

FINNISH OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS

Paavo Aaltonen (1919–1962)

1948	Gymnastics, team competition M
1948	Gymnastics, vault
1948	Gymnastics, pommel horse

Paavo Aaltonen won three Olympic gold medals in 1948. He was still only the second most successful Finnish gymnast at the London Games.

Aaltonen rose to the elite of Finnish gymnastics in the late 1930's. During the war he maintained his fitness by training on self-made apparatuses behind the frontline. In 1948 Aaltonen won a total of four Olympic medals at the London Games: gold in team competition, bronze in the individual all-around event and individual gold in both vault and pommel horse. In the last-mentioned event he tied for gold with his two team-mates Veikko Huhtanen and Heikki Savolainen. The three-way tie for gold by athletes from a single nation remains a unique occasion in Olympic history. Aaltonen's feats were still somewhat overshadowed by Huhtanen who also won three gold medals including the individual overall title.

In 1950 Aaltonen won gold in horizontal bar at the World Championships in Basel, Switzerland, thus becoming the first athlete of the Finnish Workers' Sport Federation to win a world title. Two years later in Helsinki he won his last Olympic medal as member of the home nation's bronze medal team.

Toimi Alatalo (1929–2014)

1960	Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M
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Toimi Alatalo first came to the fore in 1956 when he won the Finnish championship title in 15 kilometres. He missed the Cortina d'Ampezzo Olympic Games that year due to foot injuries. Two years later Alatalo was selected to the Finnish team for the home World Championships in Lahti, but he was not picked to start in any race.

In 1960 Alatalo, aged 30 and by now working as police officer, finally got to make his Olympic debut at the Squaw Valley Games. Seventh place in the 30-kilometre race earned him a spot in the Finnish relay team. Skiing the first leg, Alatalo took a strong start and led the race after 8 kilometres. He faded somewhat towards the end but still came to the first exchange in second place, 7 seconds behind Sweden. In the end Finland won gold after Veikko Hakulinen won a dramatic duel against the Norwegian anchor.

Alatalo won his last Finnish championship medal in 1961 and finished his skiing career three years later.

Kalle Anttila (1887–1975)

1920 Wrestling, Freestyle 67.5 kg
1924 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 62 kg

Kalle Anttila was the first wrestler to win Olympic gold in both two wrestling styles.

Anttila was one of the best Finnish wrestlers in featherweight division, but he was not selected to the Olympic team of 1920 in Greco-Roman wrestling. Instead he was offered a place in the Finnish Freestyle wrestling squad. Anttila accepted even if he was unfamiliar with the technique; Freestyle wrestling had not been much practiced in Finland at the time. In the Freestyle lightweight category in Antwerp 1920 Anttila applied Greco-Roman moves and a few quickly learned leg tricks to surprising effect: he proceeded to the final where he defeated Sweden's Gottfrid Svensson in two bouts to one.

After Antwerp Anttila returned to Greco-Roman wrestling. He won the World Championships titles in 1921 and 1922 and went to Paris 1924 as the favourite to win gold in the featherweight division. Anttila took his second Olympic title by beating all his opponents; in the final he pinned his fellow countryman Aleksanteri Toivola in three minutes.

After failing to win selection for his third Olympic Games in 1928 Anttila retired from the wrestling mat. He had never lost a match to a non-Finnish wrestler. Kalle Anttila owned a successful tailoring business, which later grew into the largest retail store chain in Finland.

Eugen Ekman (b. 27 October 1937)

1960 Gymnastics, pommel horse

Eugen Ekman was a specialist in pommel horse. He had won silver in his favourite event at the European Championships of 1959 in Copenhagen, but his inclusion into the Finnish Olympic team for Rome was by no means certain, as selectors preferred strong overall gymnasts. Political factors were also involved: the Finnish team had to include athletes from both two central federations, SVUL and TUL. In the end, Ekman made the team only when all athletes from the Workers' Sport Federation TUL were excluded from the Olympic Games.

In Rome Finland was in serious danger of missing a gold medal for the first time in its Olympic history. One of the very last hopes was Eugen Ekman, who had qualified for the pommel horse final, which was held on the final day of competitions. Ekman did not let that extra pressure affect his performance: he scored the highest points of the final and tied for victory with Boris Shakhlin of the USSR, winner of the overall competition. As winner of Finland's only gold medal Ekman was duly hailed as savior of Finland's sporting honour.

Oskar Friman (1893–1933)

1920 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 60 kg
1924 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 67.5 kg

Two-time Olympic champion Oskar Friman was known as “Wrestling Engineer” for his innovative technical skills and tactical intelligence. He was also a forerunner in mental training. Friman won the first of his ten consecutive Finnish championship titles in 1915 and went on to dominate the lowest two weight divisions of Greco-Roman wrestling in the world in the early 1920’s.

In Antwerp 1920 Friman made short work of all his opponents in the featherweight category. In the Olympic final he pinned his fellow Finn and club-mate Heikki Kähkönen in four minutes. Next he moved up to lightweights and won the World Championship title in 1921. In Paris 1924 Friman won his second Olympic title after defeating Hungary’s Lajos Keresztes by split decision after a gruelling battle in the deciding match of the lightweight division.

Friman was a tinsmith by profession but turned to coaching after finishing his career. In 1932 he was named head coach of the Finnish wrestling team. He died from heart attack on a wrestling mat during a training session at the age of 40.

Kelpo Gröndahl (1920–1994)

1952 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 87 kg

Kelpo Gröndahl was Finland’s most successful wrestler in the immediate post-war years. In London 1948 he took Olympic silver in the Greco-Roman heavy middleweight category after losing the final match to Sweden’s Karl-Erik Nilsson. Gröndahl was a dockworker and active member of the Finnish Communist Party. That brought him often into trouble with Finnish wrestling authorities in the politically charged atmosphere of the times.

In 1952 domestic arguments were put aside to select the strongest possible team to represent the home nation at the Olympic Games in Helsinki. This time Gröndahl beat his old rival Nilsson in a tight match. In the last bout he faced Shalva Chikhladze of the USSR. The strong Georgian attacked fiercely, but Gröndahl kept his composure and won the match and gold medal by two votes to one. He was carried from the mat by enraptured home crowd.

Gröndahl’s last medal was silver at the World Championships of 1953. He continued in politics and served as member of the Finnish parliament from 1962 to 1970.

Arvo Haavisto (1900–1977)

1928 Wrestling, Freestyle 72 kg

Arvo Haavisto learned Freestyle wrestling in the winter of 1924, after he had deemed his chances to win a place in the Finnish Olympic Greco-Roman team slim. He placed second in the trials and went on to win bronze the Freestyle lightweight division in Paris.

Having honed his skills for four more years Haavisto travelled to Amsterdam in confident mood. There were only eleven entrants in the Freestyle welterweight category, and Haavisto had no problems in proceeding to the final, where he faced Lloyd Appleton of the USA. The American won the first bout, Haavisto the second. In the deciding third bout Haavisto pinned his opponent in four and a half minutes to win gold.

After retiring from wrestling Haavisto became a respected international referee. An annual wrestling tournament in his home village Ilmajoki still carries his name.

Veikko Hakulinen (1925–2003)

1952	Cross-country skiing, 50 km M
1956	Cross-country skiing, 30 km M
1960	Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M

Three-time Olympic champion skier Veikko Hakulinen was Finland's greatest sporting hero in the 1950's.

Hakulinen took his first Olympic victory in Oslo 1952: he won the classical 50-kilometre race with the memorable time of 3:33.33, beating his countryman Eero Kolehmainen by four and a half minutes. Four years later in Cortina d'Ampezzo Hakulinen won gold in 30 kilometres and took silver in 50 kilometres, beaten by Sixten Jernberg of Sweden. His third medal in the 1956 Games was silver in the relay race. Hakulinen and Jernberg build a famous rivalry that epitomised the sport of cross-country skiing in the late 1950's: both men were forestry workers who had built their form in the traditional way through hard physical work.

In Squaw Valley 1960 Hakulinen had to settle for silver again in 50 kilometres, beaten by his countryman Kalevi Hämäläinen. In the 15-kilometre race he took bronze. The relay race saw one of Hakulinen's greatest performances: he started for the anchor leg 20 seconds behind Norway's Hallgeir Brenden but brought Finland to gold by winning a dramatic neck-and-neck sprint to the finish line.

Having won seven Olympic medals in cross-county skiing Hakulinen changed sports: at the Innsbruck Games of 1964 he competed in biathlon. He was the fastest skier in the 20-kilometre race, of course, but missed six shots and finished in 15th place.

Kalevi Hämäläinen (1932–2005)

1960	Cross-country skiing, 50 km M
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Kalevi Hämäläinen became an unexpected hero at the World Championships of 1958 in Lahti, Finland. He had made an underwhelming Olympic debut in Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956 and was not counted among the highest hopes of the home nation but surprised everyone by winning gold in 30 kilometres.

The next two years were less successful for Hämäläinen. In 1960 he was back in form and won selection to the Finnish Olympic team. In Squaw Valley Hämäläinen finished in disappointing 12th place in the opening 30-kilometre race but was still selected for 50 kilometres. Drawn to start at number 1, Hämäläinen took the lead after ten kilometres, and to general surprise no-one was able to beat his finishing time, not even the great Veikko Hakulinen, who had to settle for silver by a margin of 20 seconds.

In 1962 Hämäläinen took bronze in 50 kilometres at the World Championships in Zakopane, Poland. Two years later at the Innsbruck Games he launched a brave defense of his Olympic

title: he led the race after 35 kilometres but ultimately faded to 16th place. Hämäläinen was not selected to major championships after that but he continued his extraordinarily long skiing career until the early 1970's.

Pentti Hämäläinen (1929–1984)

1952 Boxing, 54 kg

Pentti Hämäläinen was raised in the tough harbor town of Kotka in a remarkable family of six brothers, all of whom became boxers of national fame. Fifth in line by age, Pentti soon stood out from the rest: by the turn of the 1950's he was recognized one of the best flyweights in the continent. He won bronze at the European Championships of 1951 and was twice selected to represent Europe in amateur matches against the USA.

In 1952 Hämäläinen was the home nation's best hope for boxing glory at the Helsinki Olympic Games and did not disappoint. He defeated four opponents by unanimous decisions on his way to the final of the bantamweight division. The final against John McNally of Ireland was a close fight, which the judges awarded to Hämäläinen by two votes to one.

Hämäläinen continued his amateur career for one more Olympiad. He moved up to featherweights and took another European Championship bronze in 1955. In Melbourne 1956 Hämäläinen earned his second Olympic medal but had to settle for bronze after losing the semi-final bout to Britain's Thomas Nicholls, whom he had beaten in Helsinki 1952.

In 1957 Hämäläinen turned professional but he retired from the ring two years later after winning five of his six matches.

Arsi Harju (b. 18 March 1974)

2000 Athletics, shot put M

Shot putter Arsi Harju made his Olympic debut in Atlanta 1996, but failed to qualify for the final. In the following year, by now wearing his trademark bandana, Harju crossed the 20-metre mark for the first time, and 21 metres followed in 1998. The World Championships of 1999 ended in disappointment following an injury-marred season.

In Sydney 2000 Harju led the qualifying competition with new personal best of 21.39. In the final he took the lead with 21.20 on the first round and improved to 21.29 on his second attempt. The American favourites struggled to respond and failed to reach Harju's mark, even if coming close: Adam Nelson took silver with 21.21 metres, John Godina bronze with 21.20. Harju's Olympic gold was Finland's first in shot put in 80 years. It was also Finland's first Olympic medal in any athletics event other than javelin throw since 1984.

Harju took bronze at the World Championships of 2001 in Edmonton and gradually retired from athletics in the following years.

Arto Härkönen (b. 31 January 1959)

1984 Athletics, javelin throw M

Arto Härkönen was one of the more surprising Finnish Olympic javelin champions. Before the Los Angeles Games of 1984 his best international achievements were silver at the European U20 Championships of 1977 and fifth place at the European Championships of 1982 in Athens. In 1983 he participated at the World Championships in Helsinki but failed to qualify for the final.

