

FRED KELLY

Nation: K'asho Got'ine First Nation
Birth: November 17, 1951
Birthplace: Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories
Sport: Cross-Country Skiing
Competitions: 1970 World Nordic Juniors Championships, Gosau, Austria
1970 FIS World Nordic Ski Championships, Vysoke Tatry, Czechoslovakia
1972 Olympic Winter Games, Sapporo, Japan

Career Highlights

- 1972, Sapporo Olympic Winter Games, 4 x 10-km relay, ranked 13th
- 1972, Sapporo Olympic Winter Games, 15 m classic, ranked 49th
- 1969, All-junior Championship, Sweden, 7.5 km, gold medallist, the first Canadian to win a men's cross-country race in Europe
- 1968 Canadian Junior Championship, gold medallist
- 1968, joined the National Team with eight other skiers from Inuvik
- 1967, Anchorage, Alaska, came first in the junior boys' 10 km at his first meet, finishing a minute faster than the best time in the seniors' meet

Biography

Fred Kelly came from a traditional Dene family based in Fort Good Hope, where hunting, trapping and fishing prowess were essential. Even though he came to high school late, at 16, because he'd spent three years working the traplines, he was a good student.

As a skier who trained with Inuvik's Territorial Experimental Ski Training (TEST) program, Kelly's power and strength were so great that he was quickly nicknamed "the Express." His technique, too, was exemplary.

At his first meet, in Anchorage, Kelly glided to victory in the junior boys' 10 km with a time that beat the senior boys' best.

At his second meet, in Prince George, the 16-year-old Kelly faced off against a 19-year-old Olympic hopeful, Ottawa's Malcolm Hunter, in the junior boys' 10 km and bested him by 19 seconds. The win made him Canada's Junior Champion. The next day, in the relay, he dealt with a wardrobe malfunction that threatened to slow down the team by throwing off his gloves in -34 degree weather. The course was hilly, and Kelly's speed often got close to 60 km an hour. At the end of the race, his hands were so frost-bitten, he had to spend a week in the hospital.

Shortly after competing at the Sapporo Olympic Winter Games, Kelly left the team and returned to Inuvik, where he worked with the TEST program as an assistant coach. His skiing friends in particular were devastated when he died a few years later, from a heart attack. Because of his young age, and his great skill, some felt he had never had the chance to achieve his true potential as a skier.

Bert Bullock, another virtuoso athlete on the Inuvik team, said of Kelly in *Guts And Glory: The Arctic Skiers Who Challenged the World*, "Fred made skiing look effortless. But more than that, he was the gentlest, kindest and most compassionate soul I have ever met, almost holy. A better teammate you couldn't have."