

k Day honoured

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Ed Day insists his best race wasn't at the Canadian Cross-Country Ski championships, nor internationally at the world championships or the 1976 Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria.

In his prime, Day won bronze in the men's 50-kilometre race at the Canadian championships held at Tabor Mountain in 1973 where he also helped the men's relay team to bronze.

He stood atop the podium at the 1975 nationals in Burns Lake in the 15km and 30km distances, and also powered the relay team to top spot.

No, despite the hardware he earned on the national cross-country ski courses, Day says his best race was an annual provincial race at Tabor Mountain one New Year's Day.

Some of his competition had remained in Banff to train at altitude for upcoming races.

"I skied the 15km, it was my fastest race of all-time," he said recently of that race at Tabor. "I skied at such a high capacity. The start and finish was below the lodge [at Hickory Wing Ski Club] and I just started at the bottom of the hill and felt nothing could stop me. It was just a provincial race, it wasn't like a B.C. Cup or Canada Cup like there is now."

Day's accolades on his skis, which made him one of the best cross-country skiers in B.C., Canada and the world, have earned him a nod into the latest class of the Prince George Sports Hall of Fame.

He'll be inducted under the athlete category in a ceremony tonight at the Hart Community Centre.

Day was born in New Zealand, but grew up in the alpine skiing hotbed of Kimberley, B.C. where he first strapped on a pair of downhill skis.

Day didn't know too much about cross-country skiing, until some older gentlemen in the Kootenay community gave him a pair of skis, showed him some waxing techniques, and took him under their wing, giving him the direction he needed to get into the sport.

During the winter he would downhill ski in the mornings and cross-country ski in the afternoons.

In the summer he mountain biked and was a runner. He would often jog from Kimberley to Cranbrook.

Even in Kimberley, Day had heard about the cross-country training camps Bjorger Pettersen held at Tabor Mountain.

Day attended his first camp in December 1962, when he was 13 years-old. It had a huge impact.

"I stayed with the Pettersens and trained with John [Bjorger's dad]. Bjorger was the guy who got me into cross-country skiing," said Day. "Staying at their place was like going into a shrine [of cross-country skiing]. It was really inspiring."

Throughout his high school years, Day continued to attend the training camps. He even made the trek north over the Christmas holidays while on break as a university student at UBC.

After graduating from UBC, Day and his wife Pat moved to Prince George in 1973, where by that time he was also a member of the national team and was almost always on the medal podium.

In March 1973, as he was completing his education degree, a call came from the national team and was told he'd be competing at the North American championships in Thunder Bay.

He hadn't skied for months and had also arranged funding from the UBC ski team.

"They [the national team] called again and said they had changed their minds," said Day.

"I was being sent to Sapporo, Japan for the Niassma Games and skied on the same Olympic course from 1972."

He only competed in the 15km race in Sapporo.

That was just the beginning of Day competing internationally. He competed at the 1974 Western Canadian championships in Big Sky, Montana; the 1974 world championships in Fallun, Sweden and the pre-Olympics in 1975 in Innsbruck. In 1976, he represented Canada at the Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, the pinnacle of his sport.

"The best in the world were extraordinary, they were in a whole different realm than where I was," said Day. "In Scandinavia, their club racers would kick the Canadian national team, the depth involved was huge."

When he retired from competing internationally, he remained a member of the Hickory Wing Ski Club and served as a coach and club executive.

While he never competed in biathlon, Day is credited with getting the sport off the ground in 1982, first at the original shooting range at Tabor Mountain and then at the first range at Orway Nordic Centre.

He also served as acting/interim chair for Biathlon B.C.

It's a special ceremony tonight for Day, as he'll be entering the Prince George Sports Hall of Fame at the same time alongside his former coaches and mentors John and Bjorger Pettersen, and his friend Dave Wood (cross-country skiing).