In 1984 the javelin world was rocked by Uwe Hohn's staggering world record of 104.80 metres. Hohn would not compete for Olympic medals, however, as East Germany had joined the Soviet-led boycott of the Los Angeles Games. Arto Härkönen had just made a personal best of 92.40 which put him into fourth place in the world list among throwers who were present at the Games. In the Olympic final Härkönen's fourth-round result of 86.76 metres proved enough to earn him gold. The silver was taken by David Ottley of Great Britain with 85.74.

Härkönen wound up his injury-ridden career after the 1985 season. He turned to faith and became an evangelist.

Heikki Hasu (b. 21 March 1926)

1948 Nordic combined
1952 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km

In 1948 in St. Moritz Heikki Hasu, aged only 21, became the first non-Norwegian Olympic champion in Nordic combined. Norwegians had swept all medals in the discipline at every previous Olympic Winter Games. Hasu won the skiing leg by a huge margin of three minutes and jumped just well enough to earn a comfortable victory ahead of his countryman Martti Huhtala. Such was Hasu's skiing prowess that he finished fourth in the concurrently held 18 kilometres cross-country competition.

Two years later Hasu won the World Championship title in Nordic combined. In Oslo 1952 he faced tough competition from the Norwegian hosts who wanted the Olympic title back. The order of the two events had been switched, and after the ski jump Hasu found himself in fifth place. Great performance in skiing earned him silver behind Simon Slåttvik of Norway. In the concurrent 18-kilometre skiing competition Hasu placed fourth again, which earned him a place in the Finnish cross-country relay team. Skiing the first leg, Hasu gave Finland a hefty lead, and his team-mates increased the victory margin to more than three minutes. Hasu remains the only athlete who has won Olympic gold in both Nordic combined and cross-country skiing in the post-war era.

Heikki Hasu retired from sports in 1953 at the age of 27 to concentrate on work on his farm. He represented the Agrarian Party in the Finnish parliament from 1962 to 1966 and 1967 to 1970.

Mirja Hietamies (1931–2013)

1956 Cross-country skiing, 3 x 5 km W

Mirja Hietamies was only 21 when took silver in women's 10 kilometres in Oslo 1952, beaten only by her team-mate Lydia Wideman. Siiri Rantanen finished third to complete a full sweep of medals for Finland in the first ever women's Olympic cross-country skiing competition.

In 1954 Hietamies took bronze in 10 kilometres at the World Championships in Falun. Two years later in Cortina d'Ampezzo she finished sixth in the 10-kilometre race. The Soviet Union had entered the Olympic Games and replaced Finland as the leading power in women's cross-country skiing. The Soviets were favoured to win gold in the relay as well, but the Finnish ladies begged to differ. Mirja Hietamies started for the second leg 24 seconds behind Alevtina Kolchina of the USSR but cut the deficit to six seconds. Anchorwoman Siiri Rantanen did the rest, and Finland celebrated victory.

Hietamies retired from major competitions after the Cortina Games. She made a brief return under her married name Mirja Eteläpää but did not win selection for the Squaw Valley 1960. She worked as bus driver and later founded a transport company of her own.

Yrjö Hietanen (1927–2011)

1952 Canoeing, K-2 1000 m

1952 Canoeing, K-2 10,000 m

Yrjö Hietanen took up canoeing as a boy in the war years. In 1948 he was selected for the Olympic Games as an alternate in kayak pairs but did not get to travel to London, as the Finnish team was cut for economic reasons. Hietanen's chances of earning a place in the 1952 Games, held in his home city of Helsinki, looked also slim, until Kurt Wires asked him to join forces in kayak doubles. After only two months of joint training Wires and Hietanen were selected to represent Finland in both two doubles events.

Wires and Hietanen won gold medal in 10,000 metres by defeating the Swedish pair by only 0.4 seconds after a gruelling duel. The 1,000-metre final took place on the following day. Wires and Hietanen faced another Swedish duo and won again, by an even smaller margin. Judges awarded victory to Finland after studying the photo-finish picture, but as the image was destroyed in the process, Sweden lodged a protest. The International Canoe Federation took a year to decide on the matter until upholding Finland's victory.

Wires retired for good after the Helsinki Games. Hietanen continued his canoeing career with other partners for four more years but did not win more medals

Gunnar Höckert (1910–1940)

1936 Athletics, 5000 m

Gunnar Höckert was an exceptional figure among the champions of the golden era of Finnish athletics. Running was an unusual choice of sport for a university-educated son of an upper middle-class family, and Höckert had to combat prejudices from many directions. His rise to

the Finnish, and world, elite was spectacularly fast. Surprise choice for the Finnish team for the Olympic 5000-metre race in Berlin 1936, he won gold by defeating his countryman and defending Olympic champion Lauri Lehtinen by three seconds.

Two months after the Berlin Games Höckert made three world records in a spell of two weeks: in 3000 metres, two miles and 2000 metres. Suffering from progressing arthritis, he never attained the same level again, however, and was eventually forced to retire from tracks. Gunnar Höckert was killed in the Winter War on 11 February 1940, one day before his thirtieth birthday.

Väinö Huhtala (1935–2016)

1960 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M

Väinö Huhtala came to fore in the Finnish skiing elite as member of a team sponsored by his employing paper mill, which also included Veikko Hakulinen, the leading skier of the time. Surprise victory in a national trial race on New Year's Day 1960 earned him a call to the Finnish Olympic skiing team. In Squaw Valley Huhtala finished 13th in 15 kilometres and then won an internal three-man trial race for a place in the Finnish relay team. Huhtala started for the third leg in joint lead with Norway. He sent Veikko Hakulinen for the last leg 20 seconds behind the Norwegian anchor, which was all that Hakulinen needed to bring Finland to victory.

Huhtala won two Finnish championship titles in 15 kilometres during the following Olympiad. At the Innsbruck Games of 1964 he finished fourth in 15 kilometres, losing the bronze by only three seconds. In the relay Huhtala was the fastest skier in the opening leg, but Finland faded on subsequent legs and finally took silver.

In 1965 Huhtala was involved in a car crash that hampered the rest of his skiing career: he continued until the early 1970's but was not selected for major championships again.

Veikko Huhtanen (1919–1976)

1948 Gymnastics, overall competition
1948 Gymnastics, team competition M
1948 Gymnastics, pommelled horse

Veikko Huhtanen was the leading force in the powerful Finnish gymnastics team of the late 1940's. He stood out from the rest also by his style: Finnish gymnasts were traditionally known for pure execution and artistic lightness, whereas Huhtanen favoured speed, strength and technically difficult, risky moves. Huhtanen's style was appreciated by foreign judges, which stood him in good stead at the Olympic Games in London 1948. Another thing in his favour was that Germany was excluded from the Games and the USSR did not yet take part, which left Finland with few rivals at the top.

The gymnastics competitions in London 1948 were a rather chaotic event: the judges took a long time to publish the results. When the scores were finally announced, they were even better than expected: Finland had won the team competition ahead of Switzerland, and

Veikko Huhtanen won gold in the individual overall competition. His third gold medal came in pommel horse, tied with countrymen Paavo Aaltonen and Heikki Savolainen. Silver in parallel bars and bronze in horizontal bar completed his haul of five Olympic medals.

Huhtanen continued his gymnastics career after London. In 1950 he took World Championship silver in horizontal bar. Injuries started to take their toll, however. Huhtanen had hoped to defend his Olympic titles in 1952 in Helsinki, his home city, but shoulder troubles put an end to that dream. Huhtanen worked as a machinist in a factory in Helsinki and later became a gymnastics instructor.

Antti Hyvärinen (1932–2000)

1956 Ski jumping

Antti Hyvärinen was the first Finnish Olympic champion in ski jumping.

Finland made an emphatic breakthrough to the world ski jumping elite in the mid-1950's. Pioneering a new aerodynamic technique, where the arms were kept back close to the hips instead of extended forward, Finnish jumpers had won gold and silver at the World Championships of 1954 and top three places at the 1954–55 Four Hills Tournament. Norwegians had won every Olympic ski jumping competition until that time, but Finns were confident that any of their four jumpers could take gold in Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956.

Hailing from Rovaniemi on the Arctic Circle, Antti Hyvärinen had placed seventh in his Olympic debut in Oslo 1952. He suffered a bad crash in Oberstdorf on New Year's Eve 1955 but recovered to win at the last Finnish Olympic trials. In the Olympic competition in Cortina Hyvärinen was in third place after the first round. His second jump of 84 metres, longest in the competition, propelled him to first place with team-mate Aulis Kallakorpi securing the silver for Finland.

Hyvärinen capped his 1956 season by winning the prestigious Holmenkollen competition in Oslo. In November 1957 he suffered a hip injury from which he never quite recovered, even if he continued his career until 1960. Hyvärinen worked as head coach of Finnish ski jumpers from 1960 to 1964 and later served in the ski jumping commission of International Skiing Federation.

Volmari Iso-Hollo (1907–1969)

1932 Athletics, 3000 m steeplechase

1936 Athletics, 3000 m steeplechase

Volmari Iso-Hollo started his athletics career in the Finnish Workers' Sport Federation and won the 3000-metre and 5000-metre races at the Moscow Spartakiads of 1928. In the early 1930's he crossed the political divide to the bourgeois sports federation SVUL, thereby gaining Olympic eligibility.

In Los Angeles 1932 Iso-Hollo took silver in the opening 10,000-metre race behind Josef Kusociński of Poland. That was considered a disappointment: for the first time ever Finland

had failed to win Olympic gold in the event. Iso-Hollo made amends in the 3000-metre steeplechase. He had tried the event only once before, in 1929, but dominated the Olympic final and won gold by a margin of 12 seconds. Due to error of the officials the finalists made one lap too many and actually covered a distance of 3450 metres.

Iso-Hollo continued his success in a wide range of long-distance events, even after contracting arthritis in 1934. In Berlin 1936 he took Olympic bronze in 10,000 metres behind his countrymen Ilmari Salminen and Arvo Askola, thus completing a famous Finnish sweep of medals. In 3000 metres steeplechase Iso-Hollo renewed his Olympic title in convincing fashion, with Kaarlo Tuominen securing silver for Finland. His winning time of 9:03.8 was a new unofficial world record.

Ludowika Jakobsson (1884–1968)

1920 Figure skating, pairs

Figure skater Ludowika Jakobsson was Finland's first female Olympic champion.

Born in Potsdam, Ludowika Eilers met Walter Jakobsson in Berlin in 1908. They won a total of six World Championship medals in pairs skating before the first World War, including gold in 1911 and 1914. Ludowika also competed in singles skating at the time, winning World Championship bronze for Germany in 1911. She adopted Finnish nationality when she married Jakob in 1911.

In 1920 the Jakobssons won gold in pairs skating at the first post-war Olympic Games in Antwerp, Belgium. Ludowika also became the only German-born medallist at the Antwerp Games, to which Germany was not invited. Representatives of artistic old-school skating, the Jakobssons continued their career for several more years. They won their third World Championship title in 1923 and Olympic silver at the Chamonix Winter Games of 1924.

Ludowika was 43 when the Jakobssons finally retired after placing fifth at their third Olympic Games in St. Moritz 1928. She led a skating school in Helsinki for more than 40 years.

Walter Jakobsson (1882–1957)

1920 Figure skating, pairs

Walter Jakobsson, Finnish champion in men's figure skating, was studying for his engineering degree in Berlin when he met Ludowika Eilers in 1908. Married since 1911, they became the best figure skating pair of their time, winning a total of seven World Championship medals between 1910 and 1923. In April 1920 the Jakobssons won gold at the Olympic Games in Antwerp. As Finland had gained independence in 1917, that was the first time that the Finnish flag was raised and national anthem played at the Olympic Games.

The Jakobssons took silver at the Olympic Winter Games of 1924 in Chamonix and finished fifth at their last Olympic Games in St. Moritz 1928, at which time Walter was 46. Walter Jakobsson made a long administrative career in the Finnish Skating Association and the International Skating Union. He also served as an international figure skating judge.

