

# Truckee's Rahlves to join hall of fame

By Tom Kelly, USSA

Sun Valley, Idaho – In a competitive career spanning two decades, Truckee's Daron Rahlves has his share of medals and trophies. A super G World Championship in 2001. Hahnenkamm champion in 2004. Two medals at 2005 Worlds. 12 World Cup victories. The 2008 X Games skicross gold. Saturday, Rahlves will be honored with induction into the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame at a ceremony in Sun Valley.

Pointing his Atomic skis downhill at 85 mph was just one phase of Rahlves' career. Ski racer? Yes. But, first and foremost, a skier. "I don't want people to look back on my history and say 'man that guy was a good ski racer,' said Rahlves. "I want people to know me as a skier who loves skiing. Staying active and influential in the ski world is really important to me."

It's fitting that among the group of six Hall of Fame inductees are two more of skiing's greatest names – Glen Plake and the late Shane McConkey. Plake is a former freestyle skier turned skiing ambassador whose trademark Mohawk hairdo is known to every skier young and old. McConkey was one of the sport's most daring skiers, literally defining a generation of extreme skiers before his tragic death in a 2008 skiing accident.

"Everyone grew up watching Glen Plake," said Rahlves. "For the last 20 years, he's been the most iconic guy in the ski world. He's done a lot for our sport in terms of recognition. It helps to have a two-foot Mohawk. But it's also about his smile and that signature cackle."

Rahlves and Plake caught up at a ski event earlier this winter and joked about their induction. "He said he didn't think he

was going to accept it because he's not done skiing," laughed Rahlves. "I told him you don't have to hang it up to be in the Hall. Besides Plake's never going to hang it up and neither will I."

Plake, McConkey and Rahlves all grew up skiing Tahoe. Each drew inspiration from the others.

"Shane, he's done some amazing things," said Rahlves. "Before my first World Cup win, I was skiing with Shane in Tahoe the day before I left for Norway. He opened my eyes to a whole new way of being creative on the mountain. I was always into going fast and doing bigger lines. But he was just really technical and always having fun. I have to attribute some of the feeling I have for that win in Norway to Shane. After ripping with him, I just took that fun into ski racing."

That March, 2000 weekend in Norway, Rahlves swept to a pair of wins on the same course that brought Tommy Moe Olympic gold fame six years earlier in Kvitfjell.

"Daron had a passion for skiing that was unlike any other World Cup racer," said former U.S. Ski Team Coach Phil McNichol, who was with Rahlves during the pinnacle of his racing career. "A lot comes from his lineage of being a Tahoe skier growing up with Glen and Shane. He just had this intense passion whether skiing the Mousefalle or skipping a rest day to hit some powder."

McNichols shared a story of the U.S. Championship downhill at Squaw Valley being canceled due to new snow. "Daron was out there inspecting in downhill skis with racing bindings when it was called. He didn't waste a minute getting to the powder – didn't even take time to change skis. He caught massive air off this jump, the skis didn't release and he threw out his hip."

Today, from his home base in Truckee, CA where he lives with wife Michelle and their twin boys, Rahlves globetrots to

powder fields and innovative ski events. It's a big change from the five-month grind of the World Cup circuit where for a decade he was best in the world.

In 2001 at St. Anton, Austria, Rahlves literally silenced the crowd of 25,000+ Austrians with his unprecedented win in the World Championship super G. It was an event that Austria totally owned. Until that day. Three years later, after he had won over many Austrian fans, he did the unthinkable, winning the fabled Hahnenkamm. From 2000 to 2006, Rahlves won a dozen World Cups. He took three wins in Kvitfjell plus wins on the classic courses in Kitzbuehel, Bormio and Wengen. But winning at home in Beaver Creek on the Birds of Prey – well, that was very special.

“Every win was cool, but the highlights are definitely the first World Championship, Kitzbuehel, Wengen and especially Beaver Creek,” he reminisced. “Birds of Prey is just a big deal for me. I skied so many years there and then it was time to just start winning on home turf. To get two wins there and also be on the podium a number of times is such a good feeling.”

Not only did Rahlves dominate on the Birds of Prey, he did so together with teammate Bode Miller. Over four Decembers from 2003-2006, Rahlves or Miller won every year, often with the other right behind in second place. It was the most dominating period in U.S. men's downhill history.

“That was a very special time in history,” said McNichol. “When we walked into Kitz or Beaver Creek, we did it with our heads held high. We were proud!”

“There's a special feeling that goes along with winning a big event in Europe,” said Rahlves. “Whether it's a World Championship or Kitz or the Lauberhorn, they all carry a magic that can't be described.

“But I'm also really proud of what I've been able to do after

my ski racing career – winning the X Games for skicross, going to the Olympics in a completely different sport.”

Rahlves is a part of one of the most prestigious classes in Hall of Fame history. In addition to Plake and McConkey, he is joined by the legendary ski racer Bobby Cochran, Paralympic medalist Muffy Davis and Sun Valley and Snowbasin resort owner Earl Holding. The six will be honored Saturday evening at the Sun Valley Inn.

The U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame is located in Ishpeming, MI – the birthplace of organized skiing in America in 1905. The Hall has recognized nearly 400 athletes and sport builders since 1956. The annual induction rotates around to America’s greatest resorts, including Sun Valley which is celebrating its 75th anniversary.

“This is definitely a big honor and something I’m proud of,” said Rahlves. “But to be among this list of names makes it even more special.”