

racers travel to North America each year to be eligible for the elite series. And there were issues with overlapping dates, especially between Finland and America.

New rules, a race calendar (no one wanted to change dates), how many races the Worldloppet elite must attend, limits on enrolment at races in Finlandia and Norway, and whether or not to join with the International Ski Federation (FIS) were hot topics. The challenges of bringing nine individual races together were huge.

Despite these issues, the concept was good and the Worldloppet (then called the World Loppet League) was born in Uppsala on June 10, 1978 to honor the dedication and enthusiasm of a unique new breed of athlete – the citizen skier.

WORLDLOPPET BEGINS

The news release “World Ski Marathon League Formed” composed by Press Secretary Tom Kelly after the founding meeting stated: “More than 50 000 of the world’s most avid citizen cross country skiers will have a new challenge beginning this year. Nine of the most famous ski marathons have joined together to form the World Loppet League.

The foremost purpose of the League is to honor dedicated long distance skiers who, during their lifetime, have completed the courses in all of the official World Loppet League races.

“The second purpose of the League is to keep outstanding cross country racers active after they have retired from national team activities. The skier with the most points from this elite group of racers will be crowned World Loppet League Champion each year.”

“World Loppet League officials are hopeful of bringing in other famous races from additional countries in future years.”

“Citizen skiers attempting to ski all the World Loppet League races will be issued with a special League passport book which certifies their completion of each race. A diploma will be issued to skiers completing all League races. They will then be able to acquire a gold medallion to further commemorate their feat. Medallions will be numbered starting from one, with lowest number carrying a great deal of prestige in future years. ...”

There were two very important decisions made in Uppsala that were to play a key role in the early days of the Worldloppet. First, elite skiers trying to win the Worldloppet title were required to participate in at least one race in North America. Given that the Finlandia and American Birkebeiner were the same weekend, this presented some challenges. Secondly, the requirements for World Loppet Master were to complete all nine events. Again, with the two races on one weekend, there would be no World Loppet Masters in the first year. But there were plenty trying!

1979: THE FIRST SEASON

Wise made many close friends in the year leading up to the 1979 debut of the World Loppet League. Finland’s Risto Rytokoski and his wife Leila were key partners, thanks in a big way to their marketing knowledge and Leila’s English. Another who became a close friend was Dolomitenlauf founder Robert Steiner, a promoter very much like Wise.

So Wise was very proud to be on hand at the January 1979 Dolomitenlauf, along with Kelly, for the first official Worldloppet race. At the pre-race dinner in Hotel Traube in Lienz, Wise honored Steiner and Lienz Mayor Hubert Huber, presenting Steiner with an American Indian headdress.

ADDITIONAL LISTS & STATISTICS

Telemark Meeting Official Attendees, Feb. 23-24, 1978

American Birkebeiner (USA) – Tony Wise, Dick Simono
Birkebeinerrennet (Norway) – Karl Snilsberg, Arne Myhren, Leif Norberg
Dolomitenlauf (Austria) – Robert Steiner
Engadin Skimarathon (Switzerland) – Albert Giger
Finlandia Hiihto – Heikki Salo
FIS – John Lindstrom (USA)
König Ludwig Lauf (West Germany) – Fritz Lang
Marcialonga (Italy) – Giulio Giovannini
Rivière Rouge (Canada) – Steve Cushing
Vasaloppet – Lars-Erik Larsson

Uppsala Meeting Official Attendees, June 10, 1978

American Birkebeiner (USA) – Tony Wise, Dick Simono
Birkebeinerrennet (Norway) – Did not attend
Dolomitenlauf (Austria) – Robert Steiner, Karl Obernosterer
Engadin Skimarathon (Switzerland) – Domeng Giovannoli
Finlandia Hiihto – Kurt Lindholm, Risto Rytökoski, Leila Vuotila-Rytökoski
König Ludwig Lauf (West Germany) – Hans Reicherl, Franz Aurhammer
Marcialonga (Italy) – Giulio Giovannini
Rivière Rouge (Canada) – Jock Coulson, Nick Close
Vasaloppet – Lars-Erik Larsson, Bengt Allan, Karl Andresson



Claudio Chiogna and Risto Rytökoski at the AGM in Mora, SWE in 1996