Jakobsson worked as head of engineering at Kone Oy, which became one of world's foremost manufacturers of elevators.

Kalle Jalkanen (1907–1941)

1936 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km

Kalle Jalkanen etched his name into Finnish sports history on the anchor leg of the first ever Olympic skiing relay at Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936.

Jalkanen was surprisingly selected for the Finnish Olympic skiing team after finishing second in the domestic trials. In Garmisch-Partenkirchen he won an internal trial race to earn a place in the relay team. Finnish team leaders hoped that more experienced skiers would give Jalkanen a good head start for the anchor leg, but the plan backfired, as Norway gained a 1.20-minute lead over Finland after three legs. Jalkanen was not deterred: he caught Norway's anchor Bjarne Iversen at half-way stage of the leg and took the lead. The men fought a fierce battle in the last kilometres. At one stage Jalkanen had to stop to collect his dentures that he had accidentally spat on the snow, but he caught the Norwegian again, went past and won in the end by a margin of six seconds.

Tired by his relay exploits Jalkanen finished twelfth in the individual 18-kilometre race in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. After earning two silver medals at the World Championships of 1937 he took his greatest individual victory in 1938, winning gold in 50 kilometres in front of huge home crowds at the World Championships in Lahti. War put an end to Jalkanen's skiing career. He died after stepping on a mine behind the front line in September 1941.

Jyrki Järvi (b. 7 February 1966)

2000 Sailing, 49er

Jyrki Järvi competed in several sailing classes before joining Thomas Johanson's 49er project in 1998: his best World Championship results were tenth place in Europe class in 1987 and fifth place in 470 in 1990. Johanson and Järvi quickly forged a successful partnership and won bronze at the World 49er Championships in Mexico in March 2000.

49er was a new Australian-designed two-handed skiff class introduced to the Olympic program for Sydney 2000. The hosts were expecting to win gold in their "own" event in front of the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge, but the Finns stole the show. Johanson and Järvi were fastest in only one of the 16 starts but finished in top three eight times. Second place in the penultimate 15th start secured their gold medal, and the last race was a formality. Silver went to Great Britain and bronze to the USA while the Australian boat dropped to sixth place.

Järvi retired from elite-level sailing competitions after the Olympic triumph in Sydney.

Matti Järvinen (1909–1986)

1932 Athletics, javelin throw

One of the greatest javelin throwers of all time, Matti Järvinen was the youngest and most successful of Verner Järvinen's four sons, who all became star athletes.

Matti Järvinen made ten consecutive world javelin records between 1930 and 1936, improving his mark from 71.57 to 77.23. In Los Angeles 1932 he won Olympic gold with a result of 72.71 with team-mates Matti Sippala and Eino Penttilä securing a full sweep of medals for Finland. Järvinen went on to dominate the javelin world for better part of the decade, winning the European championship titles in Turin 1934 and Paris 1938. The sole major disappointment came in the Olympic final in Berlin 1936 where Järvinen, nursing a back injury, could not finish better than fifth place.

Järvinen won his last Finnish championship title in 1942. He continued his career even after the war years while gradually turning to coaching. Järvinen worked as coach and sports instructor until the 1960's and inspired generations of Finnish javelin throwers.

Verner Järvinen (1870–1941)

1906 Athletics, Ancient style discus throw

Verner Järvinen was the first Finnish Olympic champion in athletics.

Winner of many strength contests and wrestling challenges at folk festivals, Verner Järvinen was known as one of Finland's strongest men around the turn of the 20th century. Railway conductor by profession, Järvinen was self-educated in Ancient history and eagerly read news about the rebirth of the Olympic Games. When Finland made its Olympic entry in 1906, Järvinen was one of the four men who travelled to Athens to take part at the Intercalated Games.

In Athens Järvinen took bronze medal in discus throw and finished fifth in javelin. In shot put he made the best result but was disqualified for faulty technique. Unhappy with his results, he decided to take part in Ancient style discus throw, an event where the throwers stood on a pedestal and emulated the position of the famous ancient Greek statue. Järvinen won the gold medal with a result of 35.17, defeating the home favourite Nikolaos Georgantas by two metres.

In London 1908 Verner Järvinen participated in many throwing events again: he took bronze in Ancient style discus and finished fourth in the "regular" discus competition. Järvinen competed at his last Olympic Games at the age of 42 in Stockholm 1912. Known as "Father" Järvinen, he coached his four boys with harsh methods into champion athletes. Akilles Järvinen took Olympic silver in decathlon in 1928 and 1932, and Matti won gold in javelin throw in 1932.

Sami Jauhojärvi (b. 5 May 1981)

2014 Cross-country skiing, team sprint (Classical), M

Sami Jauhojärvi was a mainstay in Finnish men's cross-country skiing team for more than a

decade. He made his Olympic debut at the Turin Games of 2006, finishing ninth in 15 kilometres. Jauhojärvi's best year was 2009, when he won bronze medals in team sprint and relay at the World Championships in Liberec, took his only individual World Cup victory in the Classical technique 50-kilometre race in Trondheim, Norway, and finished fourth in the overall classification of the World Cup.

In Sochi 2014 Jauhojärvi, skiing at his third Olympic Games at 32, joined forces with young Iivo Niskanen for the Classical technique team sprint. Finland was not counted among the favourites but held on in the leading pack all through the race. Jauhojärvi started for his last 1.8-kilometre leg in joint lead with Russia's Nikita Kryukov and Germany's Tim Tscharnke. The race came to a dramatic end: the Russian and German anchors collided, which allowed Jauhojärvi to escape to victory. This was Finland's first Olympic gold medal at Winter Games in 12 years.

In 2017 Jauhojärvi and Iivo Niskanen teamed up again for the Classical team sprint at the home World Championships in Lahti. This time Niskanen did the anchor leg, but just as he was about to take the lead in the last curve he crashed, and Finland had to settle for bronze. After that season Jauhojärvi retired from the skiing competitions.

Thomas Johanson (b. 3 June 1969)

2000 Sailing, 49er

Thomas Johanson started his sailing career in Europe class before moving on to Laser, in which he won one World and two European Championship titles and took part in the 1996 Olympic regatta in Savannah, finishing in eighth place. After the 1998 season he teamed with Jyrki Järvi in 49er, the new two-handed skiff class that had been introduced into the sailing program of the Sydney Olympic Games. They learned the secrets of the new boat quickly and won bronze at the World Championships in March 2000.

The Olympic regatta of 49er class in Sydney 2000 consisted of 16 starts. Johanson and Järvi sailed with remarkable consistency, never dropping below fourth place in the overall classification. Victory in the 14th start and second place in the 15th sealed their gold medal. They would not have needed to take part in the last race but started anyway because the President of Finland had come to see them sail.

After parting ways with Jyrki Järvi Johanson continued in 49er class with his new partner Jukka Piirainen. Their project ended with eighth place at the Olympic regatta of 2004 in Athens. In 2005 Johanson retired from sailing in Olympic classes and moved to ocean racing.

Kaarlo Kangasniemi (b. 4 February 1941)

1968 Weightlifting, 90 kg

Finnish weightlifting enjoyed a short period of bloom in the late 1960's with Kaarlo Kangasniemi as its brightest name.

A blacksmith's son with four brothers who also became championship-level weightlifters, Kaarlo Kangasniemi made his Olympic debut in Tokyo 1964, finishing seventh in the 82.5 kg category. Four years later he took a big leap forward: after taking bronze at the European Championships in June 1968 Kangasniemi made his first world record and improved it twice before travelling to the Olympic Games in México in October.

Kangasniemi dominated the 90-kilogram division in México: he pressed 172.5 kg, snatched a world record of 157.5 kg and cleaned 187.5 kg to reach a total score of 517.5 kg, defeating by ten kilograms his greatest rival Jaan Talts, an Estonian representing the Soviet Union. Kangasniemi became Finland's first Olympic weightlifting medallist as well as the only Finnish champion at the México Games.

In 1969 Kangasniemi won gold medals at the World and European Championships in Warsaw, and in the following year he took another European title. Back injuries took their toll, however, and Kangasniemi was forced to retire from weightlifting soon after competing at his third Olympic Games in Munich 1972.

Veikko Kankkonen (b. 5 January 1940)

1964 Ski jumping, normal hill

In the early part of his career Veikko Kankkonen was known as a courageous but accident-prone ski jumper. Often his jumps ended in a fall, as had happened in his Olympic debut in Squaw Valley 1960.

In 1964 Kankkonen won the Four Hills Tournament at the turn of the year, which made him favourite to win gold at the Innsbruck Games. For the first time there were two ski jump events in the Olympic program: normal hill and large hill. There was also a change of rules which was to prove important: there were now three rounds of jumping instead of two, and the worst result of each jumper was discarded from the total score.

Kankkonen took maximum benefit from the new rules in the Olympic normal hill competition. He stumbled badly in his first jump but made a glorious 80-metre leap on the second round. His third jump ended in elegant landing at 79 metres and brought him the gold medal ahead of Norway's Toralf Engan. In the large hill competition Kankkonen took the lead after the first round but dropped to second place after almost falling in his second jump. On the third round he made the longest jump but fell. Kankkonen remained in silver medal position, but his fallen jump caused a change in the other medals, Toralf Engan replacing his countryman Torgeir Brandtzæg in gold.

After the Innsbruck Games ski jump competitions returned to two rounds and have remained so ever since. Veikko Kankkonen won the Four Hills Tournament again in 1966, but later that year he suffered a crash from which he did not fully recover. He retired from ski jumping after competing at his third Olympic Games in Grenoble 1968.

Urho Karhumäki (1891–1947)

1936 Art competitions, literature, epic works

Writer Urho Karhumäki was the first Finnish medallist at Olympic art competitions. The Olympic Games included art competitions as official medal events between 1912 and 1948.

Teacher by profession, Urho Karhumäki was a versatile author: he published novels, plays, essays and non-fiction works. Patriotism, rustic life and idealised nature were recurrent themes in his books, well in keeping with the spirit of the 1930's. Karhumäki was an avid sportsman and often wrote about the intrinsic moral value of physical fitness. His entry at the Berlin 1936 Olympic art competitions, titled *Avoveteen* (To Open Waters), was a novel about a young man who returns to his home village after wasting years in corrupting city life, finds love and a new purpose for his life in sports and ultimately wins gold in 5,000 metres at the 1940 Olympic Games in Helsinki.

Karhumäki had not expected to win and was surprised to hear about his Olympic victory while he was on a ship to Berlin to watch the Games as a tourist. He had to stay in Berlin to finish the book: the judging panel had made its choice on the basis a partial manuscript in German translation. *Avoveteen* was subsequently published in Finnish and German and was a middling success, as was its Finnish film adaptation in 1939.

Klaes Karppinen (1907–1992)

1936 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km

Klaes Karppinen was one of the best skiers in the world in the late 1930's: he won a total of ten World Championship medals, record at the time, between 1934 and 1939. Karppinen is best remembered as a relay skier, however: he skied in the Finnish team at six consecutive major championships, winning five gold medals and one silver. The most notable of his relay victories came in the inaugural Olympic relay in 1936.

Karppinen's best individual achievement was gold medal in 18 kilometres at the 1935 FIS races, later recognised as World Championships, in Vysoké Tatry, Czechoslovakia. He also took silver in 50 kilometres at the same competitions. The Olympic Games of 1936 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen were a rare disappointment for Karppinen. In the relay he started for the second leg one minute after Norway and fell 20 seconds further behind, but Kalle Jalkanen's heroics on the anchor leg saved the day for Finland. In the Olympic 50-kilometre race Karppinen finished fifth as the best Finnish skier.

In the following years Karppinen increased his medal tally with World Championship silver in 50 km in Chamonix 1937 and silver in both 18 and 50 km in Zakopane 1939. Such was Finland's strength in depth in those days that in spite of his ten World Championship medals Karppinen never managed to win an individual Finnish championship title.

Pertti Karppinen (b. 17 February 1953)

1976 Rowing, single sculls M

1980 Rowing, single sculls M

1984 Rowing, single sculls M

Winner of three single sculls gold medals in a row, Pertti Karppinen is one of the greatest Olympic rowers of all time.

