

## **Once a ski jumper, always a ski jumper - ski jumping legend Max Bolkart and the Nordic World Ski Championships 2010 in Oberstdorf**

Former professional ski jumper and Oberstdorf native Max Bolkart follows the World Ski Championships on TV and looks back on his career.

A cosy fireside lounge in Hotel Freiberg in Oberstdorf: Max Bolkart (88) sits on a comfortable bench alongside a table and speaks about his ski jumping career, which he ended in 1965. Many trophies line a large shelf on the wall, a testament to his professional success. There are also some black and white shots on the wall of him in action. As he sits in front of his TV at home during the World Ski Championships, Bolkart will be rooting for Karl Geiger, a ski jumper who is also from Oberstdorf. The 88-year-old considers him the favourite for the title: "When others start to tremble, he keeps his nerve and jumps all the further for it."

Indeed, his trained eye for ski jumping could have helped him get a job as a coach after his career. "It's not that I was never asked. I was offered the position. But the responsibility was too big for me to take the job. After all, in any competition, anything can happen," he says.

### **Respect for the landing, bad marks for posture**

"Personally, I always had respect for the landing. That's why I put myself in a safe position in the air so that I could stand better when I landed. As a result I often got bad marks for my posture as a jumper," says Bolkart, adding with a laugh: "Someone once told me that I would never become Allgäu or Bavarian champion because of the bad marks for my posture."

"Every season, athletes jump further, even if it's only half a metre. The scientific development behind the sport never stands still," he says. As a jumper, there was only one area in which he resisted scientific and technical progress: although there were lifts for athletes back then, he always walked up with his skis on his shoulders. "When I got to the ski jump platform, everyone else was already there and always making some kind of comment," he recalls. He also experimented with his equipment. He recounts with a glint in his eye: "The Finns feared me as an opponent. In those days I got a chunk of paraffin and I finagled a bit. I got up at 2 am and polished my skis until they were smooth as glass." By Friday, he was already testing them out at practice and was thrilled. The comments were quick to follow: "You've got to be careful with Max".

In 1960, Ewald Roscher from Baden-Baden became coach of the German national team. "He was a master painter and at that time we all grumbled about him, his skilled profession and his Central German origins. In the beginning he stopped us from using the heavy jumping skis and said that touring skis were better for jumping. As a result, many people left the team. He reacted and allowed the regular jumping skis again. After all, they provide stability in the air," he explains.

Jumpers have no foothold in the air, especially when there is a lot of wind. In such conditions, even the heavy skis don't help. At that time, wind nets along the ski jump were not yet an available technology. Only once did he carry his skis back down unused. He had been sitting on top of the "thunder box", the beam at the top of the ski jump from which each athlete starts his jump. "We had paid to jump the hill, but it was too dangerous," he says.

Before he started his career as a ski jumper, Max Bolkart always wanted to become a ski racer. He enjoyed jumping over ski jumps even back then. "We built higher and higher jumps. My skis often got broken," he says with a laugh and continues: "My father eventually got me into ski jumping. He was sporty himself and practised floor gymnastics as a hobby. We were sitting up there at Schönblick having lunch, as we often did, on a skiing day together at Söllereck. My father reached into his pocket and gave me money so I could buy ski jumping skis."

### **Four-time German champion and the first West German winner of the Four Hills Tournament**

Bolkart's success was the result of tenacious training with his skis and always trying to make the best out of a jump. He became German ski jumping champion four times. The highlight of his career finally came in 1959/60 when he became the first West German jumper to win the Four Hills Tournament. That was during the Cold War. People were very proud at the time - an athlete from Oberstdorf had beaten East German athlete Helmut Recknagel to the title. Recknagel had previously won the Four Hills Tournament two years in a row. The teams from East Germany, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Poland did not take part in the 1959/60 competition because West Germany did not recognise the East German athletes' flag and prohibited them from competing under it.

### **61 years after Max Bolkart, Karl Geiger was the next to win the opening jump**

After 60 odd years, an Oberstdorfer once again succeeded in winning on his home hill: Oberstdorf native Karl Geiger won the opening jump in Oberstdorf at the 69th Four Hills Tournament.

After Max Bolkart ended his successful career in 1965, he soon lost contact with his former team mates. Ski jumping, however, will always be a part of his life: whether in the form of his trophies, old pictures on the wall or an afternoon in front of the television watching the German national team jump at the World Ski Championships in Oberstdorf.

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