

## HISTORY OF BIATHLON

### 1.1.1 Ancient History and Early Development

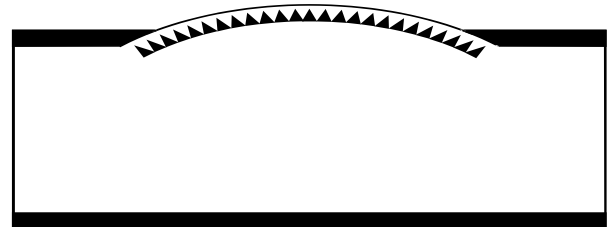
The word *biathlon* is of Greek origin and means "two tests". The combination of skiing and shooting used in the sport today is founded on a tradition of hunting, stemming back over four thousand years. Petroglyphs found in Norway depict hunters, with spears, traveling on skis in pursuit of game. Written descriptions of hunting on skis can be traced back to 400 B.C. and the Roman poet, Virgil. "Biathlon's" military uses have been subsequently noted by generals, writers, geographers, and historians such as Xenophon, Strabol, Arrian, Theophanes, Prokopius, and Acruni who described battles of warriors equipped with skis. Gradually, the techniques needed for survival and combat, developed into contests of skill. What could have been a more natural competition between the hunters in the Scandinavian forests, than that of marksmanship and cross-country skiing?

The first recorded biathlon race was organized near the border between Sweden and Norway in 1767 but regular competitions did not take hold until the early twentieth century. As training for defense purposes, biathlon grew in popularity among military units, especially in Scandinavia. Known as the "military patrol", it was contested at the first Olympic Winter Games, at Chamonix, France, in 1924. The sport remained on the Olympic program until 1948, when post-war sentiments caused it to be dropped.

### 1.1.2 International History

During the 1950's, Swedish members of the *Union Internationale Pentathlon Modern* (UIPM) advanced the cause of biathlon. At the meeting of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) held in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1957, the UIPM presented a motion concerning the introduction of "Individual Biathlon" as an official event in the Olympic Winter Games. The motion was approved and ratified one year later at the IOC meeting in Tokyo, Japan. Thus, biathlon was re-introduced to the Olympics at Squaw Valley, U.S.A. in 1960 and has remained ever since. The first Olympic gold medal for an individual biathlon race was presented to Klas Lestander (SWE).

The first World Championships for men were held in 1958 at Saalfelden, Austria, under the auspices of the UIPMB (*Union Internationale Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon*). It was an individual 20 km event using full-bore rifles. Five shots were taken from each of four shooting ramps with target distances of 100 m (standing), 150 m, 200 m, and 250 m (prone). For each miss, a 2 minute penalty was added to the skiing time. Later, the shooting distances were standardized to 150 m for both prone and standing. The penalty system was also changed so that there was a non-penalty bulls-eye (125 mm for prone, 350 mm for standing), a one-minute penalty zone to a diameter of 250 mm for prone and 450 mm for standing, and a two-minute penalty zone beyond these diameters. Little changed in the 20 km individual event until the



introduction of the small bore rifle.

In 1972, the UIPMB decided to change the calibre of rifles used at the World Junior Championships, in order to gain experience with new rules. The reasons for the change included the high cost of ammunition, the size and power of the rifles, noise and safety issues, and the difficulty in obtaining gun licenses. In 1976, at the Biathlon Congress in Seefeld, Austria, a proposal for the official introduction of the small bore, .22 calibre rifle was approved. Two years later in Hochfilzen, Austria, the small bore rifles were used for the first time in World Championships, a development that dramatically changed the sport of biathlon. As a consequence, the acceptance and popularity of biathlon grew rapidly. World Championships in 1978 doubled in size to 28 participating nations and that same year, a 5-stop World Cup tour was established for senior men. In 1997, the IBU added the Pursuit and Mass Start competitions to the World Cup schedule. The Pursuit would be first added to the Olympic Program in 2002 (Salt Lake City, USA) and the Mass Start was first seen at the Olympic Games in 2006 (Torino, ITA). Currently, the International Biathlon Union (IBU) boasts 65 member nations from five continents. There are over 30 nations competing in the nine-event World Cup tour and more than forty attend World Championships and the Olympic Winter Games.

### 1.1.3 Women in Biathlon

Following the change to small bore rifles, interest in biathlon among women and girls began to rise. By 1982, the European Cup was established for women. This competitive tour followed the Men's World Cup throughout Europe. In 1986, by which time competitors from 3 continents had joined the tour, the events were elevated to the status of World Cups. Today, 120 women from 39 countries vie for the coveted title of World Cup Champion.

World Championships for women was inaugurated in 1984 as part of the World Junior Championships for men. Not until 1989 did women gain their rightful place at the combined men's and women's World Championships. That year, the World Junior Championships were opened for the first time to junior women. Despite the number of female competitors, the International Olympic Committee did not include women in the Olympic Winter Games biathlon program until 1992! In Albertville, France, the first Olympic gold medals for women's biathlon were presented to Antje Misersky (GER) in the Individual event and Anfissa Retzova (RUS) in the Sprint.

### 1.1.4 Canadian History and Achievements

In Canada, the sport of biathlon began under the auspices of the Canadian Armed Forces. In 1968, represented by an all-military team at Grenoble, France, Canada participated for the first time in an Olympic biathlon competition. Unfortunately, the sport declined in popularity. National championships, which had been held throughout the 1960's, were abandoned. It was not until 1978 and the rule changes regarding rifle calibre that biathlon enjoyed a resurgence in Canada. Under the auspices of the Biathlon Discipline of the Canadian Ski Association (which became incorporated independently as Biathlon Canada in 1985) Canadian Championships began being staged again and have included women since 1980.

