

Alpine Ski Racing

After the 2010 olympics, Lindsey Vonn is a name that is well known to most people. As the first American woman to win the women's downhill race, Vonn brought a lot of attention to alpine ski racing (Pennington). The sport of alpine racing has developed over many years and has become something that many people are involved in. Today alpine skiing is not only an olympic and professional sport, but also something that is competed at the collegiate and high school level. William Haling was someone who was very passionate and involved in this sport for a long time. "I was the head alpine ski coach at Wausau West for ten years and I was an assistant coach for five years prior to that," Haling said. "It's hard to pick a favorite memory because I have so many good memories: conference titles, girls placing third at state, seeing new skiers advance and improve, and watching teams come together and work towards a common goal. These are all important parts of what I remember as a ski coach." Alpine skiing racing has developed over time and today is a widely practiced sport at many different levels.

Alpine racing has been changing over hundreds of years to develop into what it is today. Ski fragments have been found that have been dated back to 8000-7000 B.C. Back in these times skiing was used as a form of transportation and was a necessary part of life. Downhill skiing finally developed into a sporting activity in the 19th century and the first racing competition was held in Norway in the 1840s (Olympic Sport History). The article *Alpine skiing Equipment and History* also says, "The first national skiing competition in Norway, held in the capital Christiania (now Oslo) and won by Sondre Norheim, in 1868, is regarded as the beginning of a new era of skiing enthusiasm. A few decades later, the sport spread to the remainder of Europe and to the US, where miners held skiing competitions to entertain themselves during the winter.

The first slalom competition was organised by Sir Arnold Lunn in 1922 in Mürren, Switzerland.” After this beginning, alpine skiing continued to become more well known. In 1936 alpine skiing was first in the olympic games for both men and women. This only included the combined competition of downhill and slalom. In the winter olympics of 1948 these were separated, in 1952 giant slalom was added, and in 1988 super giant slalom was added as the fourth and final event (Olympic Sport History). Even today, dynamics of ski racing are still changing. “The biggest change I see today in high school ski racing is that participation numbers are declining. When I was coaching I remained consistent each year with eighteen to twenty skiers on the team depending on the year. Today, I don't think West has ten total racers,” Haling said. “It's unfortunate because I know there are a lot of skiers that attend Wausau West but not many that are interested in ski racing. This is sad because at the end of the day racing will make you a better skier for the rest of your life.” Despite all of these changes, alpine skiing continues to be a sport that is enjoyed by many.

Today, many people at different levels are able to compete through alpine skiing. At the high school level, athletes are able to compete in slalom, giant slalom or super G, all of which require different techniques and equipment (Haling). Collegiate skiing is also competed by both national and international students in the NCAA. This has many benefits which include a competitive field, affordability, a four year tenure, team environment and mental strength (Morgan). This helps many athletes to continue to compete at the professional and olympic level. A very well known olympic athlete is Lindsey Vonn. After competing in four olympic games and winning multiple medals, Vonn retired from skiing in 2019. Vonn has also won 86 World Cup victories which is the most by any woman ever (Pennington). Vonn's success brought a lot

of attention to the sport and has made it more popular at all stages. This popularity has helped the sport develop more into what it is today.

“I really enjoyed helping my athletes improve over the course of the season and ultimately their careers. To have a skier with limited racing experience as a freshman go out and become a conference champion by their senior year is really fun to see and to know that I may have had a small part of that success is very rewarding,” Haling said. “I was fortunate enough to have several of my athletes become these champion skiers over my coaching career.” Having skiers in the Wausau area that have had success in alpine ski racing is also a feat for the community. Alpine skiing is also a sport that has brought many people together and taught many life lessons. Alpine skiing is a sport that everyone should try if they have the chance.

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