

Beattie is flanked by men's head coach Sasha Rearick and current team member Marco Sullivan in Kitzbuehel. Beattie has been to nearly every Hahnenkamm in the last 50 years.



## The Man Behind the Medals

As head coach of the U.S. Ski Team from 1961-1969, Bob Beattie paved the way for the current success of American ski racing BY BRIAN PINELLI

**CONSIDERING THE BRILLIANT** performances and record-breaking, nation-leading medal haul by U.S. skiers last month in Vancouver, it's impossible not to feel a strong sense of pride and satisfaction as a fan of American snow sports. The nordic combined team wowed everyone while Bode inspired, Lindsey lived up to expectations, Julia jammed and Andrew achieved — not to mention the amazing medals by freestyle and aerials athletes. Feeding off the vibe, younger members of the team also exceeded potential.

However, if it weren't for Bob Beattie and his immeasurable contributions and commitment to American ski racing in the late 50s and 60s, those multiple medals in Vancouver and Whistler might not have been possible.

Beattie will forever be known as the first coach of the U.S. Ski Team to

lead American men to Olympic alpine medals after Billy Kidd and Jimmie Heuga respectively won silver and bronze in 1964 at Innsbruck. At the time Kidd and Heuga were both just 20.

Affectionately referred to as "The Coach" over the years, Beattie spoke about the early days of the U.S. Ski Team during an interview in Kitzbuehel, Austria, in January.

"In 1962, I came to Kitzbuehel for the first time with Kidd, Heuga, and Billy Marolt," said Beattie while sitting in Kitzbuehel's brand new, state-of-the-art press center. "They were all 18 when we first came to Europe and we had a great time. I'm 10 years older than they are so I'll always remember their ages."

Beattie continued. "I've been here almost every year since then, it's over



40 years now, almost 50 staying in the same hotel and almost the same hotel room as a matter of fact," said Beattie. "It has become quite a tradition to come here every year."

After guiding the University of Colorado to NCAA titles in 1958 and 1959, he was named Head Alpine Coach of the United States Ski Team in 1961. The highly energetic and enthusiastic Beattie immediately wanted to make an impact and change European perceptions towards American ski racing.

"That first year, Chuck Ferries won the slalom and we thought it was very easy then," recalled Beattie. "He's been the only American to win the slalom here ever since then."

"His name is on gondola 70, going up the lift tower," continued Beattie, regarding the Kitzbuehel tradition of inscribing the names of race winners on the Hahnenkammbahn gondolas. "The year they put the names on, there was a party at the Kitzbuehel Ski Club and they told me that night they had put the names on the gondolas. I had stood out in the rain the night before to see if they had done that and said 'No, you haven't, you haven't put Chuck Ferries' name on.' And they said, 'Oh, haven't we? Well we will,' and of course they did."

Taking over the helm of the team in 1961, Beattie saw enormous potential, inspired by the accomplishments of America's first great ski racer, Buddy Werner. In an era dominated by the Austrians, French and Swiss, Werner was proof to Beattie that more Americans could contend against their European counterparts.

"Buddy won here in 1959 — I had never been to Europe at that time and there was no U.S. Ski Team then," recalled Beattie. "He was better known in Europe than in the United States, very famous there."

Without teammates or a support staff, Werner trained and skied regularly with the Europeans. Throughout the mid and late-50s he had won a string of international races.

"They tested skis and Buddy had an unbelievable way of being fast," said Beattie. "They'd wax skis and he was faster than all the Austrians, then they'd switch skis and he would still be faster. They could never understand that."

Werner became the first non-European to win the famed Hahnenkamm downhill, shockingly defeating the Austrians at the age of 22. It was also the first year that live coverage of the race was broadcast on Austrian television adding to the aura of the American racer.

"Winning in '59 was great," said Beattie. "He is the only American to win the downhill from the top and that was really amazing."

In the mid-sixties, it was also Beattie's foresight along with French journalist, Serge Lang and French Team director Honoré Bonne to connect a series of international ski races in Europe and the United States to determine the world's best. In January 1966, details were finalized in Kitzbuehel and that following winter the World Cup was born.

That inaugural season, France's Jean-Claude Killy dominated, easily capturing the overall title. With Billy Kidd missing the season due to injuries, Beattie's other star competitor, Heuga, was second at races in Franconia, Vail and Jackson Hole, finishing third in the season's giant slalom standings.

Throughout the 60s, America's ski racing trio seemed inseparable.

