

The History of Lahti Ski games

and World championships in Nordic Events in Lahti
in 1926, 1938, 1958, 1978 and 1989

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The history of Lahti Ski Games started in the 1920's. In Finland, skiing competitions had been organized on flat terrain, on fields and frozen lakes, since 1880's. The style of the skis matched the needs of flat skiing. The long and heavy skis were very practical, the weight of the skier was evenly divided on ice.

In Norway competitive cross-country skiing was practised for the first time already in 1888 and there cross-country competitions became a regular sport in 1902. In Finland, the desire to organize international cross-country skiing competitions was growing. Positive experiences from the Holmenkollen Games in 1922 supported these intentions on the background. The Finnish skiers Anton Collin and Tapani Niku achieved double victory in the "kingship competition", the men's 50-km race. Until then the winner had always been a Norwegian.

The authority to look for a suitable location to organize skiing competitions was granted to Professor Lauri Pihkala. His proposition was that Finland's first international cross-country skiing competitions should be organized in Lahti. His decision was based first on Lahti's excellent location: the competitors and the game visitors, who in those days brought along their own ski equipment, could economically travel to the site by train. Pihkala writes in the Finnish Sports Magazine on March 13, 1922: - I wonder what Lahti might be like as the host of such an event? It is at reasonable distance from everywhere. Actually I think there is no other railway station in Finland to be reached with any less money, if we think that all Finns would like to come to see the games. The Salpausselkä ridges were also found out to offer excellent terrain for cross-country skiing. Here it was possible to create a network of ski tracks to meet the high demands of international skiing competition.

The 75th games at Salpausselkä

Lahti Ski Association was founded on the 4th of March, in 1922. The city gave the association 14 hectares of land on a 50-year leasing contract. Construction work was started in the fall of 1922. In December, the sauna building was already completed. It was designed by Professor Carolus Linberg to serve the competitors as a cloakroom and bath. In the same month, also the first ski jump was finished. It was designed by the Norwegian engineer Robert Persson. The opening jump carried 11 meters.

The first Lahti Ski Games were organized on February 3-4, 1923. Since then the tradition has continued annually, except for two occasions, the years of 1930 and 1940. In 1930 there was lack of snow and in 1940 the Second World War prevented the organizing of the games. Now it is the 75th time Lahti is hosting the ski games.

Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti

1926

The Nordic World Ski Championships today in progress, are the sixth of their kind held in Lahti. The first time was in 1926, when an International Congress of Skiing Association was organized in Lahti. For a long time the competitions carried the name International Skiing Congress, but received later the honorary title of World Championships.

In 1926, there were participants from seven countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Austria and Latvia. The number of foreign competitors was 27.

The following international competitions were organized in these games: Nordic combined (ski jumping and 30-km cross-country skiing competition), men's 50-km cross-country race, ski jumping and ice-skating.

The program additionally included several national competitions (Nordic combined for adolescents under 18 years of age, women's 5-km flat skiing, and senior men's 10-km flat skiing), and special competitions for the military and civil guard (Nordic combined, 20-km skiing, reconnaissance skiing, 20-km team skiing competition, and biathlon).

The circumstances were demanding. In the 1920's tracks were not cleared out in the woods but quite the opposite: the hardest and deepest hills and toughest curves possible were included in the route. Thereto the weather conditions were severe. During the men's 50-km race the air temperature was as low as - 30C.

1938

For the Nordic World Ski Championships of 1938 a new ski jump was introduced, enabling jump lengths of even 50 meters. The ski jump was of new design with its aerodynamic profile. Thereto safety issues had been taken into consideration in its design. The critical point of the ski jump was 62.5 m.

These championships received participating competitors from 13 countries. The number of foreign athletes was 160. The game program included relay race, 18-km and 50-km competitions, Nordic combined and ski jumping. The Finns were successful in skiing and the Norwegians in Nordic combined. The specialty of these games was the evening ski jumping competition. However, this sport had only Finnish competitors because the foreign ski jumpers were not experienced in practicing their sport in artificial light.

The evening competition received a big audience. A special steam engine train brought people directly to the site. The smoke from the locomotive was so intense at the stadium that the organizers were forced to delay the beginning of the ski jumping competition by half an hour, waiting the air to

clear off. After the competition, spectacular fire works lit up the sky. The total number of spectators was 60 000.

This was the first time in World Ski Championship history that the events also reached home audience by radio, although yet by post-broadcasts.

1958

For the World Ski Championships in 1958 a new ski jump was again built in Lahti. There to, new constructions included a new officer's building, a loge for special guests, and a restaurant. The number of participating countries was 17, and the number of competitors 263. The two participating Japanese ski jumpers were the first non-European competitors of Lahti Ski Games ever.

The Nordic World Ski Championships of 1958 were a success for the Finns. Finland won all men's competitions, which were ski jumping, Nordic combined, 15-km and 30-km skiing. The International Skiing Federation had accepted women's skiing competitions to the Olympic Program, beginning from the 1952 Olympics in Oslo. In 1958, the champions of women's skiing came from the Soviet Union. This country had been participating in international skiing competitions since the 1954 games in Falun. Wooden skis were used in these competitions.

The Finnish ski jumping team was well tuned and attracted a record audience of 67 000 people to the ski jumping competitions. At that time, the entire population of Lahti was only 62 925. The total number of people visiting the World Championships that year reached 204 591. The Finnish Broadcasting Company filmed TV-broadcasts at the site, and additionally sent direct radio broadcasts, spreading the great spirit to home audience.

1978

The fourth Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti took place at a ski stadium, which had undergone major changes: In 1972 a new 114-m ski jump had been finished, constructed of concrete. And a few years later it was accompanied by the 90-m and the 70-m ski jumps. There to, a new building with stand and service facilities, and new score board equipment were built at the stadium.

The number of participating countries kept growing, and was now 29. The program included ski jumping competitions at the 70-m and 90-m ski jumps, ski jumping team competition, Nordic combined, men's 50-km, 30-km and 15-km skiing competitions, women's 20-km, 10-km, and 5-km skiing competitions, as well as men's and women's relays.

At these championships, the skiers of all countries were already using glass fiber skis.

1989

The settings of the Nordic World Ski Championships of 1989 had not changed much from the previous ones. Some modifications had been carried out at the judge towers, the main stand and the serviced premises of the teams. One new building had erected at the ski jumping end of the stadium to serve TV-and radio broadcasting. After these championships, this building was turned into a Ski Museum, which it still is.

The Finnish Broadcasting Company spread the championship spirit to millions of listeners and TV-spectators all around the world, reaching such places as Hong Kong and Mexico. The number of World Championship quests in Lahti was more than 450 000. Sports sponsoring was well visible. This time there were 30 countries participating.

Skiing competition were now organized in two different styles: traditional style and free style. Finland achieved total of 15 medals, its team of women being especially successful. Ski jumping competition predicted change in style: Jan Boklöv from Sweden jumped with V-style, which however was yet regarded as a stylistic fault.

2001

For the Nordic World Ski Championships 2001 the Ski Stadium has undergone the following renovations: the profile of the greatest ski jump has been modified, its critical point has been changed from 114 meters to 118 meters, there is a new ski jumping stand, a service building at the Karpalo sports field, and thereto the Ski Museum building has a new extension with restaurant and info-services.

As novelties of the Nordic World Ski Championship Program this year two competitions have been introduced: newly arranged pursuit race and sprint skiing.

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