Karppinen's first Olympic victory in Montreal 1976 was a complete surprise. Finland had never won gold in rowing before, and few expected a medal from Karppinen, even if he had finished fourth at the World Championships of 1975. In the Olympic final Karppinen took a slow start but he picked up pace, caught the favourite Peter-Michael Kolbe of West Germany after 1,500 metres and slid past him to win gold by two seconds.

In the following years Karppinen and Kolbe alternated as winners of major single sculls titles, with Karppinen winning World Championship gold in 1979. West Germany's boycott of the Moscow Games of 1980 left Karppinen without a serious challenger, and he duly won his second Olympic title in overwhelming manner.

During the next three years Karppinen rowed double sculls with his brother Reima, with silver medal at the World Championships of 1981 as their best result. The Olympic year 1984 saw Pertti Karppinen return to single sculls. In Los Angeles 1984 he met his old rival Peter-Michael Kolbe. Once again the German led the race almost until the very end, and once again Karppinen passed him in the last few strokes.

Pertti Karppinen continued his rowing career for eight more years. He won his second World Championship title in 1985 and his last medal in 1987. He finished seventh in Seoul 1988 and finally retired after placing tenth at his fifth Olympic Games in Barcelona 1992. He worked as fireman during his rowing career and later became a sports masseur.

Elias Katz (1901–1947)

1924 Athletics, 3000 m team race

Elias Katz made his breakthrough in 1923 by winning the 3000-metre steeplechase at the most prestigious international athletics meet of the year in Gothenburg, Sweden. He was one of the first Finnish runners who gave serious thought to steeplechase, an event that was still in its infancy in the early 1920's.

Finnish star runners Paavo Nurmi and Ville Ritola dominated long-distance races at will at the Paris Olympic Games of 1924. Nurmi was not interested in steeplechase, which gave Elias Katz a chance for the silver medal. He did not disappoint and crossed the finish line in second place, 11 seconds behind Ritola. Katz's other event in Paris was the 3000-metre team race. Each country could enter six runners, and its team score was decided by adding the placings of the best three men. With Nurmi and Ritola on board, Finland was almost certain to win. As expected, Nurmi came first and Ritola second. Katz clinched the gold medal by finishing fifth as the third-best Finnish runner; eleventh place would have been enough.

Katz was Finland's first Jewish Olympic champion. He lived in Germany from 1925 but still occasionally competed in Finland. He was training for the Amsterdam Games of 1928 when foot injury put an end to his career. In 1932 Katz moved to Palestine, where he worked as cinema projectionist and athletics coach among Jewish settlers. He was killed by a sniper in Gaza in 1947.

Marja-Liisa Kirvesniemi (b. 10 September 1955)

1984	Cross-country skiing, 5 km W
1984	Cross-country skiing, 10 km W
1984	Cross-country skiing, 20 km W

Marja-Liisa Kirvesniemi (née Hämäläinen) is the most successful Finnish female Olympic athlete of all time.

Marja-Liisa Hämäläinen had won relay gold at the World Championships of 1978, but she made her real breakthrough to the world skiing elite in the 1982/83 season, winning the World Cup. In the following winter in Sarajevo Hämäläinen made Olympic history by winning all three individual gold medals: victory in 10 kilometres was followed by another in 5 kilometres and a third one in 20 km, which was a new Olympic event. Her fourth medal in Sarajevo was bronze in the relay.

Skiing since 1984 under her married name, Marja-Liisa Kirvesniemi continued her career for ten more years after Sarajevo. She won another Olympic relay bronze in Calgary 1988 and bronze in both 5 km and 30 km at her sixth and last Olympic Games in Lillehammer 1994. In addition to her seven Olympic medals Kirvesniemi collected eight medals at World Championships, including gold in the Classical technique 10-kilometre race in front of home audience in Lahti in 1989.

After retiring from skiing in 1994 Kirvesniemi worked as physiotherapist. Her former husband Harri Kirvesniemi was also a famous skier who won six Olympic bronze medals between 1980 and 1998.

Arto Koivisto (b. 7 December 1947)

1976	Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M
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Arto Koivisto had a brief but bright spell in the world skiing elite in the Olympic year 1976. Coast guard by profession, Koivisto won his first Finnish championship title in 1974. In 1976 he won the Finnish national trials and travelled to the Innsbruck Games in confident mood. After finishing eighth in the opening 30-kilometre race Koivisto took bronze in 15 kilometres. He had led the race at half-way stage but dropped to third place behind two Soviet skiers after falling in the last kilometres.

The Soviet Union was favoured to win the relay race but dropped out of contention when their opening skier broke his shoe. Instead, Juha Mieto gave Finland a commanding lead on the second leg. Arto Koivisto started for the anchor leg with a comfortable one-minute lead over Norway. Instead of just securing victory he clocked the fastest individual time of the whole relay and increased Finland's winning margin to almost two minutes.

Koivisto concluded his Innsbruck Games by finishing tenth in 50 kilometres. The last years of his skiing career were not as successful: he took part at the World Championships of 1978 and 1982 but failed to qualify for Lake Placid 1980.

Väinö Kokkinen (1899–1967)

1928	Wrestling, Greco-Roman 75 kg
1932	Wrestling, Greco-Roman 79 kg

Väinö Kokkinen was the best middleweight wrestler of the Finnish Workers' Sport Federation in the 1920's. After winning first prize at the Workers' Olympiad of 1925 in Frankfurt am Main he moved to the "bourgeois" federation and gained Olympic eligibility. In Amsterdam 1928 Kokkinen pinned all his five opponents to win gold; only Ivar Johansson of Sweden and László Papp of Hungary could give him tough resistance.

In Los Angeles 1932 only four wrestlers entered the Greco-Roman middleweight category. Kokkinen won his second gold medal in convincing fashion after pinning Sweden's Axel Cadier in the last match after 18 minutes of wrestling. In his prime years Kokkinen kept in shape by hard physical work: he lifted heavy coffee bags every day in his job as deliveryman. Later he opened his own restaurant and had less time for training. He ended his wrestling career after finishing fourth at his third Olympic Games in Berlin 1936.

Hannes Kolehmainen (1889–1966)

1912	Athletics, 5000 m
1912	Athletics, 10,000 m
1912	Athletics, cross-country race
1920	Athletics, marathon

Winner of three Olympic gold medals in Stockholm 1912 and a fourth one in the marathon of 1920, Hannes Kolehmainen was the first of Finland's legendary runners.

Hannes Kolehmainen first made a name for himself outside Finland with his victory in the 4-mile race at the English championships of 1911. In Stockholm 1912 he first won gold in 10,000 metres in overwhelming manner. The 5000-metre final saw a famous duel between Kolehmainen and Jean Bouin of France: Bouin kept relentless pace, but Kolehmainen followed at his heels and pulled ahead of the Frenchman in the final metres. His winning time was a spectacular new world record 14:36.6. Next Kolehmainen made a world record in 3000 metres in qualifying heats of the team race before wrapping up his Stockholm Games by winning his third gold medal in the cross-country race. He had to settle for silver in the team cross-country competition because one of his team-mates suffered a foot injury.

Kolehmainen did not come home from the Stockholm Games: instead of returning to Finland he emigrated to the United States. For the next eight years "The Smiling Finn" dominated the long-distance running scene in North America, clocking many records in indoor and outdoor races. Kolehmainen was asked to represent the USA at the Olympic Games of 1920, but he wanted to run for his home country, which by now had become an independent nation. In Antwerp Kolehmainen won Olympic marathon gold for Finland.

After the Antwerp Games Kolehmainen returned to Finland to stay. He took part at one more Olympic Games in Paris 1924 but failed to finish the marathon. After his career he opened a

sporting goods store in Helsinki. In 1952 Hannes Kolehmainen lit the flame in the tower of the Olympic Stadium at the opening ceremony of the Helsinki Games.

Mikko Kolehmainen (b. 18 August 1964)

1992 Canoeing, K-1 500 m M

Mikko Kolehmainen made his Olympic debut in kayak fours in Los Angeles 1984 and competed in kayak doubles with his brother Olli in Seoul 1988. In kayak singles his best result was seventh place in 500 metres at the World Championships of 1991, but he made rapid progress in the 1992 Olympic season, finishing third in a World Cup race in Duisburg just before the Barcelona Games. Few people in Finland still expected him to win an Olympic medal, let alone gold.

In Barcelona Kolehmainen won his heat and semi-final in 500 metres in convincing fashion. In the final he took a cautious start. In seventh place at halfway point, he picked up pace, caught the rest of the field and edged past the defending champion, Hungary's Zsolt Gyulay in the last 20 metres. Kolehmainen's victory was Finland's only gold medal at the Barcelona Games as well as the first Finnish Olympic canoeing medal since 1952.

Kolehmainen won gold in 500 metres at the World Championships of 1993 in Copenhagen. He competed at his fourth Olympic Games in Atlanta 1996, finishing seventh in 500 metres and ninth in 1000 metres and retired from canoe races after the 1997 season.

Urpo Korhonen (1923–2009)

1952 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M

Urpo Korhonen was one of the best skiers of his time in shorter distances, but such was the strength in depth of Finnish skiing in the early 1950's that he never quite rose to the forefront. He failed to win a place in the Finnish team for the individual 18-kilometre race of the 1952 Olympic Games but travelled to Oslo as a candidate for the relay team.

Tapio Mäkelä, Paavo Lonkila and Heikki Hasu were selected to the Finnish relay team after finishing in places 2, 3 and 4 in the 18-kilometre race. Urpo Korhonen won an internal trial race between other Finnish skiers for the remaining slot. His task did not prove very daunting: he started for the third leg with a commanding lead of 2.30 minutes and came to the last exchange 2.24 minutes ahead of Norway, leaving the anchor Mäkelä an easy job to bring Finland to victory.

Korhonen was also an accomplished long-distance runner: he finished eighth in 10,000 metres at the Finnish trials for the Helsinki Olympic Games. In later years he wrote three books based on his experiences as a ski patrol commando in the Second World War.

Tapio Korjus (b. 10 February 1961)

1988 Athletics, javelin throw M

Tapio Korjus was a talented cross-country skier in his junior years but back pains forced him to abandon skiing and concentrate on his summer sport, javelin throw. He won a surprising gold medal at the Finnish championships of 1987, but his real breakthrough came in the Olympic year 1988: two improvements of the Finnish javelin record made Korjus a medal favourite for the Seoul Games.

In the Olympic javelin final in Seoul Korjus took the lead with his first-round throw of 82.74. Thigh cramp forced him to forfeit two throws and he could only watch the Czechoslovak world record holder Jan Železný and his Finnish countryman Seppo Rätty overtake him. With the last throw of the competition Korjus made a result of 84.28, which surpassed Železný's mark by 12 centimetres. Rätty took the bronze medal for Finland. Korjus was Finland's seventh Olympic javelin champion and the only Finnish gold medallist at the Seoul Games.

Recurrent injuries forced Tapio Korjus to end his javelin career after the 1989 season. He became a coach and a prominent sports administrator. Korjus has served as director of Kuortane Olympic training center and chairman of the Finnish state sports council.

Lauri Koskela (1907–1944)

1936 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 66 kg

Lauri Koskela began his wrestling career in the Workers' Sport Federation but he was forced to change affiliation in the heady political atmosphere of the early 1930's. In Los Angeles 1932 Koskela took Olympic bronze in the featherweight category of Greco-Roman wrestling. Next he moved up to lightweights and won the European Championship title in 1935.

In Berlin 1936 Koskela prevailed over tough resistance to win gold in the Greco-Roman lightweight division: he defeated Josef Herda of Czechoslovakia and Voldemar Väli of Estonia by split decisions in the deciding bouts. Two more European championship titles in 1937 and 1938 confirmed Koskela's dominance in the division.

Koskela had intended to defend his Olympic title in front of home audience in Helsinki 1940, but war cancelled those Games. He was called to arms himself at the last stages of the war and died on the frontline while on guard duty in August 1944.

