

UNITED STATES BIATHLON ASSOCIATION

PETER LAHDENPERA

HALL OF FAME

Peter Lahdenpera was connected to biathlon from the beginning. He came from Finland to the United States in 1948 as a 12-year-old. His family joined his father who preceded them after escaping capture by Soviet authorities for his role in the Weapons Cache Case following the Winter Wars of 1939 and 1944. Like many of the 40 other Finnish officers involved, his father Colonel Erkki Lahdenpera joined the U.S. Army and was sent to Camp Hale, Colorado to train and evaluate the 10th Mountain Division. He often used Peter to demonstrate proper cross-country technique and initiated ski races among the troops that essentially led to the first organized biathlon race held in the United States in 1956.



After high school graduation from Fitchburg High School in Massachusetts, Peter attended Middlebury College and as a member of the ski team he won 6 straight Eastern ski carnivals. Graduating in 1959, he became an officer in the U.S. Army and joined the list of Middlebury alumni who became Olympians. He competed in the cross-country races at Squaw Valley, but actually, he had been selected for both the cross-country and biathlon teams but was forced to choose between the two. Seeing the potential for multiple cross-country ski races at Squaw Valley rather than the single biathlon race, he chose cross-country. Following the 1960 Olympic Games the U.S. Army assigned him to the U.S. Army's Modern Winter Biathlon Training Center in Alaska. As a member of this exceptional group of soldiers, he participated in the 1961 and 1962 World Biathlon Championships and achieved remarkable results in Scandinavian competitions during the period. In 1964 he again achieved the unique qualification for both the cross-country and biathlon teams for the Innsbrück Olympic Games. After time away from the sport while establishing a sports retail and importing businesses, he came back in 1972 to qualify for his fifth Olympic team at his third Olympic Games at Sapporo, Japan.

Following the closure of the army's biathlon training center the biathlon team faced difficult financial shortages in 1974. Peter came to the rescue by supplying the team with uniforms and other equipment and later served as the Team Leader from 1975 through 1982. He also became the Vice President for Biathlon within the U.S. Modern Pentathlon and Biathlon Association and was a leader in establishing greater support for athletes and headed the committee that studied and recommended the separation of the two sports and establishment of the independent U.S. Biathlon Association. For his athletic achievements and his leadership Peter is welcomed as a member of the U.S. Biathlon Association's Hall of Fame for 2019.