

Wallace "Buddy" Werner (1936-1964)

Buddy Werner, a native of Steamboat Springs, Colorado started out his skiing career as a ski jumper, winning his first Regional Championship at the age of 10. Buddy soon after decided to focus his attention on Alpine skiing during his younger years. This decision would take Buddy Werner from a local hometown skier to an international icon, and one of the greatest skiing legends there ever was.

Buddy was favored to win in those 1964 Olympics, but as it would happen, he crashed during his race. At the time, the US Men's Alpine Team had not won a medal for their country. Buddy's hopes to become the first had been crushed during that final attempt. However, when his teammates, Billy Kidd and Jimmie Huega, who were both considered longshots to medal, clinched second and third place to capture the first two medals for the US Team, Buddy leaped into the finish arena and threw his arms around them. His enthusiasm and sportsmanship were impossible to deny. This, it is said, was typical of Buddy's attitude.

Buddy was a three-time member of the United States Olympic Team and a 2-time member of the United States Federation Internationale De Ski Team. Buddy made the international ski competition circuit as a member of FIS at the age of 18. Two years later, he made his first Olympic appearance at the 1956 Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. He also competed in the FIS games in Austria in 1958. Although Buddy was a team member for the 1960 Olympic winter games just up the road in Squaw Valley, California, a broken leg suffered eight weeks earlier would keep him from competing. But just four years later, Buddy would again secure his place on the Olympic Team and competed in Innsbruck, Austria for the United States.

Perhaps the most famous of Buddy's numerous accomplishments was the stunning victory at the 1959 Hahnenkamm race in Kitzbuehel, Austria. Buddy was the first American skier to ever win the most notorious event in ski racing history. His history-making victory, on the most dangerous downhill course on the World Cup circuit, had not been repeated by a US skier for 44 years, when Daron Rahlves won the prestigious race in 2003.

"Buddy was one of the few Americans that could beat the Europeans and do it not just once and awhile by luck, but often enough so that the Europeans really loved him," said Billy Kidd, a friend and former teammate of Werner on the U.S. Ski Team. "They loved his style of going for it and taking chances." Says Billy Kidd.

On April 12, 1964, Buddy was in the Swiss Alps skiing in a television documentary when an avalanche struck. Buddy tried to outrace the thundering snow, but to no avail. Buddy did not survive and the world lost one of its most enigmatic, dedicated sportsman. Buddy always gave 110 percent. People said he would finish first or crash because he gave it his all. Locals tell of a young man who, even at the height of his fame, would always come out to ski with the local kids. After Buddy's untimely death, the councilmen of Steamboat Springs unanimously voted to rename the town's ski mountain from "Storm Mountain" to "Mt. Werner", in honor of their beloved hero and friend. The US Department of the Interior approved of the renaming, and the dedication ceremony took place in 1965. Buddy was posthumously inducted into the National Ski Hall of Fame in 1964.

Today, you can ski Mt Werner, just as Buddy did and you can also visit the Bud Werner Memorial Library in Steamboat Springs. Truly the best way to experience a little Buddy Werner magic is to ski your heart out and cheer on your teammates in our Buddy Werner Youth Ski League. The League encourages our young skiers to emulate the values, work ethic, and sportsmanship demonstrated by the late, great Buddy Werner.