Kaarlo Koskelo (1888–1953)

1912 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 60 kg

Kaarlo Koskelo was the most surprising Finnish wrestling champion at the Olympic Games of 1912. Largely unknown even in the home country, he travelled to Stockholm as one of Finland's seven entrants in the featherweight division. Koskelo defeated five opponents to win a place in the top three alongside his team-mate Otto Lasanen and Germany's Georg Gerstacker.

The rules of the Olympic wrestling tournament of 1912 stated that if the loser of the first match between the top three beats the third wrestler, the winner of the first match will be

declared champion. After Lasanen lost to Gerstacker he had to forfeit his match against Koskelo, otherwise the gold medal would go to Germany. Koskelo then saved the day for Finland by pinning Gerstacker in 18 minutes.

Koskelo did not wrestle again at major competitions after the Stockholm Games. Bricklayer by profession, Kaarlo Koskelo was the only Olympic champion who fought on the Red side of the Civil War of 1918. After the defeat he escaped imminent execution by leaving the country. Koskelo travelled via Siberia and China to America and settled in Oregon where he opened a Finnish sauna bath. He did not visit his homeland until 1952, when he came as a tourist for the Helsinki Olympic Games.

Teodor Koskenniemi (1887–1965)

1920 Athletics, cross-country race, team competition

Shoemaker Teodor Koskenniemi was a late bloomer as an athlete: he started his running career at the age of 26 and won his first Finnish championship title in 5000 metres five years later in 1919.

Koskenniemi was the oldest member of the Finnish track team at the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp. While all eyes were on his young team-mate Paavo Nurmi, Koskenniemi did much better than expected, finishing fourth in 5000 metres and sixth in the cross-country race. The team competition of the cross-country was decided by adding the placements of best three runners of each country. As Paavo Nurmi finished first and Heikki Liimatainen third, Koskenniemi's sixth place was more than enough to secure Finland the gold medal by a comfortable margin over Great Britain.

Risto Laakkonen (b. 6 May 1967)

1992 Ski jumping, team competition

Risto Laakkonen had made his Olympic debut in Calgary 1988, but his breakthrough to the world ski jumping elite came in the following season. After finishing second in Oberstdorf, third in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, seventh in Innsbruck and tenth in Bischofshofen Laakkonen claimed a surprise victory in the Four Hills Tournament. At the World Championships of 1989 in Lahti Laakkonen clinched the team gold for the home country as the last jumper of the competition.

In the next few years ski jumping was revolutionised by "V-style". Laakkonen never mastered the new technique, which put him out of contention for podium places: eighth place in normal hill at the World Championships of 1991 was to remain his best individual achievement at major events. At the Albertville Games of 1992 Laakkonen finished 16th in normal hill and 21st in large hill. In the team competition Laakkonen made two secure jumps that seemed to guarantee Finland the silver medal behind Austria. That was upgraded to gold after a huge final performance by the 16-year-old Toni Nieminen, only jumper in the Finnish team who used the V-style.

Laakkonen retired from ski jumping after the 1992 season. He worked as bricklayer during his sports career and later became a library worker.

Matti Lähde (1911–1978)

1936 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km

Matti Lähde was a surprise winner in the short-distance race at the Finnish skiing championships of 1935. Later in the same year he finished fourth in 18 kilometres at the Holmenkollen Ski Games. Lähde struggled to find the same form in the next winter but he still qualified for the Finnish Olympic team for Garmisch-Partenkirchen and once there, gained a place in the relay team.

Lähde started for the third leg in second place 1.30 minutes behind Norway's Sverre Brodahl. He cut the difference by three seconds, leaving the Finland's fourth skier Kalle Jalkanen a glimmer of hope. Jalkanen caught the Norwegian anchor and brought Finland to a famous victory. Two days later Lähde finished fifteenth in the individual 18-kilometre competition; he had caught flu but was entered for the race anyway, as the other Finnish skiers were even more sick.

In later years Lähde competed sparsely and concentrated on his work as policeman. One of the best results of his late career was victory in 50 kilometres at the Lahti Ski Games of 1941.

Janne Lahtela (b. 28 February 1974)

2002 Freestyle skiing, moguls M

Hailing from Kemijärvi, Finland's northernmost town, Janne Lahtela led Finnish moguls skiing in its golden era around the turn of the millennium.

Lahtela had won two world junior championship moguls titles, but it still came as a surprise for most Finns when he took silver and his cousin Sami Mustonen bronze for Finland in the Olympic moguls competition in Nagano 1998. One year later Lahtela won gold at the World Championships in Meiringen-Hasliberg, Switzerland, while Lauri Lassila and Mustonen secured Finnish moguls skiers a clean sweep of medals.

The freestyle skiing competitions of the Salt Lake City Games of 2002 took place in Deer Valley, Utah. Lahtela finished second in qualifying and edged past the home favourite Travis Mayer in the final to win gold. He became the first Finnish Olympic champion in a non-Nordic skiing event.

Janne Lahtela retired from competitions after taking part in his fifth Olympic Games in Turin 2006. In addition to his Olympic and World Championship medals he took three overall victories in the moguls World Cup. In later years he worked as head coach of moguls skiing in Japan and Finland.

Kalevi Laitinen (1918–1997)

1948 Gymnastics, team competition M

Kalevi Laitinen was considered Finland's third best gymnast before the 1948 Olympic Games, surpassed in skill only by Veikko Huhtanen and Paavo Aaltonen. In London he performed with clockwork precision in spite of nursing a shoulder injury: Laitinen placed in top twenty in all six apparatuses and finished in eighth place in the individual all-round competition. His consistency was a vital factor in Finland's narrow victory over Switzerland in the team competition.

In 1950 Laitinen finished eighth again in the allround competition at the World Championships in Basel, Switzerland. In Helsinki 1952 he was a member of Finland's bronze medal team and finished sixth in the floor competition. Laitinen was training for his third Olympic Games in 1956, when injury forced him to retire from gymnastics.

Mika Laitinen (b. 5 March 1973)

1992 Ski jumping, team competition

Mika Laitinen made a successful Olympic debut at the Albertville Games of 1992: still using the old "diagonal" jumping technique he finished fifth in normal hill and won gold in the team event, thanks to 16-year-old Toni Nieminen's tremendous second jump.

Laitinen failed to qualify for Lillehammer 1994 but by the following season he had finally learned the new "V-style". In 1995 he won bronze in normal hill and gold in team competition at the World Championships in Thunder Bay, Canada. The start of next season saw Laitinen in the best form of his career. He won five World Cup competitions in December 1995, until he crashed and broke his collarbone in training for the New Year's competition in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

In 1997 Laitinen won another team gold at the World Championships in Trondheim, Norway. More injuries followed, however, and he was not able to find his old form again. In Nagano 1998 Laitinen's best result was 18th place in the large hill competition, while Finland was fifth in the team event. Laitinen retired from ski jumping in 2000.

Samppa Lajunen (b. 23 April 1979)

2002 Nordic combined, normal competition

2002 Nordic combined, sprint competition

2002 Nordic combined, team competition

Winner of three gold medals at the 2002 Winter Games, Samppa Lajunen has been the most successful Finnish Olympic athlete in the 21st century.

Samppa Lajunen was only 17 when he won the Nordic combined World Cup overall title in the 1996/97 season. In his Olympic debut in Nagano 1998 he took silver in the individual event as well as in the team competition. Three more individual silvers followed at the World

Championships of 1999 and 2001. On most these occasions Lajunen was beaten only by Bjarte Engen Vik of Norway, whose retirement in 2001 left him alone at the top.

Lajunen was known as an excellent jumper and a fair skier. In the first Nordic combined event of the 2002 Salt Lake Olympic Games, the individual normal competition, Lajunen placed third in jumping behind his team-mate Jaakko Tallus and Mario Stecher of Austria, who were weaker skiers. Lajunen had no trouble in overtaking the two on the ski track, and Tallus took silver for Finland. In the team competition Finland took an insurmountable lead in jumping, and Lajunen had the easy task of securing victory on the anchor leg of the skiing relay. For the first time ever there were two individual Nordic combined events in the Olympic program. Lajunen was the best in jumping in the sprint competition and earned a 15-second head start for the 7.5-kilometre skiing section. He coasted to his third gold medal by a margin of nine seconds over Germany's Ronny Ackermann.

In 2003 Lajunen gained two bronze medals at the World Championships. One year later he surprisingly announced his retirement from sports, at the age of only 24. Afterwards Lajunen became a successful businessman and real estate investor.

Harri Larva (1906–1980)

1928 Athletics, 1500 m

Goldsmith's apprentice Harry Lagerström decided to become a miler after seeing Paavo Nurmi win a race in their common hometown Turku in 1924. Four years later he won the 1500-metre race at the Finnish Olympic trials, equalling Nurmi's Finnish record in the process. Earlier in 1928 he had Finnicised his name to Harri Larva.

Internationally Larva, only 21, was still an unknown quantity: the Amsterdam Games were his first major assignment outside Finland. He took a cautious start in the Olympic final but picked up pace and entered the final lap in third place. He overtook his countryman Eino Purje at the last curve and France's Jules Ladoumègue 20 metres before the finish line. Larva thus brought a second consecutive Olympic 1500-metre title to the town of Turku, while Purje took bronze for Finland.

Larva's tenure at the top was brief: he never reached his great form of 1928 again. He tried to defend his Olympic title in 1500 metres in Los Angeles 1932 but finished in tenth place.

Lauri Lehtinen (1908–1973)

1932 Athletics, 5000 m

Lauri Lehtinen emerged to the world track elite in 1931 after defeating serious arthritis that had threatened to end his career. In 1932 he won the 5000-metre race at the Finnish Olympic trials with a spectacular world record of 14:16.9, bettering Paavo Nurmi's old mark by more than 10 seconds.

Lehtinen was the overwhelming favourite to win Olympic gold in 5000 metres, but his victory caused one of the greatest scandals of Los Angeles 1932. Lehtinen had lost much of his form

during the long trip to America. On the last lap of the Olympic final he was closely trailed by the home favourite Ralph Hill, and in the last ten metres the American tried to get past. Either by exhaustion or tactical wile Lehtinen zigzagged in front of Hill, thus prevented him from overtaking. Lehtinen crossed the finish line first, but the crowd considered his conduct unsportsmanlike and booed loudly. The Americans did not lodge a protest, however, and the results were allowed to stand.

In Berlin 1936 Lehtinen came close to defending his Olympic title in 5000 metres but had to settle for silver, beaten by his countryman Gunnar Höckert.

Eero Lehtonen (1898–1959)

1920 Athletics, pentathlon

1924 Athletics, pentathlon

Athletic pentathlon combined five events: long jump, javelin throw, 200 metres, discus throw and 1500 metres. Unlike in decathlon, the results were decided by adding together the athletes' placements in each five events.

Eero Lehtonen was a versatile athlete: excellent long jumper, fast sprinter and a passable thrower. In the pentathlon in Antwerp 1920 he placed second in long jump, second in javelin, tied for first in 200 metres, second in discus and second in 1500 metres to win gold by a comfortable margin with 14 points. Hugo Lahtinen took bronze for Finland.

Never known for diligence in training, Lehtonen competed sparsely during the next four years and concentrated on his work as forestry manager. In 1924 he was ready to defend his Olympic title, however. The pentathlon competition in Paris began with a shock, as Robert LeGendre of the USA made a new world record in long jump: 776.5 metres. Lehtonen was only seventh with 662 but improved step by step: he was best in the last three events and won gold with 14 points. Elemér Somfay of Hungary took silver with 16 points, while LeGendre faded to bronze with 18.

Lehtonen ended his sports career when his event was cut from the Olympic program in 1926.

Kyösti Lehtonen (1931–1987)

1956 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 67 kg

Kyösti Lehtonen failed to win a place in the Finnish Olympic team for Helsinki 1952, but in the following year he took silver in the 67-kilogram category of Greco-Roman wrestling at the World Championships in Naples. Another silver followed at the World Championships of 1955 in Karlsruhe.

