

UNITED STATES BIATHLON ASSOCIATION

HALL OF FAME

SVEN JOHANSON

In 1961 Sven Johanson was named the coach of the U.S. Army's Modern Winter Biathlon Training Center at Ft. Richardson, near Anchorage, Alaska. At the age of 37, he had been skiing since his childhood in his native Sweden. One of 11 children, he was born on a family farm in Neder-Kalix, he immigrated to the U.S. in 1951 and settled in Anchorage. Before leaving Sweden Sven had established an impressive record of athletic success in multiple sports, including a 4th place finish in the Swedish biathlon championships in 1945 and had been the Swedish National cross-country ski junior champion. He was also successful in other sports, holding Sweden's national records for three sports, bicycling, running and speed skating. Those included the 10,000m distance for athletics, the 50km and 100km cycling distances and the 10,000m speed skating distance.



Sven Johanson was the long-time coach for the U.S. Army's biathlon team.

Once settled in Alaska, he continued his athletic success by winning the national cross-country ski championships twice and won many other events. He set a record for the Donner Memorial race, the longest ski race at the time, and retired the perpetual trophy for the John Craig Memorial race in Oregon with three consecutive wins and the Stowe trophy in Vermont with two titles. In 1958 he qualified for the FIS ski championships and was selected for the U.S. Olympic teams in 1956 and 1960, however due to citizenship issues, he was not allowed to participate in 1956. In Alaska he is probably best known as a 6-time winner the famed Mount Marathon race.

His competitive career in multiple sports, a graduate of the Swedish Institute of Physical Fitness and service as a lieutenant in the Swedish army, performing duty with ski troops on border patrol had well prepared him for his role as the coach of the U.S. Army's biathlon team. He served in that role from 1961 to 1973, with many of those skiers going on to great athletic careers both as skiers and coaches. He was the coach for the 1964 and 1968 Olympic teams as well as every World Biathlon Championships and CISM teams during that period.

He became somewhat of a legend in Alaska and within the biathlon community. Innovative, he implemented track grooming, introduced new training methods and testing, built saunas at Hatcher Pass and inspired athletes to new levels of performance. Sven Johansen was the first Alaskan named to the U.S. Ski Hall of Fame and every year on his November 24th birthday he would ski his age in kilometers, typically at Hatcher Pass. It would have been 52 kilometers in 1976 but Sven tragically died that September in an industrial accident.