One of the mandates of the national organization is to develop a national team and prepare them

for international competition. Canada began sending teams to compete at the world level in 1982. By the end of the decade our athletes were beginning to post excellent results. In 1986, Lise Meloche (ONT) achieved four top-10 placings in World Cup and World Championship events and Charles Plamondon (QUE) was the first Canadian man to place in the top 20 at World Championships. Some of the other athletes showing flashes of brilliance were Kristin Berg (AB), Tony Fiala (BC), Jane Isakson (AB), Ken Karpov (AB), Nikki Keddie (ONT), Kevin Quintillio (AB), Glenn Rupurtus (AB), Jean Paquet (PQ), Paget Stewart (MAN), and Yvonne Visser (AB). Beginning in the 1990's, the world sat up and took notice of the Canadian biathletes with the 8<sup>th</sup> place finish by Steve Cyr (PQ) in the Olympic Sprint event in Albertville, France in 1992. However, one Canadian name stands above all others - Myriam Bédard.

Born in December, 1969, Myriam began biathlon in the mid-1980's as a cadet. She excelled at the sport and joined the national team in 1989 when she placed 4th at the World Junior Championships held in Chamonix, France. She went on to win Canada's first ever World Cup medal, placing 2nd in Walchsee, Austria in 1990. Myriam continued to storm the world rankings and finished second overall in World Cup points in 1991-92. Demonstrating the depth of her ability, not only has Myriam repeated this feat, she also won an Olympic bronze medal in 1992 at Albertville, France. Thanks to a young biathlete from Loretteville, Quebec, Canada had won its very first Olympic medal in Nordic competitions. Amazingly, the best was yet to come. In 1992-93, Myriam won a string of World Cup medals, finishing 2nd overall, and she won two medals at the World Championships in Borovetz, Bulgaria, including the gold medal in the 7.5 km sprint. However, 1994 proved to be her crowning glory and a year we will never forget in Canada. On February 18th, at the Olympic Winter Games in Lillehammer, Norway, Myriam Bédard won the gold medal for Canada in the 15 km individual event! Five days later, she struck gold a second time to accomplish what has never been achieved by any Canadian woman. Myriam had won two gold medals at one Olympic Games! For her spectacular results, Myriam was named Canada's female Athlete of the Year for 1994 and has been inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame.

For the period between Lillehammer and Nagano Biathlon Canada went through a rebuilding phase. Myriam Bédard (QC), Nikki Keddie (AB), Steve Cyr (QC), Kevin Quintillio (AB), and Michelle Collard competed at the 1998 Olympic Winter Games but unfortunately Canada wasn't able to field a relay team.

Unfortunately things got even worse four years later for the Salt Lake City Olympics where Robin Clegg (ON) was the only Canadian in attendance. Robin was able to capitalize on the opportunity and he posted the best Olympic result in 8 years with his 28<sup>th</sup> position in the 20km Individual event.

Fortunes began to rise going into the 2006 Torino Olympics. Canada qualified a full women's team and sent three men. Veterans Robin Clegg (ON) and David Leoni (AB) were joined by then junior Jean Philippe Le Guellec (QC) who had just won a third place at the 2006 World Junior Championships. The women's team was lead by Zina Kocher (AB) with a 27<sup>th</sup> in the 15km Individual, plus Sandra Keith (AB), Martine Albert (QC), and Marie-Pierre Parent (QC).

Following the 2006 season Canadian Biathletes began flexing their muscle on the international stage. Zina picked up a third place and multiple top 10 finishes on the World Cup. Sandra,

Robin, and Jean-Philippe all posted their own top 10 results. Expectations were high going into the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games with Canada's Own The Podium Program identifying both Zina and Jean-Philippe as potential medal winners. Jean Philippe was able to come the closest with a 6<sup>th</sup> place in the Sprint and two more results in the top 13. He was joined by Robin Clegg (ON), Brendan Green (NT), and Marc-André Bédard (QC) for a Canadian best-ever 10<sup>th</sup> place relay result. On the women's side Zina was joined by Megan Tandy (BC), Megan Imrie (MB), and Rosanna Crawford (AB).

Since the 2010 Olympic Games, six athletes have been able to win individual medals at the World Youth and Junior Championships. These include Kurtis Wenzel (AB), Yolaine Oddou (QC), Aurdrey Vaillancourt (QC), Rose-Marie Côté (QC) Sarah Beaudry (BC), and Julia Ransom (BC). Jean Philippe Le Guellec (QC) continued to have success on the international stage with a gold medal in the Men's 10k sprint at the World Cup in Ostersund, Sweden in 2012.

The 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi produced very strong results for Canadian biathletes. The team consisted of Jean Philippe Le Guellec (QC), Nathan Smith (AB), Scott Perras (SK), and Brendan Green (NT) on the men's side. The women's side the team consisted of Rosanna Crawford (AB), Zina Kocher (AB), Megan Imrie (MB) and Megan Heinicke (BC). Jean Philippe Le Guellec placed 5<sup>th</sup> in the Sprint and 10<sup>th</sup> in the Mass Start. Nathan Smith had an 11<sup>th</sup> place finish in the Pursuit. Brendan Green placed 9<sup>th</sup> in the Mass Start. Canada had both men and women (Le Guellec, Smith and Megan Imrie) in the Mass Start for the first time at the Olympic Games. The future continues to look bright for biathlon in Canada with more international success on the horizon for 2018 and beyond.