In Melbourne 1956 Lehtonen won Olympic gold by winning all his four matches. In the medal rounds he defeated Turkey's Rıza Doğan by points and Hungary's Gyula Tóth by fall. The Finnish team had a lot to celebrate: only minutes earlier Rauno Mäkinen had won gold in a lower division, and it was Finland's Independence Day, 6 December.

Lehtonen was known as a flamboyant character who often came to odds with sports authorities. The rest of his wrestling career was quite fractious: he finished fifth in Rome 1960 and was disqualified in Tokyo 1964 after failing to make weight. After his wrestling career Lehtonen served as Finland's national team coach between 1971 and 1974.

Eino Leino (1891–1986)

1920 Wrestling, Freestyle 75 kg

Eino Leino was a promising Greco-Roman wrestler when he decided to emigrate to the United States in 1914. In America only Freestyle wrestling was practiced, but Leino learned the skills well enough to become one of the best amateur wrestlers of the country. In 1920 Leino accepted an invitation to represent Finland at the Olympic Games in Antwerp. He won gold in Freestyle middleweight division by defeating his countryman Väinö Penttala in best-of-three final matches by 2–1.

Leino was already 29 in Antwerp 1920, but that was only the start of a remarkable Olympic career. In Paris 1924 Leino took silver after losing only to Hermann Gehri of Switzerland. Four years later Leino had to lose weight to gain a place in the Finnish Olympic team in the lightweight category. Weakened by the ordeal he had to settle for bronze in Amsterdam. In Los Angeles 1932 Leino gained yet another bronze at the age of 41, thus becoming the first wrestler to win a medal at four Olympic Games.

Eino Leino moved back to Finland in 1932 and became a farmer and a wrestling coach.

Heikki Liimatainen (1894–1980)

1920 Athletics, cross-country race, team competition

1924 Athletics, cross-country race, team competition

Heikki Liimatainen won three Finnish championship titles in 10,000 metres between 1918 and 1920. In Antwerp 1920 he finished in seventh place in 10,000 metres won by his young compatriot Paavo Nurmi. In the cross-country race Liimatainen took bronze behind Nurmi and Sweden's Eric Backman. The team competition was decided by the sums of placings of the best three runners of each nation. Finland won gold with a comfortable margin, as Nurmi placed first, Liimatainen third and Teodor Koskenniemi sixth.

In Paris 1924 Liimatainen won his second gold medal in a much more dramatic way. The cross-country race took place in excruciating heat: 36 degrees in shadow. Paavo Nurmi won gold and Ville Ritola silver, but Finland still needed a third man to finish to get a team result. Three of the six Finnish entrants had fallen by the wayside, when Liimatainen staggered to the stadium. Delirious from sunstroke, he turned at first to wrong direction before finding the right way and finally managed to cross the finish line in twelfth place. Finland won the team gold by three points ahead of the USA.

Liimatainen ended his running career after his ordeal in Paris. He later became the manager of a sweet factory. Cross-country race was cut from the Olympic program after the Paris Games, never to return.

Yrjö Lindegren (1900–1952)

1948 Art competitions, architecture, town planning

Yrjö Lindegren was one of Finland's most renowned architects in the middle years of the 20th century. His most famous work was the Olympic Stadium of Helsinki, designed in partnership with Toivo Jäntti. The two young architects were surprise winners of the design competition in 1932. Considered a masterpiece of Functionalist architecture, the stadium was inaugurated in 1938 and later served as main venue of the 1952 Olympic Games.

In 1946 Lindegren was contracted by a paper mill company to design a sports centre to the small industrial town of Varkaus. His plan included a total of 45 facilities for different sports and other recreational activities, complete with an observation tower, outdoor amphitheater and a funfair ground, all set in harmony with the forested landscape. Lindegren's project was sent as Finland's entry to the art competitions of the 1948 London Olympic Games and was rewarded with gold medal in town planning category. The bronze medal was won by Ilmari Niemeläinen of Finland for a similar sports centre project in the town of Kemi.

Lindegren's plan for Varkaus became entangled in municipal politics and never realised: in fact, only the athletics track was ever built. The Olympic art competitions were discontinued after the London Games.

Adolf Lindfors (1879–1959)

1920 Wrestling, Greco-Roman over 82.5 kg

Adolf Lindfors was one of the best Finnish heavyweight wrestlers in the early years of the 20th century. He won three national championship titles between 1905 and 1913 as well as World Championship silver in 1911. In the Olympic tournament in Stockholm 1912 Lindfors had to withdraw after two matches due to injury. He retired from wrestling at the age of 36 in 1915 and concentrated on his bakery shop.

In 1920 Lindfors, by now 41, decided to make a comeback for and won a place in the Finnish Olympic wrestling team. In Antwerp he pinned five opponents to reach the final of the Greco-Roman heavyweight division. His adversary in the gold medal match was Anders Ahlgren of Sweden, who weighed 30 kilograms more. Lindfors decided to wear out the giant Swede. After 47 minutes of ineffectual wrestling the judges deemed Ahlgren too tired to continue and awarded the victory to Lindfors. Ahlgren forfeited the matches for other medals, which allowed Martti Nieminen to take bronze for Finland.

Lindfors retired from wrestling for good after his triumph in Antwerp.

Pentti Linnosvuo (1933–2010)

1956 Shooting, free pistol
1964 Shooting, rapid-fire pistol

Pentti Linnosvuo made a highly promising Olympic debut in 1952 at the age of 19 in his hometown Helsinki, finishing fifth in rapid-fire pistol. In Melbourne 1956 Linnosvuo took part at first in his secondary event, free pistol. Accustomed to fire rapidly, he finished his 60 shots quickly while the specialists struggled in windy conditions and to general surprise won the gold medal, Finland's first ever in Olympic shooting. In his own rapid-fire event Linnosvuo finished fourth.

In Rome 1960 Linnosvuo took silver in rapid-fire pistol, beaten by William McMillan of the USA in a three-man shoot-off for medals. Four years later in Tokyo he scored 592 points, one more than Romania's Ion Tripşa, to finally win Olympic gold in his main event. Finland dominated pistol shooting in Tokyo 1964, as Väinö Markkanen had earlier won the free pistol competition.

Linnosvuo took part at his fifth Olympic Games in Mexico 1968 and continued his career long into the 1970's. He later coached pistol shooters in Finland, Norway and West Germany.

Paavo Lonkila (1923–2017)

1952 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M

Paavo Lonkila made his breakthrough to the Finnish skiing elite in 1949. One year later he placed fifth in 18 kilometres and gained silver in the relay at the World Championships in the USA. In 1952 Lonkila took his greatest individual victory in the 18-kilometre race at the Holmenkollen Ski Games in Oslo.

Lonkila aimed to repeat his Oslo victory at the Olympic Games in the following winter, but in the autumn he accidentally hit his wrist with an axe while working in his plot of woods. He recovered well enough to win a place in the Finnish Olympic team. Sore wrist did not prevent Lonkila from taking Olympic bronze in 18 kilometres behind Norway's Hallgeir Brenden and his team-mate Tapio Mäkelä. In the relay Finland's opener Heikki Hasu build a huge lead and on the second leg Lonkila practically clinched the gold medal by increasing the advantage to 2.30 minutes.

Toivo Loukola (1902–1984)

1928 Athletics, 3000 m steeplechase

Toivo Loukola emerged to the top ranks of Finnish long-distance running in 1927. In the Finnish trials for the 1928 Amsterdam Games he finished second in 10,000 metres and won the 3000-metre steeplechase with an unofficial world record time of 9:25.2 in spite of having tried the event only once before in his life.

Loukola was still not counted among gold medal favourites in Amsterdam: that distinction belonged to his illustrious countrymen Paavo Nurmi and Ville Ritola. Loukola started his Olympic Games by finishing seventh in 10,000 metres won by Nurmi. After sharing the honours in 5000 and 10,000 metres Nurmi and Ritola entered the steeplechase final tired and nursing injuries. Loukola took the lead after the 2-kilometre mark and won the race by nearly

10 seconds before Nurmi. Ove Andersen finished third to secure a clean sweep of medals for Finland. Loukola's winning time was 9:21.8, another unofficial world record.

In 1932 Loukola failed to qualify for the Los Angeles Games after falling in the Finnish steeplechase trials. Loukola's career in athletics was exceptionally long: he won his last national championship title in 10,000 metres in 1936 and even took part in the Olympic marathon trials in 1948.

Tapio Mäkelä (1926–2016)

1952 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M

Tapio Mäkelä came to the fore in Finnish skiing elite in 1948, even if he narrowly missed qualification for the Olympic team for St. Moritz. In the next few years he established himself as one of Finland's fastest skiers in shorter distances. Mäkelä's major international debut at the World Championships of 1950 was not very successful, but in 1951 he won prestigious skiing races in Kuopio and Falun.

In Oslo 1952 Mäkelä led a formidable Finnish team in the Olympic 18-kilometre race to places 2, 3 and 4. His silver medal was considered a mild disappointment, as Norway's surprise winner Hallgeir Brenden had beaten him by 35 seconds. In the relay race there was no denying Finland, however. The first three skiers had already built a commanding lead, but Mäkelä still clocked the fastest individual time of the competition and widened Finland's victory margin over Norway to almost three minutes.

Mäkelä won another relay gold at the 1954 World Championships in Falun, Sweden. He retired from skiing after failing to qualify for Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956. Mäkelä worked as policeman at the time of his Olympic triumph in Oslo; later he became office manager at a paper mill.

Satu Mäkelä-Nummela (b. 26 October 1970)

2008 Shooting, trap W

Satu Mäkelä won bronze in women's trap at the World Championships of 1995. She retired in 1999 to concentrate on her family but made a comeback three years later coached by her husband Matti Nummela, who represented Finland in trap shooting at three Olympic Games between 1984 and 1992.

In Beijing 2008 Satu Mäkelä-Nummela hit 70 targets out of 75 in the qualification round of women's trap competition, tying for first place with Zuzana Štefěčková of Slovakia. In the final round of 25 targets she scored 21 hits, while the Slovak shooter could only muster 19 and settled for silver. Mäkelä-Nummela was the first Finnish Olympic shooting champion since 1964 as well as Finland's only gold medallist at the Beijing Games.

Mäkelä-Nummela was already 37 at the time of her triumph in Beijing but that was only the beginning of her Olympic career. She placed seventh in London 2012 and tenth in Rio de

Janeiro 2016. She has also won World Championship bronze in 2009 and taken several victories in the World Cup.

Kaarlo Mäkinen (1892–1980)

1928 Wrestling, Freestyle 56 kg

Kaarlo Mäkinen's Olympic debut in the featherweight category (60 kg) of Freestyle wrestling in Antwerp 1920 was premature on two accounts: like most Finnish wrestlers he was not yet well versed in Freestyle techniques and he had to wrestle against much heavier opponents in the featherweights, which was the lowest division in the Olympic program at the time.

In the following years Mäkinen developed into one of Finland's best wrestlers in the lowest weights. After winning World Championship silver in 1921 and bronze in 1922 in Greco-Roman wrestling Mäkinen honed his skills in Freestyle. In Paris 1924 he took silver in the new flyweight division (56 kg), beaten only by his fellow countryman Kustaa Pihlajamäki. Four years later in Amsterdam there was no denying Mäkinen; he pinned two opponents to reach the final where he beat Robert Hewitt of the USA in two bouts to nil. Mäkinen retired from wrestling after failing to qualify for his fourth Olympic Games in 1932.

Rauno Mäkinen (1931–2010)

1956 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 62 kg

Rauno Mäkinen failed to qualify for Helsinki 1952 in Greco-Roman wrestling. Instead he was selected to the Finnish team in Freestyle wrestling and finished in a promising sixth place in front of home audience.

The following four years were not very successful, but in 1956 Mäkinen won selection to the Finnish Olympic team as a Greco-Roman wrestler. In Melbourne he won his first three bouts to qualify for the three-man final rounds. After losing to Roman Dzeneladze of the USSR Mäkinen beat Hungary's Imre Polyák. He then had to wait for the result of the match between those two men to know his fate. For Mäkinen to take gold Polyák had to win by points but not by fall, and that was exactly what happened. A few moments later Kyösti Lehtonen won another gold for Finland in the next weight category. It was Finland's Independence Day, 6 December.

