

Canada's Tiger

Featuring Nancy Greene

Athlete Article



The moment that had drawn nearly 7,000 spectators and a world-wide press contingent to the steep slopes of Rossland's Red Mountain was at hand. This tiny mining community about 12 miles "up the hill" from Trail, BC was about to play host to Canada's first-ever World Cup ski meet. It was a sunny Friday morning late in the 1968 ski season and before this meet was done some of the greatest skiers in the world would ski the slopes. Skiers such as Jean Claude Killy, Karl Schranz, the Goitschel sisters, Isabelle Mir and Annie Famose.

And of course there was Nancy Greene, the hometown girl who earlier that season had won a gold and silver medal at the Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France. She'd captured the World Cup title the year before and as this meet was about to begin she stood a good chance of winning it again. Hometown girl, naturally the hometown favourite, but on this day there was a snow-load of town pressure.

Rossland had been awarded the World Cup meet because of Nancy's past successes. When she arrived home for this race she announced her retirement. She was far ahead of Isabelle Mir in Cup points although it was mathematically possible for Mir to catch up if she could win at Rossland and the following weekend at Heavenly Valley, California, the last race on the '68 tour. "But that hardly seemed a likely prospect," she said later that year in her book, *Nancy Greene: An Autobiography*. "No, the only explanation for the shaking in my boots as I waited at the top of the slalom course was the prospect of blowing things in front of the home town crowd." Her mother and father, for example, had not seen their daughter race since 1960. On hand, lining the run, were all the friends she grew up with. Cameras were everywhere, reporters were taking notes and the ABC Wide World of Sports crew was busy hauling cables, checking monitors and hundreds of other small last-minute details.

Then there was the course itself. Red Mountain has one of the steepest runs in Canada and the day prior to the slalom snow had been followed by first rain then freezing temperatures, leaving the surface icy and very fast. The winner of the two-run women's slalom would be the one who maintained absolute control at every moment. The margin for error was nil. On her first run thousands of fans cheered wildly, but a very nervous Nancy skied 'raggedly'. Her normally smooth style deserted her and she finished quite far back. Now the name of the game was simple -- it was time to play catch-up in the second run. As Nancy stepped into the starter's gate she had just one thought in mind: Don't blow it.

She blew it.

Partway down the course, one of Nancy's ski tips caught a gate, ripping the ski from the boot and sending the defending World Cup champion helplessly flying out of control. As she described it later, the crash was spectacular -- and painful. Disqualified from the slalom, she tried to force a smile as she picked herself up out of the snow with one ski intact and the other hanging only by its runaway strap.

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“My ankle hurt badly as soon as I stood up from the fall. I tore open my boot and packed it with snow. That took care of the swelling.” But I noticed another ailment – and it wouldn’t go away. My neck ached. And that evening, when the pain persisted so much that I could hardly turn my head, I drove into Trail and visited a chiropractor for the first time in my life.” “He diagnosed the trouble as two vertebrae out of place and he put me through a series of neck manipulations. He told me to press hot towels against the soreness for a few hours, and, to my everlasting relief, the treatment worked.” The giant slalom was scheduled for the next morning. It was going to be the last chance for Greene to perform the way she wanted to before the home town gallery.



Right from the start Lady Luck decided to lend a helping hand to Rossland’s “first lady.” Nancy drew the number one start position for the race and that gave her a decided advantage over the others. The course was extremely icy and as the racers skied the course ruts would develop, causing time-losing rugged terrain.

Greene was out of the gate like an exploding bullet, and then skied flawlessly and effortlessly to the bottom. Watching others on the course from the finish area Nancy waited patiently. Nobody came close to her time and the best of the rest, Florence Steurer, was nearly two seconds behind. “It was, needless to say, a magnificently satisfying feeling,” she said later.

Ditto for Rosslanders and all Canadians. Today, Nancy is Mrs. Al Raine and the mother of twin boys. An honoured member of the BC Sports Hall of Fame & Museum, she remains active in skiing.