

U.S. Junior Olympics

A Great Opportunity for SWSA

By Larry Stone

Salisbury Jumper, Lake Placid and Olympic Coach

U.S. Nordic Skiing has seen its share of internationally acclaimed athletes, such as Bill Koch, Jay Rand, and our own Roy Sherwood. Add to that roster Bill Demong, who is going to the Vancouver Games as one of the favorites in Nordic Combined. These athletes all got their start in local development programs in towns like Lake Placid, New York, Brattleboro and Putney, Vermont, and Salisbury. Demong, who was here in the late 1990s, is among those who have competed on the Satre hill. He and the others didn't become stars without putting in time and effort at these regional clubs.

Since ski jumping was dropped from the National Collegiate program in the early '80s, the age level at which these athletes had to develop their skills has become much younger in order to progress up the pipeline towards the International level. One of the pivotal points of this development cycle is the Junior Olympics, which serves as the U.S. Junior National Championships. It is geared towards athletes age 17 and younger, and is the first National level competition these athletes face as they make their way up the ladder.

For many years these championships were held in ski centers that have larger jumps, such as Lake Placid, Steamboat Springs and Park City, but too often the Junior Olympics were held on hills that were above the comfort and skill levels for the J-2 skiers. So a few years ago, the competition was

divided into two categories: the Junior Olympics and the North American Championships. Creation of the Junior Olympics has opened national competition to sites like Salisbury (as well as those in Anchorage, Alaska, Lebanon, New Hampshire, and Coleraine, Minnesota,) which have a hill size (K-50-65) more appropriate to the younger group of athletes. The opportunity—for both athletes and organizing committees—to expose their programs to higher levels of competition can generate much needed excitement and enthusiasm for all the ski sports, but in particular for ski jumping and Nordic combined.

The United States has a lack of good hills in the K-65 meter range (200 feet), a key size for young jumpers learning to fly. Salisbury thus finds itself poised to once again become a factor at the national level. This will be particularly true of a Salisbury jump redesigned to modern specifications and suited to fostering correct modern techniques.

The redesign and rebuilding of Salisbury's hill is a tremendous commitment by a regional club with a long Nordic tradition. It will have beneficial repercussions on a national level and give a needed boost to ski jumping in the U.S. It will also enable the great fan base of spectators in Salisbury to see the best young ski jumpers in the country come to Satre Hill and show what they are made of. I'm sure the Satre Brothers would be as proud as the rest of us to see Salisbury make such an important contribution to Nordic skiing in this country.



Photo by Jon Capecelatro

Peter Frenette, overall winner at Salisbury in 2009, will represent the United States at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics.

It Takes a Village ...

Photos by Ian Johnson, Mark LaMonica and Jon Capecelatro

