

Horizon Biathlon n°1 - Biathlon in the land of cowboys #1

Here is the first episode of our brand new long format series, Horizon Biathlon. Through this series, we wish to highlight biathlon and its actors in countries where it is still little known or recognized. Today we cross the Atlantic to fly to the United States! A first episode divided into two parts, including this first one on the American biathlon of yesterday and today.

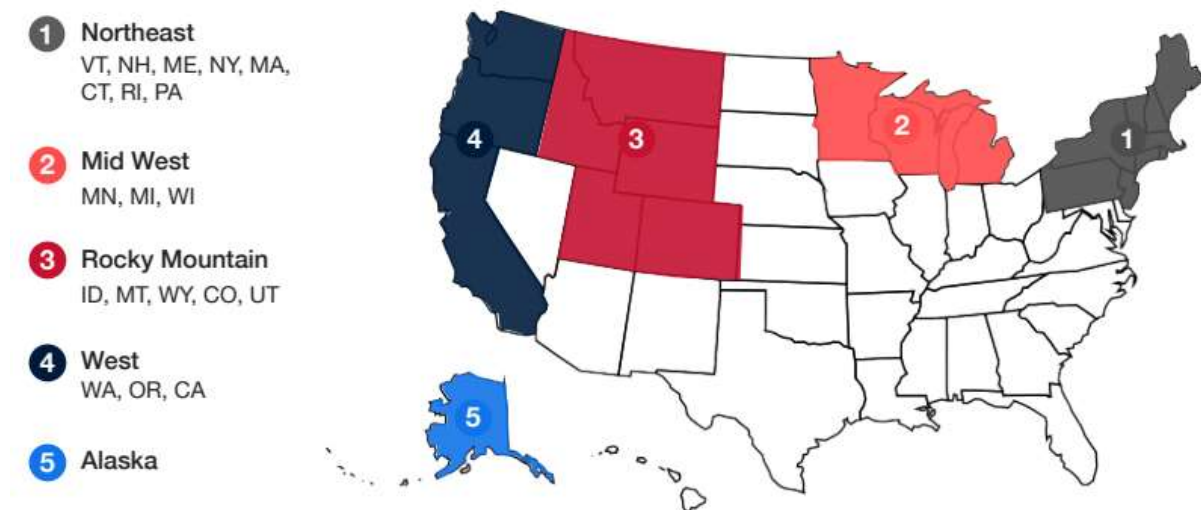
American biathlon : past & present

A paradox for the country with some 2827 Olympic medals, number one in many sports and immense potential considering the talent pool it possesses, biathlon is still a very little known sport in the United States today.

How is biathlon organized in the United States?

Since 1980, American biathlon has been governed by a national association, the USBA (United States Biathlon Association). USBA currently has more than 20 clubs across the country, three regional centres of excellence and more than 700 members who participate in winter and summer competitions.

The USBA identifies five major areas in the United States where biathlon is established and/or developed through local clubs. Each region has a regional coordinator who acts as a liaison between the USBA and the regional clubs.



The USBA's objective is to support and assist in the development of biathletes in the United States in order to prepare them as best as possible for national and international competitions.

With the growing interest in biathlon and recent encouraging results, the USBA sees the coming years as a period of continued growth, with more and more talented biathletes.

After 20 years at the head of the USBA, **Bernd Eisenbichler** decided to return to Germany. With his departure, an entire page of the American biathlon history is being turned. Eisenbichler left the program after developing it at all levels. He joined the American biathlon in 1999 as a technician and has progressed through all levels. Highly respected by his athletes and colleagues, he was appointed High Performance Director in 2007 and head of the USBA in 2014.



Max Cobb and Bernd Eisenbichler side by side (Photo: Facebook Team USA)

To replace him, **Max Cobb**, a well-known person in the house, took over. Max joined the USBA in 1989 as National Race Director after having been a biathlete during his university years in Dartmouth. In 1990, he was appointed assistant coach and director of the national team. He then became Director of Programs in 1994 and Executive Director in 2006. In 2016, he was elected to the IBU Executive Board, becoming the first American to serve on it.

Olympian quadruple Olympian **Lowell Bailey**, has been named this season as the American Biathlon High Performance Director and will join another great name of the house, **Tim Burke**, who has been in place for two seasons now. Tim becomes the new Director of Athlete Development. Former teammates will now work together to support American biathlon at all levels of sport, youth and national and Olympic team development.