Mäkinen had to abandon his Olympic title defense in Rome 1960 when he was injured in his second match. He worked as policeman during his sports career and served as wrestling referee at the 1968 Olympic Games in México.

Hannu Manninen (b. 17 April 1978)

2002 Nordic combined, team competition

Hannu Manninen is a legend in the sport of Nordic combined. He took a record of 48 World Cup victories between 1996 and 2010 and won the overall Cup title four times in a row

between 2004 and 2007. Yet he won only one individual World Championship title and all his three Olympic medals came in team competitions. Second to none in skiing, Manninen was all too often let down by his form in ski jumping.

Manninen made his Olympic debut at the age of 15 in Lillehammer 1994. His first Olympic medal was team silver in Nagano 1998. Four years later at the Salt Lake Games Manninen won gold in the same event after Samppa Lajunen and Jaakko Tallus had given the Finnish team a decisive lead in ski jumping. He placed seventh in the individual sprint competition and also participated in the sprint event of cross-country skiing, finishing eighth.

In Turin 2006 Manninen was favoured to win gold, but all he could muster was team bronze. He finally took an individual victory in the sprint competition of the 2007 World Championships in Sapporo. Manninen retired from competitions in 2008 but made a comeback for Vancouver 2010, where he placed fourth in the large hill competition, which was his best individual Olympic result. After spending the next five years on the sidelines and graduating as commercial airline pilot Manninen made one last comeback and competed at his sixth Olympic Games in Pyeongchang 2018.

Hannu Manninen's younger sister Pirjo (later Muranen) won three World Championship titles in cross-country skiing. Her only Olympic medal was bronze in the relay in Vancouver 2010.

Jari Mantila (b. 14 July 1971)

2002 Nordic combined, team competition

Jari Mantila was Finland's leading Nordic combined athlete in the early 1990's. He won individual silver at the World Championships of 1995 in Thunder Bay, Canada and finished second in the World Cup in the 1996–97 season. By that time the Finnish Nordic combined squad was strengthened by highly promising youngsters Samppa Lajunen and Hannu Manninen. In their company Mantila won team silver at the Olympic Games of 1998 in Nagano and team gold at the World Championships of 1999.

Mantila got to finish his international career in victorious note at the Salt Lake Winter Games of 2002. He was not selected for individual events but his experience stood once again in good stead in the team competition: Finland took a comfortable lead of 44 seconds after the ski jump, and Mantila had no problems in keeping the advantage on the first leg of the skiing relay.

Eero Mäntyranta (1937–2013)

1960 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M
1964 Cross-country skiing, 15 km M
1964 Cross-country skiing, 30 km M

Winner of seven Olympic and five World Championship medals, Eero Mäntyranta was perhaps the best male cross-country skier in the world in the 1960's.

Hailing from Lapland just above the Arctic Circle, Mäntyranta made a promising Olympic debut in Squaw Valley 1960: he finished sixth in 15 kilometres and skied the second leg in the gold medal winning Finnish relay team. Individual titles were not long in coming: in 1962 Mäntyranta won the 30-kilometre race at the World Championships in Zakopane, Poland. The Innsbruck Games of 1964 saw Eero Mäntyranta in the best form of his career. He started by winning Olympic gold in 30 kilometres by a margin of nearly two minutes over Norway's Harald Grønningen. In 15 kilometres Mäntyranta was fastest again, beating Grønningen by 40 seconds. He wrapped up his Games by raising Finland from fourth place to silver medal on the anchor leg of the relay race.

In 1966 Mäntyranta took his third consecutive major title in 30 kilometres at the World Championships in Oslo. Two years later at the Olympic Games in Grenoble he collected three more Olympic medals: after taking bronze in 30 kilometres Mäntyranta finished second in 15 kilometres, beaten by his old rival Grønningen by mere 1.9 seconds, and pulled the Finnish team to bronze in the relay after defeating the Soviet anchor in a fierce duel.

Mäntyranta retired from skiing after the Grenoble 1968 but he made a surprise return three years later and competed at his fourth Olympic Games in Sapporo 1972.

Väinö Markkanen (b. 29 May 1929)

1964 Shooting, free pistol

Staff sergeant Väinö Markkanen served as gunsmith in the Finnish Border Guard, which gave him ideal training conditions for pistol shooting. He won his first Finnish championship title in 1958 and made his major international debut at the World Championships of 1962 in Cairo.

In Tokyo 1964 Markkanen did not count among the highest favourites in spite of having recently scored 562 points, which put him into third place in the world list. In the Olympic free pistol competition Markkanen scored 560 and won gold with an ample margin of three points ahead of Franklin Green of the USA. In the following day Pentti Linnosvuo won gold for Finland in the other pistol event of the Games, the rapid-fire competition.

Markkanen competed at World and European championships in various pistol events until the mid-1970's but won no other individual medals.

Marjo Matikainen (b. 3 February 1965)

1988 Cross-country skiing, 5 km (Classical) W

Marjo Matikainen made a short but illustrious career in cross-country skiing. She won her first Olympic medal, bronze in the relay, at the age of 19 in Sarajevo 1984. In 1986 Matikainen took the first of his three overall World Cup titles, and one year later she won her first individual gold medal in 5 kilometres at the World Championships in Oberstdorf.

In Calgary 1988 Matikainen won Olympic gold in women's Classical 5-kilometre race by defeating Tamara Tikhonova of the USSR by 1.3 seconds. She also took bronze in 10 kilometres and another bronze in the relay. The following year saw Matikainen in the best

form of her life: she won unprecedented five medals at the 1989 World Championships in front of home crowds in Lahti, Finland, including gold in 15 kilometres and the relay.

Unusually for cross-country skiers at the time Matikainen came from urban academic background. A few weeks after her greatest triumphs in Lahti she suddenly announced her retirement from skiing, still only 24. Marjo Matikainen-Kallström made a successful career in engineering and later in politics. She was elected to the European Parliament in 1996 and 1999. She also served in the Finnish parliament and ran for the chairmanship of the Finnish Conservative Party.

Juha Mieto (b. 20 November 1949)

1976 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M

Standing nearly two metres tall and sporting a thick black beard, Juha Mieto was the most instantly recognised cross-country skier of his time. He won a total of five Olympic and four World Championship medals but became most famous for a race that he did not win.

Juha Mieto's remarkable series of Olympic near misses began at his first Games in Sapporo 1972 where he lost the bronze in 15 kilometres by 0.06 seconds. In Innsbruck 1976 Mieto's furious performance on the second leg was decisive in Finland's surprise victory in the relay race. That was however to remain his only gold medal.

In 1980 Mieto lost the Olympic 15-kilometre race to Sweden's Thomas Wassberg by 0.01 seconds, the smallest possible margin. That prompted a change in the rules of cross-country skiing: finishing times have since been measured by tenths of a second. Mieto took another silver in 50 kilometres and bronze in the relay at the Lake Placid Games. At his last Olympic Games in Sarajevo 1984 Mieto finished fourth in 15 kilometres and took once more relay bronze.

Mieto remained a popular public figure after his sports career. He served in the Finnish parliament between 2007 and 2011.

Kaija Mustonen (b. 4 August 1941)

1968 Speed skating, 1500 m W

Kaija Mustonen made her breakthrough into women's speed skating elite at the Innsbruck Olympic Games of 1964: she took silver in 1500 metres and bronze in 1000 metres, beaten only by Soviet skaters. Later in the same winter she finished fourth in overall points at the World Championships.

In January 1968 Mustonen finished in disappointing fifth place at the World Championships in her hometown Helsinki, but the Olympic Games in Grenoble only two weeks later saw her in the best form of her life. Mustonen won gold in 1500 metres by defeating the Dutch favourite Carolina Geijssen by 0.3 seconds, then finished fourth in 1000 metres and concluded her Games with silver in 3000 metres, her fourth Olympic medal. She was Finland's first Olympic champion in women's speed skating.

Mustonen was the only Finnish champion of the Grenoble Games, but she did stay to enjoy public limelight. Unhappy with lack of funding for women's speed skating she decided not to continue her career.

Mika Myllylä (1969–2011)

1998 Cross-country skiing, 30 km (Classical) M

Mika Myllylä made his Olympic debut in Albertville 1992. His breakthrough to world skiing elite came two years later in Lillehammer: after taking bronze in the 30-kilometre Freestyle race and the relay Myllylä finished second in 50 kilometres (Classical), beaten only by Vladimir Smirnov of Kazakstan. His silver medal was the best Finnish result at the Lillehammer Games.

In 1997 Myllylä won his first World Championship title in the Classical 50-kilometre race in Trondheim. In Nagano 1998 his main event was the opening race, 30 kilometres in Classical technique. Myllylä plowed through a blizzard at unrelenting pace and won gold by a hefty 1.5-minute margin over Norway's Erling Jevne, becoming the first Finnish individual Olympic champion in men's skiing in 34 years. He then took bronze in 10 kilometres and the relay to increase his Olympic tally to six medals.

Myllylä dominated the World Championships of 1999 in Ramsau, Austria, winning three gold medals and one silver. In 2001 he was expected to defend those titles front of home audience in Lahti, but shock news intervened: Myllylä was one of six top Finnish skiers who were caught for the use of banned blood plasma expander. He was given a two-year suspension, which effectively put an end to his skiing career.

Jonni Myyrä (1892–1955)

1920 Athletics, javelin throw

1924 Athletics, javelin throw

Jonni Myyrä finished eighth in his Olympic javelin debut in Stockholm 1912. During the First World War Myyrä became the best javelin thrower in the world: he broke the world record several times but did not get the official record to his name until 1919, when he threw 66.10 metres in Stockholm.

At the first post-war Olympic Games in Antwerp 1920 Myyrä won gold with a result of 65.78. Followed by countrymen Urho Peltonen, Paavo Johansson and Julius Saaristo, he led Finnish javelin throwers to a historic triumph: not before or since has Finland occupied top four places in any Olympic competition.

In Paris 1924 Myyrä won his second Olympic gold medal: his result of 62.96 beat Sweden's Gunnar Lindström's mark by two metres. Myyrä had incurred legal troubles in his work as manager of a rural bank. Instead of returning home from Paris he went to a tour of Japan and from there to California where he settled to stay, leaving his debtors behind. He never visited his homeland again.

Pauli Nevala (s. 30 November 1940)

1964 Athletics, javelin throw M

Pauli Nevala won his first Finnish championship javelin title in 1961 at the age of 20. His major international debut at the 1962 European Championships was not a success, but in 1963 Nevala threw a new Finnish record of 86.33 metres, best result of the year in the world.

In the Olympic year of 1964 Nevala struggled long but found his form just in time for the Tokyo Games. Favoured to win gold was Norway's Terje Pedersen, who had just become the first man to break the 90-metre barrier. The Norwegian failed to qualify for the Olympic final, however. Nevala took the lead with his fourth-round throw of 82.66 and won gold by a margin of 34 centimetres over Gergely Kulcsár of Hungary. He became the first Finnish Olympic athletics champion in 16 years.

Nevala's subsequent career was checkered and marred by recurrent conflicts with athletics authorities and the press. He finished fourth at the European Championships of 1966 but failed to qualify for the Olympic final in México 1968. In 1969 Nevala took silver at the European Championships in Athens and in the following year he led the world statistics with his personal best result 92.64. Shoulder injury in early 1971 forced him to end his career.

Toni Nieminen (b. 31 May 1975)

1992 Ski jumping, large hill

1992 Ski jumping, team competition

Toni Nieminen was only 16 when he won two gold medals at the Albertville Games of 1992, which makes him the youngest Finnish Olympic champion of all time.

Ski jumping went through a revolution in the 1991–92 season: as judges were instructed not to subtract points for the use of “V-style” any more, jumpers had to learn the new technique quickly in order to have any chance of success at the Olympic Games that winter. In Finland the only one who mastered the new skills was Toni Nieminen. The youngster took the ski jumping world by storm, winning the Four Hills Tournament at the turn of the year.

