinen, Voitto Raatikainen and Juhani Sipilä. The chief director for radio broadcasting was sports manager Voitto Raatikainen. The above-mentioned commentators looked back on their best moments of the 1978 World Championships in an article of the Finnish magazine *Katso*, in 1978. For Noponen, these World Championships were a very important event after his long sick leave. He said that he had started to gather background information and in other ways prepare himself for the big assignment several months prior the actual event.

From these World Championships, the most dominating memory for Raimo Häyrinen – best known for his team sports reports – was that he was severely down with a flu, preventing him from working fulltime. The temperature fluctuation from the +25 C inside the commentators' booths to the -15 C outdoors did indeed put the commentators in a big risk of falling sick.

Juhani Sipilä remembers that the quick interviews by the finish line were very interesting, because the strong emotions and the atmosphere of the competition was then really present.

Lahti had its own WSC- radio station in operation during the 1978 Nordic World Ski Championships. For the channel, the frequency Lahti USW II of Häme Regional Radio was used. Programs were usually broadcast for one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon. Additionally, news from the World Championships were broadcast four times a day. The WSC-radio production manager was Kauko Kojonen.

## **The 1989 Nordic World Ski Championships around the world**

The 1989 Nordic World Ski Championships were broadcast live on television by YLE to millions of spectators around the world, including Australia, Hong Kong, and Mexico. The broadcasting signal was directly transmitted from Lahti to all over Europe.

For television and radio broadcasting purposes, a big new center was built beside the ski jumping stadium. Today this building is known as Lahti Ski Museum. The total cost of the World

Championships for YLE was FIM 13.5 million. The structures included 80 commentators' booths. The biggest number of cameras used on one day was 30 units. The size of Finnish broadcasting staff on site, TV and radio included, was 335 people. Aarre Elo was the projectmanager of the company, as he had been already at the 1978 World Championships. Kalevi Uusivuori officiated as YLE's chief TV-producer. The TV-commentators in 1989 were Kari Hiltunen, Hannu-Pekka Hänninen, Erkki Kumpunen, Voitto Liukkonen and Pentti Salmi.

The chief producer for YLE's radio broadcasts was Voitto Raatikainen. The commentators' voices on radio belonged to Raimo Häyrynen, Jarmo Lehtinen, Paavo Noponen and Juhani Sipilä. The Swedish broadcasts were presented by Niklas Henrichsson and Bror-Erik Wallenius. The accumulated duration of radio broadcasts from the World Championships was 35 hours. The success of Finnish women skiers and Lahti's own ski jumper Jari Puikkonen resulted in that the World Championships gathered masses of spectators not only at the Stadium but also in the front of tv- and radiosets.

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Broadcast Live to Home Audience

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