

# Opinion: South Shore Olympians add to area's history

By Garry Bowen

As we near our celebration of our local Olympic triumph in honor of the glorious efforts of our three Olympians, I thought it might merit a look at Lake Tahoe's ski legacy over the decades, as its significance is now enhanced, to say the least.

Back in the mid-1950s, with the announcement of the Olympics coming to Squaw Valley, the country said, "Where is that?" It's by Lake Tahoe. "OK, where's that?" That's by Reno. " Oh, you mean the divorce capital of the U.S.?"

In short, the 1960 Olympics really did a lot to put this area on the map, particularly since the Squaw Olympics was the first to be televised around the world, though not in living color.



Garry Bowen

After those Olympics, Lake Tahoe had a relatively strong international ski presence, with many notables hanging out here for various events. And we have had our share of local notables, recognition on the international stage of the FIS (Federale Internationale du Ski), and even our own Heaven(ly)

ski joke.

Those were the days of Squaw's Tamara McKinney and Jimmy Heuga, Billy Kidd, Bill Marolt, Bob Beattie; all from elsewhere but who hung out here. A number of those went on to keep their presence in the ski world (Bill Marolt, for example, is part of the U.S. Olympic Committee and president of the U.S. Ski & Snowboard Association; Bob Beattie became the voice of skiing for ABC's "Wide World of Sports"). But some were not so fortunate: Jimmy Heuga, who along with Steamboat Springs Billy Kidd, won the Olympic bronze to Kidd's Olympic silver in the 1964 Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria, suffered the cruel indignity of multiple sclerosis.

As a true Olympic champion Heuga dignified his condition with his long-fought advocacy for the benefit of all MS patients.

Our own closer-to-home celebrity from that era, Vladimir "Spider" Sabich (his dad was the CHP lieutenant at Kyburz) was the victim of a fatal celebrity shooting in 1976 a number of years after winning the World Cup in 1968 here. The traumatic loss of Sabich was especially heart-breaking for me, as I used to ride the school bus everyday to Placerville (El Dorado High) with he and his older sister, Mary (his younger brother, Pinky, was much younger) – an hour and a half round trip journey with a good friend. And the end of many, many escapades on the slopes, at parties, here and in Aspen Highlands.

The World Cup that Sabich won was right here at Heavenly – and was the source of national TV exposure through Beattie and the "Wide World of Sports" – that, plus the FIS event ceremony dinner at Harrah's South Shore Room, where we were treated to our own Heaven(ly) joke at the expense of a skiing legend.

Told at the World Cup dinner ceremonies at the conclusion of the World Cup: "It seems a long-term, fanatic skier died and ended up at the pearly gates: upon arrival, he's greeted by

St. Joseph, who welcomes him by suggesting a tour of the facilities. He's promptly shown the brand new sparkling 40-lane bowling alley (open-all-the-time!), then shown the spectacular 27-hole golf course (with no sand traps). Then, as they start off for yet another place, the newcomer stops him, and asks, 'Hey, what about me? You know I've been a life-long skier, don't you have something here for me?' At which point St. Joseph takes him a distance where he tells him of 'the thousands of feet of vertical drop, the several ridges and cornices where he can leap 60-80-100 feet through the air to his heart's content, the lifts that can take he and five others in speedy fashion up the slopes for an unbelievable number of runs, etc., etc.' – when suddenly they are both interrupted by this sleek figure in perfect form, zooming by exceptionally fast, incredibly dressed. And the newcomer turns and says, 'Wow! That guy was great, that must have been Stein Erickson!' To which St. Joseph responds, 'No, that was God! But he thinks he's Stein Erickson.'"

The Lake Tahoe region has a long and strong history in the ski world, and I'll add yet another local dimension. We also had, for instance, Greg Dorland as the U.S. National Junior Ski champion, Wally Rothgeb Jr. on the U.S. Ski Team (his mom and dad ran Heavenly Valley in the 1960s), and even Julia's dad, Ciro Mancuso, as part of the South Shore contingent.

After this quick review of those before them, Lake Tahoe's long-time ski connections are now greatly enhanced by the three young ladies that will be honored this week: Jamie Anderson, Maddie Bowman and Hannah Teter.

Having surpassed all of whatever any expectations there might have been and have outdone and added to all previous accomplishments and skills of those who came before, which, knowing most of them as I do, would most probably be a thrill to them all, it is a great honor to add all of them to Tahoe's history.

Thanks for all your dedicated work and for bringing this prestige and recognition back home. Welcome!

You've outdone them all.

*Garry Bowen has a 50-year connection to the South Shore, with an immediate past devoted to global sustainability, on most of its current fronts: green building, energy and water efficiencies, and public health. He may be reached at [tahoefuture@gmail.com](mailto:tahoefuture@gmail.com) or (775) 690.6900.*