

Jimmie Heuga

1964 Olympic Slalom Bronze Medalist

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Jimmie Heuga exemplifies the best of the Far West Ski Association. He is a product of the Far West Junior Racing Program and the Lake Tahoe Ski Club. He started skiing at age three with his father at Squaw Valley, participated in many Sacramento Bee races and, ultimately, made the US Ski Team.

At age 9, he starred in a Warren Miller film. A dozen years later he collected the bronze medal in the 1964 Innsbruck Olympic slalom, joining silver medalist **Billy Kidd** as the country's first male alpine skiers to earn Olympic medals. A week after the Olympics, Jimmie won the slalom at the prestigious Arlberg-Kandahar in Garmisch, Germany, a win that was recently duplicated by American Daron Rahlves. In 1966, he finished fourth in the combined at the World Championships in Portillo, Chile.



He completed in the 1962 and 1968 World Championships, won a World Cup third overall in 1967 in giant slalom. He retired from amateur competition after the 1968 Grenoble Olympics, where he had two top 10 finishes. He was inducted into the National Ski Hall of Fame in 1976.

Jimmie's greatest challenge commenced with disturbing health indications in 1967 and final diagnosis in 1970 as having Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Ignoring his doctors' advice to avoid physical activity, Jimmie forced himself to get back on his bike, his sailboat and his skis — to work through the pain and challenge of MS. "I can't worry about the things I'm unable to do. I focus on the things I can do."



In 1984, he founded the Heuga Center, a nonprofit medical and educational center based near Vail, Colorado. It promotes the benefits of exercise and nutrition for people with chronic conditions such as MS. "I could not have dealt with my MS without my ski background and all that it taught me." The Center has raised \$11 million and helped 3,500 people deal with chronic diseases. In 1996, a scientific study concluded that Heuga was right all along: Exercise is beneficial to people with MS.

Though now confined to a wheelchair and a health-care facility on Colorado's Front Range, Heuga maintains his positive outlook. "From one side, I abhor being here, but from the other side I say, 'Life goes on.' Sometimes you can't call the shots. I still exercise here every day." He also manages to go sit-skiing on occasion with his three children in Vail. "That's given me a tremendous amount of joy."

Thirty-eight years after his historic Innsbruck triumph, Heuga served as an Olympic torchbearer in February 2002.

The Jimmie Heuga Center for the Reanimation of the Physically Challenged can be reached at 800-367-3101 or www.heuga.org. ■