First results

Charlie Kellogg discovered skiing as a student. He then practiced several different skiing events, slalom, downhill, jumping and cross-country.

After graduation, Charlie joined the army, completed his military training and was posted to the Modern Winter Biathlon Training Center in Fort Richardson, Alaska. He then made his

way into the biathlon team and competed in several events during the winter of 1964, achieving the best result for an American at CISM (International Military Sports Council) in Ostersund.



Charlie Kellogg at the 1968 Grenoble Olympics (Photo: Fasterskier)

After completing his military service, Charlie left Alaska for Andover, Massachusetts, while continuing to practice biathlon. In January 1965, he won the first national championship held in Rosendale, New York.

21 February 1959, Courmayeur (Italy), individual, 2nd edition of the World Championships. This is how far back we have to go to find evidence of the Americans' first participation in an international race. **Maurice Paquette** 8th (10 fouls), **Robert Collins** 19th (20 fouls), **John Burritt** 21st (22 fouls) and **Richard Mize** 25th (32 fouls), will forever remain the American biathlon pioneers internationally. The participants in this event were then 30 at the start of the only race format that existed at the time, the individual. And the rules were not really the same as today (see article on biathlon history). There were up to 40 mistakes for the most clumsy one and 47 minutes late!



Richard "Dick" Mize at the second World Biathlon Championships in Courmayeur (Photo: <https://www.vaildaily.com/>)

Holly Beattie can be considered the first female biathlete in the United States. She was introduced to biathlon at a men's team training camp at the American Olympic Center in Squaw Valley in fall 1978. Looking at the training, she asked if she could try it and immediately knew that it was the right sport for her. Encouraged by the men's team, she borrowed a gun and started training. She continued to train and then participated in a few men's races during the winter of 1978-1979.

The first medal in the history of the United States at the World Biathlon Championships was won in Chamonix in 1984 by the women's relay (3 x 5 km). World Championships which are at the same time the very first women's edition in history. The relay composed of **Holly Beattie**, **Julie Newman** and **Kari Swenson** is in 4th position after the last shot and is somewhat ahead of the Finnish team. Holly, the last American torchbearer, managed to make up the deficit and passed the Finnish with a lead of less than one metre on the finish line to win the bronze medal.

On the men's side, it will take three more years to see a first medal at the World Championships. This one will be won at home. It was by finishing 2nd in the Lake Placid individual in 1987 that **Josh Thompson** won the first men's medal in the history of American biathlon.

During the 2009-2010 season won by **Emil Svendsen**, thanks to very good results in the first weeks of competition, **Tim Burke** became the first American to wear the yellow bib as leader in the overall World Cup ranking.



Tim Burke with his yellow bib (Photo: Fasterskier)

We are at the World Championships in Hochfilzen (Austria) on February 16, 2017. Thirty years have passed since the first men's medal in the history of American biathlon. 20 shots, 20 targets cleared. Starting with race number 100, **Lowell Bailey** had to fight to the finish line to succeed in dislodging **Ondrej Moravec** from first place, also having filled up with shots. One last straight line at the finish, for the record, and the American left-handed man becomes World Champion in the individual at 35 years old! In press conference, he will come back to his wife's support at the end of the previous season when he was hesitant to take his retirement.



Lowell Bailey on the top step of the podium (Photo: IBU)

Still at the Hochfilzen World Championships, three days after **Lowell Bailey's** title, teammate **Susan Dunklee** became vice-world champion of the mass-start by finishing 4.6 seconds behind Germany's **Laura Dahlmeier**, both 20/20. What a year for American biathlon!

You're going to tell me "What about the Olympic Games in all this? ». Well, it may seem hard to believe, but to date biathlon has the particularity of being the only sport in the Olympic Winter Games for which the United States has never won a single medal. The country's best result so far is an 8th place, obtained by **Lowell Bailey** on the Sochi individual in 2014.

Before the 2014 Olympic Games, the best result was **Pete Karns'** at the 1972 Sapporo Olympic Games. Despite the cancellation and postponement of the event due to a snowstorm, Pete finished 14th in the individual. He is also part of the relay that will finish in 6th place, and remains the best American result in this event to date.