

DAVE DYER

Discipline: Cross Country

DOB: May 22, 1954

Hometown: Russell, Ontario

Active Career Period: 1982-2022

Induction CSHF: 2023

Category: Builder Award

Once pride of place is ceded to family, it is fair to say that sport is the passion that has filled the remaining corners of Dave Dyer's busy life. On graduating from the University of Waterloo in 1977 with a Kinesiology degree, he embarked on a succession of jobs that related to fitness and the running craze that had emerged in the 1970s. An accomplished triathlete (an early participant in the Hawaiian Ironman Competition) and marathoner, he worked for a time at the Ottawa Athletic Club, doing testing and launching a successful running club (Marathon for Me). He also worked in a program called Fitness Break that had the goal of luring Federal employees and others away from their desks. Concurrently, he served as Race Director for the National Capital Triathlon for some ten years. Not surprisingly, the bike that he came to know so well in his triathlon days remained an integral part of his life, and multi-day ride events (some with son Alexander) continued to provide a welcome personal challenge well into mid-life. Along the way, Dave also developed an enduring love for soccer that was manifest in deep involvement in his community as an official, organizer and groundskeeper (if it needed doing, Dave was willing). And for countless years, Dave has maintained a stubborn pursuit of golf excellence – his impossible dream.

But it was an early exposure to and involvement in cross-country skiing that ultimately grew to become his life's work. In late 1982, Dave was recruited as an apprentice ski coach by the legendary Heinz Neiderhauser, Cross Country Ontario's master coach. The rest is history:

- **Getting Started.** Heinz, it turned out, had a good eye for potential. With Cross Country Canada (CCC) rolling out the now-famous Jackrabbit Program as its cornerstone recruitment and skill development vehicle, Dave was soon appointed Jackrabbit Coordinator for the National Capital Division. In 1982, he initiated the Jackrabbit Ski League and several years later introduced the first Jackrabbit Ski Day, bringing together the various clubs in the Ottawa area to celebrate the sport with skill tests, games and guest celebrities (including Jackrabbit Johannsen himself – at 102 years of age). These early successes led to Dave's selection by CCC to run the national Jackrabbit Program.
- **CCC - First Go-Round.** Once established in the CCC National Office (then located in Ottawa), Dave was assigned an extensive span of responsibilities in the events management sphere:
 - Most importantly, he was tasked with coordinating the various structural requirements for organizing and managing competitions at club, provincial and national levels, consistent with applicable Federation International de Ski (FIS) criteria. At this point, Dave quickly grasped the important reality that, in amateur sport, the majority of program development is done by committees that are led and staffed by volunteers drawn from clubs across the country. The subject matter expertise that resides in this volunteer work force is accumulated through years of experience in parent clubs and attendance at certification courses mandated by CCC. Dave's role was to be the

quintessential facilitator who would provide cohesion, continuity and required staff support to keep the work on track and on time. Happily, his skill-sets were ideally suited to this purpose, with the result that many sport-essential outcomes were achieved under his watch. These included: the development and subsequent maintenance of policies and technical packages to govern three tiers of competition; the development and maintenance of an integrated Canadian/FIS Competition Rules Manual; oversight and coordination of an officials certification program; and provision of ongoing professional development opportunities for technical delegates.

- In addition, Dave coordinated the annual organization and implementation of a geographically balanced national race calendar. Through sponsor solicitation - his first serious encounter with the joys of marketing - he was also able to create an enhanced prize purse in support of all Tier 1 events.
- **Canada Games Hiatus.** As part of his events-related work, Dave interacted with federal and provincial partners and local organizing committees to coordinate the participation of cross-country skiing in the quadrennial Canada Winter Games. Such was the impression he made that the Canada Games organization eventually recruited him to jump ship and join their team, where he served as Director of Marketing and Communications from 1992 to 2002.
- **CCC – Second Go-Round.** Though he enjoyed working at the Canada Games and profited from the broader exposure to the Canadian sport system it provided, Dave missed the travel and ongoing involvement with athletes, coaches and volunteers that he had experienced with CCC. Dave is at heart a people person. Making a multi-sport event happen every two years was long on administration and short on regular interpersonal connections. As luck would have it, Dave's desire to get back to hands-on work in a sport he loved coincided with a pressing need at CCC for the skillsets he had to offer. With its budget much diminished as a result of federal deficit reduction initiatives in the late 90s, CCC had downsized to two staff positions, one of them in a re-located National Office in Canmore and the other working from home in Ottawa. In 2002, with its programs in disarray, it decided that the best use for its available funding was to hire someone who could both put the events program back on track and expand the budget by getting CCC back in the marketing game. Dave was re-hired, this time as Director of Marketing and Events Management. The reunion was a happy one, and the results he achieved in the years that followed figured prominently in the strategic recovery of the sport:
 - As much of his earlier work in the events management field had lapsed, Dave's first priority was to revitalize the national race series (the NorAm/Canada Cup circuit) and the National Championships. To accomplish this, he sourced willing and capable clubs to host events, worked with those clubs and their Divisions to create competent local organizing committees and led the work to update the policy and technical documents to underpin these activities.
 - In the marketing sphere, Dave defied the naysayers who said that chasing sponsors would be a futile effort. During the decade from 2002-2012 – when major corporate sponsors for amateur sport were hard to find and equally hard to keep – CCC initiated productive and enduring partnerships with Haywood Securities, AltaGas, Teck and Canadian Pacific. Dave would be the first to credit the international success being enjoyed by National Team athletes such as Beckie Scott,

Sara Renner, Chandra Crawford, Devon Kershaw and Alex Harvey for having improved CCC's marketability. And a number of "finders and friends" (e.g. Dave Wood, Shane Piersall, Patricia Newson) were key to opening corporate doors. But it was Dave who closed the deals and managed the fulfillment programs that made the sponsorships work. The revenue from these marketing successes was critical for funding the many re-building initiatives in the CCC Strategic Plan.