"Bob thought the more ski runs you did the better you got," said Billy Kidd, many years ago during an interview with *People* magazine. "His ideas didn't always coincide with mine." But Kidd added that Beattie's toughness provided a key element to the U.S. squad, "Motivation — Bob could really get you charged up."

Four years after the Americans' first-ever Olympic alpine medals in Inns-

bruck, expectations were high in the lead-up to the 1968 Grenoble Games. Beattie's super duo of Kidd and Heuga was pictured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in early February just before the start of the Olympics.

But unlike Lindsey Vonn, the U.S. skiers failed to live up to the hype and walked away from the French Olympics without a medal. Beattie stepped down from his position as head coach in 1969.

Good-looking and gregarious, Beattie would embark on a 31-year broadcasting career with ABC Sports and, later, ESPN, continuing his contributions to the sport.

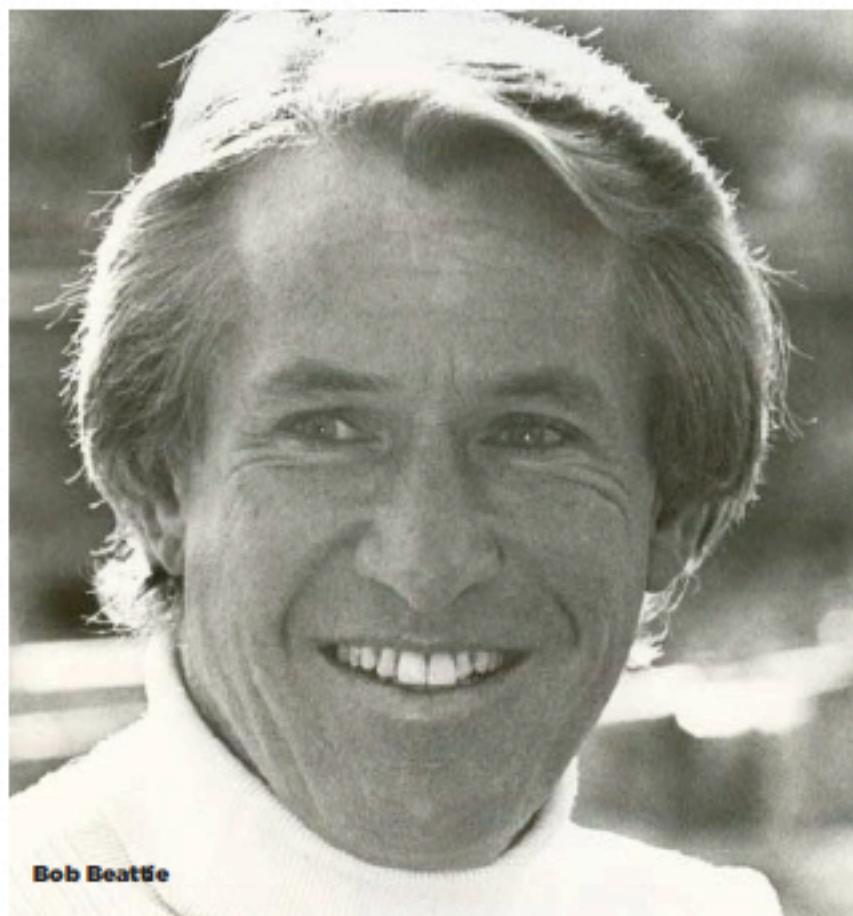
Now 77, Beattie has called Colorado home for many years. Raised in Manchester, N.H., Beattie graduated from Vermont's Middlebury College in 1955. After graduation, he became coach of his alma mater's ski team, quickly leading them to a third-place showing at Nationals. The following season he moved west to take over the University of Colorado program where he continued his coaching success. Beattie has written three books about the sport and in 1984 was inducted into the National Ski Hall of Fame. These days he still works with the Colorado Ski Museum among other organizations.

"I can't ski anymore because my leg is really bad, from a freak accident," he said. "But my wife skis everyday. If she didn't ski everyday, I'd be in a much warmer climate."

While Beattie doesn't make it to too many races these days, he is still one of the most ardent supporters of the team he passionately began coaching in 1961. At home in Aspen, he was overjoyed and emotional when Lindsey Vonn won her first Olympic gold and Julia Mancuso silver in the women's downhill at Whistler.

"I never thought I'd see anything like this, not only first and second, but way out in front," Beattie told the *New York Daily News* during a phone interview that day. "Lindsey being way out there with her injury. We all knew she's tougher than hell, but Mancuso coming right in there too — every time I think about it I well up in tears." **SR**

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Bob Beattie