

ERNIE LENNIE

Nation: Sahtu
Birth: December 20, 1953
Birthplace: Aklavik, Northwest Territories
Sport: Cross-Country Skiing
Competitions: 1976 Olympic Winter Games, Innsbruck, Austria

Career Highlights

- 1976, Innsbruck Olympic Winter Games, 4 x 10-km relay, ranked 12th, Canada's best-ever showing
- 1976, Innsbruck, 50 km classic, ranked 41st
- 1976, Innsbruck Olympic Winter Games, 15 km classic, ranked 67th
- 1976 Canadian cross-country ski championships, 50 km, silver medalist (2:44:58)
- 1971, Manitoba 1971 Canadian Junior Championship, gold medalist

Biography

Ernie Lennie excelled at both school and skiing, but for a time, skiing took precedence. At the age of 18, he qualified for the Sapporo Olympic Winter Games, but was told he was too young to go. It was an enormous disappointment, and he decided to quit skiing.

A month later, the Canadian Ski Association asked Lennie to compete at the American Junior Championships in Vermont. Despite the fact that he hadn't trained for a month, he came third, with first going to future Olympic silver medalist Bill Koch and second going to future four-time Olympian Tim Caldwell.

After he graduated from high school in Inuvik, Lennie went to the University of Alberta for a semester but dropped out to race in Europe, starting off with the Swedish International Ski Games in Falun in 1974. He and teammate Bert Bullock were sent to the World Championships in Russia, and then to the Canadian Senior Championships in Mont Ste. Anne, Quebec. There, he became the youngest skier ever to win the 30 km senior race, and Lennie, Bullock and Rex Cockney won the relay, too. Lennie and Bullock were invited to join Canada's National Ski Team.

After the 1976 Games, Lennie returned to Eastern Canada to train and work, but when preparing to compete for a second Olympic Winter Games became too financially oppressive, he moved back to the north.

Lennie had several jobs before settling into a position in 1980 with the Territorial government, as a native employment counselor. Since that time, he has worked helping Aboriginal organizations develop their communities.

According to former National Team coach Anders Lenes in Sally Manning's book, *Guts and Glory: The Arctic Skiers Who Challenged the World*, results were not really what mattered when it came to the performances of Inuvik's Olympic Games skiers, of which Lennie was a crucial member. "Just think: they were the first generation removed from the land," Lenes said. "Their early years were spent hunting, trapping and fishing. Every day was a struggle for survival. To go from that to the Olympics – well, to me, it is remarkable."

Links:

<http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes/le/ernie-lennie-1.html>