- Understanding the importance of imagery, Dave also negotiated with a Peterborough firm named Lazergraphics for the cost-free design and production of all CCC brand promotion and marketing material, thus enhancing both internal and external communication. Not a big dollar partnership, but one with huge impact!
- The most ambitious initiative in the period – from athlete development, facility enhancement, sport promotion and marketing perspectives – was to bring international racing back to Canada. In Europe, World Cup races are revenue generators; in North America, they are money pits. In this endeavour, Dave led the way through the endless maze of bids, contracts, grants, negotiations and crisis management to ensure that when the World Cup circuit returned to Canada in 2005 (in Vernon, BC, and Canmore, AB), FIS was effusive in its praise of the events. More World Cups followed, with similar results. The highlight was undoubtedly the Ski Tour Canada 2016 World Cup series, an impressive multi-stage event with stops in Gatineau, Montreal, Quebec City and Canmore. Featuring ski expos at each site, the Tour raised the national profile of the sport, generating over 52 million television views world-wide. This was a first for North America and perhaps Dave's crowning achievement. Ski Tour Canada received the Prestige Award from the Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance (CSTA) as the Canadian sport event of the year.
- With the growing success of Canadian skiers in international competition and the growing appetite in FIS for scheduling World Cups in Canada, CCC recognized that there was a strategic need to broaden its FIS representation, with a view to gaining better insight into FIS deliberations and, where possible, to influence discussion and decisions. Accordingly, Dave was nominated and quickly accepted on the FIS Cross Country World Cup Committee (2004-2020). From 2010 to 2020, he also served on the FIS Marketing Committee on behalf of the Canadian Snowsports Association. In both of these appointments, Dave's extensive experience, can-do attitude and negotiating skills were quickly recognized. This made him a credible, valued contributor, and an excellent ambassador for Canadian – and indeed North American – interests in a Eurocentric organization.
- In assessing Dave's body of work from 2002 to 2022, it is accurate to say that in a sport with access to more resources, there would have been one or more employees for marketing, another employee for domestic events and another for special projects such as World Cup hosting. Dave Dyer was a one man band, shouldering each additional responsibility as it came, and delivering results beyond expectations and without complaint. Sometime around the Vancouver/Whistler Winter Olympic Games, the (then) Secretary-General of the Canadian Snowsports Association enquired as to whether CCC realized what a gem it had in Dave Dyer. Other sports were envious.

In summary, in a career that spanned more than forty years, Dave served at community, regional, national and international levels, and applied his talents and energies to an extensive range of responsibilities in coaching, event management, official's development, sport promotion and marketing. Countless discrete facets of the sport prospered and grew through his efforts. But Dave also served a higher purpose in the way he drew people together and enthused them to share his love for the sport and his vision for how it might evolve. Both recreational/lifestyle and competitive participants in cross-country skiing share an addiction to it, but as in many amateur sports their interests are frequently parochial, which can lead to friction in the system and inhibit progress. In a sense, Dave served as a sort of lubricant that made the sport work more efficiently towards its common goals. Through the strength of his personality and his visibility and involvement at all organizational levels across Canada, Dave gradually became the working face of the sport – a happy warrior in the trenches - breaking down barriers between national, provincial/divisional and club agendas; creating credibility and trust; enhancing communication; building capacity; and generally enhancing the brand and cohesiveness of the cross-country community.

In the sport of cross country skiing, no one has a bad word or complaint about Dave Dyer. This speaks volumes for the esteem in which he is held. His longevity, productivity and popularity are epic. Words and phrases frequently used to describe him include: professional, likeable, dependable, big-hearted, ethical, sincere, selfless, generous, helpful and eternally positive.

“If you don't roll up your sleeves and get involved, things don't tend to happen,” Dave said. “Doing stuff for the ski community just makes sense. There's a pride in ownership. Cross-country skiing is a sport where you can have a positive influence and long term impact.”

Dave thrived on working in a team environment. He identified with athletes in pursuit of their podium dreams and the coaches who supported them – and he took great satisfaction in being able to help their dreams come true. He also held the countless volunteers with whom he worked in high regard, and he defined his work in relation to their contributions and commitment. “My role was really to offer checks and balances, and to sometimes step in to troubleshoot and offer best practices. And if help was needed, I was ready to be the first one to lend a hand.”

About being inducted to the Canadian Ski Hall of Fame, Dave said: “It's very humbling. As a trenches guy, you believe in the sport and you champion the athletes and the excellence they achieve, while you also recognize the expertise of the officials, coaches and race organizers. I'm honoured, and it has caused me to pause and reflect on my career.”

“As a staff member, Dave's plate was typically overflowing, yet he was always quick to pitch in and spend the additional time needed to get other necessary jobs done,” said Al Maddox, Canadian Ski Hall of Fame inductee in the Class of 2022. “Retirement did not end his commitment to hosting events, both locally and nationally. The sport keeps reaching out to Dave, and Dave just keeps giving back to it.”