



USA BIATHLON TEAM

CROSS COUNTRY SKIING - RIFLE MARKSMANSHIP

BIATHLON

The Sport of Biathlon - which combines the skills of cross-country skiing and rifle marksmanship - is primarily an individual sport now gaining popularity among cross-country skiers desiring yet another challenge. The first competition in the U. S. was held in 1956 after which Biathlon became part of the Winter Games in 1960. The best U. S. Olympic performance came in 1972 when the team placed sixth in the relay event. The national TV coverage in the 1976 Winter Olympics helped demonstrate the rising appeal of the sport.

There are three events in the sport including; the 20-kilometer race, a 10-kilometer "Sprint", and a four-man relay. The 20-kilometer event (12.5 miles) consists of a course with an even distribution of uphill, downhill, and level skiing along which the competitor has four stages of shooting, with five shots per stage at paper targets on a central 50-meter range. The biathletes shoot two stages from the prone (lying down) position and two stages from the offhand (standing) position, with the positions alternated. Time penalties are levied for each target missed with 40 minutes being the maximum issued.

The 10-kilometer "Sprint" is a miniature version of the 20-kilometer race with two shooting intervals rather than four, and breakable glass targets replacing the paper targets. One stage is shot in the prone position and the other in the offhand. Instead of penalty minutes assessed for missed shots, the competitor must ski a 150-meter penalty loop for each unbroken target before continuing the race.

In the relay, each biathlete skis a 7.5-kilometer cross-country course with two stages of shooting at five breakable targets each stage. The biathlete has five regular shots and three extra ones to break the five targets. If after all eight shots are fired, there are still targets unbroken, the competitor must complete a 150-meter penalty loop for each target missed.

The national governing body for Biathlon is the United States Modern Pentathlon and Biathlon Association (USMPBA), organized in 1960. It is a non-profit corporation listed as a non-taxable entity under Federal Law. The USMPBA governs both biathlon and modern pentathlon which combines riding, swimming, shooting, fencing, and cross-country running. The two sports have a single international administrative head as well: the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon. The USMPBA has conducted annual U. S. national and junior championships since 1965. In Olympic years the top six biathletes are chosen to make up the U. S. Olympic Team. In non-Olympic years the top qualifiers make up the USA international team and represent the U. S. at the World Championships and other international races.

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Biathlon was originally a military-oriented activity conceived by the Nordic nations, and derived from the winter skills of hunting and traveling on skis. Many of our top biathletes received their initial training through the military at the Ft. Richardson, Alaska training center closed in 1973. Currently Biathlon in the U. S. has turned from this military background to become the ultimate challenge in cross-country skiing.

Several regions of the country are ideally suited for Biathlon competition; expenses involved in constructing cross-country ski courses are minimal (targets and adequate terrain are all that is necessary); and it is simple to establish courses at skiing or cross-country areas around the nation. Today biathletes have many grass-root centers throughout the U. S. including several Minnesota courses, and courses at Jackson Hole, Wyoming; Bend Oregon; Lake Placid, N. Y.; Anchorage, Alaska, and Rosendale, New York. These and other sites service the "Regions" or geographical areas of interest in Biathlon.

For the avid marksman, Biathlon provides a new challenge, one which shooters in winter regions have come to appreciate. For the avid skier, particularly in the mushrooming sport of cross-country skiing, the skills involved in combining cross-country skiing and rifle marksmanship is the ultimate challenge. The sport that combines the intellect of the mind with the athletic ability of the body is Biathlon.