Nieminen started his Olympic Games at Courchevel, France with bronze medal in the normal hill competition, beaten by two Austrians. Next in program was the team competition. Nieminen's three Finnish team-mates all used the old “diagonal” technique, while all four Austrians had adopted the V-style. Austria had taken a seemingly insurmountable lead before the last round of jumpers, but Nieminen's huge jump of 123 metres carried Finland to victory by a narrow margin of 1.5 points. Nieminen's triumphal process continued in the individual large hill competition: he jumped 123 metres on the second round, five metres longer than anyone else, and won gold by 12 points.

The 16-year-old Olympic champion was given a hero's welcome in Finland. He went on to win the World Cup that winter, but that was to be the peak of his ski jumping career. Nieminen entered history books one more time: in 1994 he became the first man to

successfully land a 200-metre jump in the ski flying hill in Planica, Slovenia. He did not compete at Olympic level again until 2002, when he made a brief comeback at the Salt Lake Games.

Ari-Pekka Nikkola (b. 16 May 1969)

1988 Ski jumping, team competition
1992 Ski jumping, team competition

Ari-Pekka Nikkola was one of the best ski jumpers of the world in his time, but he tended to save his best efforts for team events. His consistency brought Finland two Olympic gold medals and four World Championship titles in team competitions between 1987 and 1997.

In Calgary 1988 Nikkola was the second best jumper in the gold medal winning Finnish team, outshone only by Matti Nykänen. His contribution was no less valuable four years later at the Albertville Games, where young Toni Nieminen decided the gold medal for Finland with his last jump. Still, Nikkola never placed higher than fifteenth in individual events at his four Olympic Games between Calgary and Nagano 1998.

Nikkola did win individual acclaim outside the Olympic Games. In the World Cup he took a total of nine victories over the course of as many years and won the overall Cup title in the 1989/90 season. At World Championships Nikkola won two individual medals: silver in 1989 and bronze in 1991. After finishing his career Nikkola worked as ski jumping coach in the Finnish and Slovenian national teams.

Elmer Niklander (1890–1942)

1920 Athletics, discus throw

Winner of four Olympic medals in throwing events, Elmer Niklander was one of Finland's most popular sports heroes for 15 years spanning the First World War and the nation's independence in 1917.

Niklander made his Olympic debut at the age of 18 in London 1908. Four years later in Stockholm he was a medal contender in all shot put and discus events, especially in two-handed competitions, which were in the Olympic program for the only time. Hampered by an ankle injury, he finished fourth in both shot put and discus throw with one hand but took bronze in two-handed shot put and silver in two-handed discus, where he was bested only by his countryman Armas Taipale.

World war forced Niklander to wait eight years for another chance for Olympic glory. In Antwerp 1920 he took silver in shot put, beaten by younger team-mate Ville Pörhölä. In the discus competition Niklander finally got his due: he threw a result of 44.865 metres, which in rainy conditions was enough to earn him gold. Taipale took silver for Finland after mustering 44.19 metres. Niklander continued his career for four more years and retired to his farm after competing at his fourth Olympic Games in Paris 1924.

Iivo Niskanen (b. 12 January 1992)

2014 Cross-country skiing, team sprint (Classical) M
2018 Cross-country skiing, 50 km (Classical) M

Iivo Niskanen made a name for himself in the world skiing elite in emphatic fashion in 2014. After winning gold at the World Junior Championships he finished fourth in the Classical 15-kilometre race in Sochi, losing the Olympic bronze by only 0.2 seconds. In the team sprint he joined forces with the veteran Sami Jauhojärvi, who beat the Russian and German anchors in the dramatic finish to clinch Finland's first Olympic Winter Games gold medal in 12 years.

In the following years Niskanen established himself as one of the best skiers in the world in Classical technique. At the World Championships of 2017 in Lahti he won gold in 15 kilometres in front of jubilant home crowds. In Pyeongchang 2018 the Classical race in the program was 50 kilometres by mass start. Niskanen pulled away from the pack after 20 kilometres and won gold by 18 seconds ahead of Alexander Bolshunov of Russia. He became the first Finnish Olympic champion in the most prestigious event of cross-country skiing since 1960.

Iivo Niskanen's older sister Kerttu also made her breakthrough in Sochi 2014: she won Olympic silver medals in team sprint and relay and placed in the top eight in three individual cross-country skiing events.

Sulo Nurmela (1908–1999)

1936 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km

Sulo Nurmela was not only a skier but also a talented runner in his early years: in 1932 he finished seventh in steeplechase at the Finnish Olympic trials for the Los Angeles Games. He made his breakthrough in skiing in 1934: after taking surprise victory at the Finnish championships Nurmela was selected for the FIS races in Sollefteå, Sweden, where he won gold in 18 kilometres and the relay. Another relay victory came at following year's FIS races in Vysoké Tatry. These achievements were later recognized as World Championship titles.

Finnish skiing trials for the 1936 Olympic Games were held in extremely cold weather. Nurmela won the race but became severely ill. He was still feeling unwell when the team arrived in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. On the opening leg of the relay race Nurmela lost to Norway's Oddbjørn Hagen by 62 seconds. Finland still won the gold medal, thanks to Kalle Jalkanen's heroics on the anchor leg. In the individual 18-kilometre race Nurmela finished seventh.

Victory in the prestigious 50-kilometre race at the Lahti Ski Games of 1937 was the best result of Nurmela's later career. He retired from major competitions after 1938 to attend to work on his farm.

Paavo Nurmi (1897–1973)

1920 Athletics, 10,000 m

1920	Athletics, cross-country race
1920	Athletics, cross-country race, team competition
1924	Athletics, 1500 m
1924	Athletics, 5000 m
1924	Athletics, cross-country race
1924	Athletics, cross-country race, team competition
1924	Athletics, 3000 m team race
1928	Athletics, 10,000 m

Paavo Nurmi is the most successful Olympic track and field athlete of all time. “The Flying Finn” was one of the most famous sports stars in the world in the first half of the 20th century. He won a total of nine gold and three silver medals at three Olympic Games and made 20 officially ratified world records in distances ranging from 1500 to 20,000 metres.

Nurmi was beaten to silver by France’s Joseph Guillemot in his first Olympic competition, 5000 metres in Antwerp 1920. He never lost an Olympic final to a non-Finnish runner again. He came home from Antwerp with three Olympic titles after beating the Frenchman in 10,000 metres and winning gold in the cross-country race and in its team competition.

The Olympic year of 1924 saw Paavo Nurmi in the best form of his life. One month before the Paris Games he broke the world records in 1500 and 5000 metres inside one hour. In Paris Nurmi won gold in 1500 metres and shortly later in 5000 metres, where he defeated his countryman and great rival Ville Ritola. He then won the cross-country race in stifling heat, with Finland taking team gold as well, and wrapped up his Games with a fifth gold medal in the 3000-metre team race.

In Amsterdam 1928 Nurmi won gold in 10,000 metres but lost to Ritola in the final of 5000 metres. In the 3000-metre steeplechase he took silver behind yet another Finn, Toivo Loukola. Nurmi intended to crown his career with Olympic marathon gold in Los Angeles, but in early 1932 the International Athletics Association IAAF declared him professional, which effectively ended his career.

In 1936 Nurmi coached Finnish distance runners at the Berlin Olympic Games. Later he went to construction business and became one of the wealthiest persons in Finland. In 1952 Nurmi lit the flame in the cauldron in the Olympic Stadium at the opening ceremony of the Helsinki Games.

Matti Nykänen (1963–2019)

1984	Ski jumping, large hill
1988	Ski jumping, normal hill
1988	Ski jumping, large hill
1988	Ski jumping, team competition

Matti Nykänen was the best ski jumper of his time – and perhaps all time.

Nykänen won the World Championship title in large hill at the age of 18 in Oslo 1982. In the following season he took the first of his four overall titles in the World Cup. In Sarajevo 1984

Nykänen was pipped to silver in the normal hill competition by Jens Weissflog of the GDR, but in the large hill he beat the East German by 17 points to take his first Olympic victory.

Four years later at the Calgary Games Nykänen first won gold in the normal hill in overwhelming manner after making the best jumps of both two rounds. In the large hill he knocked out opponents already on the first round, landing his jump at 118.5 metres, a new hill record. No-one had ever before won both two ski jumping competitions at one Olympic Games, but there was still more was to come: team competition was in the Olympic program for the first time. Finland had one of the strongest teams in the world, and Nykänen made it well-nigh invincible. He made again the best two jumps of the day and got to celebrate his third gold medal.

Calgary 1988 was Nykänen's crowning achievement. He retired from ski jumping after the 1990/91 season with a haul of five Olympic medals, nine World Championship medals, a total of 46 victories and four overall titles in the World Cup and two victories in the Four Hills Tournament.

After his sports career Nykänen became a pop singer and overall tabloid celebrity.

Hermann Pihlajamäki (1903–1982)

1932 Wrestling, Freestyle 61 kg

Hermann Pihlajamäki came from an illustrious wrestling family. He won his first Finnish championship title in 1927 but was beaten in the Finnish Olympic trials for Amsterdam by his cousin Kustaa Pihlajamäki, Olympic champion from Paris 1924. In 1931 Hermann won the European Championship title in the featherweight division of Freestyle wrestling in Budapest.

In 1932 Hermann Pihlajamäki earned selection to the Finnish Olympic team after Kustaa had moved up to the lightweights. In Los Angeles he beat all his opponents in the Freestyle featherweight division. After defeating Edgar Nemir of the USA by points Pihlajamäki pinned Sweden's Einar Karlsson after eight minutes in the last match.

The two cousins went to the Olympic Games together again in 1936. In Berlin Hermann wrestled in the lightweights (66 kg) and earned bronze. Hermann and Kustaa were both policemen. Hermann served in the mounted police in the town of Vaasa and occasionally took part in equestrian competitions.

Kustaa Pihlajamäki (1902–1944)

1924 Wrestling, Freestyle 56 kg

1936 Wrestling, Freestyle 61 kg

Winner of two Olympic gold medals 12 years apart and no fewer than nine European Championship titles, Kustaa Pihlajamäki is the most successful Finnish wrestler of all time.

Pihlajamäki won his first Olympic gold at the age of 22 in Paris 1924. In the final of the flyweight category (56 kg) of Freestyle wrestling he defeated his fellow countryman Kaarlo Mäkinen in two bouts to nil. Four years later in Amsterdam Pihlajamäki took silver in the featherweight division (61 kg) after losing the semi-final bout to Allie Morrison of the USA.

Between 1930 and 1939 Pihlajamäki won an Olympic or European Championship gold medal every year with one exception: in Los Angeles 1932 he finished fourth in lightweights while not yet fully fit after a knee operation. His cousin Hermann Pihlajamäki covered for him by winning Olympic gold in the featherweights.

Remarkably, Pihlajamäki won seven of his nine European Championship titles in Greco-Roman wrestling, while at the Olympic Games he only competed in Freestyle. In Berlin 1936 Pihlajamäki took his second Olympic gold in overwhelming manner: only the match against the American silver medallist Francis Millard lasted the full time.

Kustaa Pihlajamäki worked as a policeman in Helsinki. He died of peritonitis at the age of 41.

Matti Pitkänen (b. 20 December 1948)

1976 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M

Matti Pitkänen made a successful Olympic debut in Innsbruck 1976. After finishing thirteenth in the 30-kilometre race he was selected to the Finnish relay team and given the first leg. The highly favoured Soviet team dropped out of contention when their opener Yevgeny Belyayev broke his skiing shoe. Pitkänen came to the first exchange in fifth place 21 seconds behind leading Sweden. His team-mates did the rest, and in the end Finland won gold by almost two minutes.

Pitkänen was in the best form of his life when Finland hosted the World Championships of 1978 in Lahti. Dishearteningly he finished fourth in all three individual races: 15, 30 and 50 kilometres; silver in the relay gave little comfort. Two weeks later Pitkänen won the classical 50-kilometre race at Holmenkollen. In Lake Placid 1980 Pitkänen earned Olympic bronze in the relay. In individual races he finished sixth in 30 kilometres and eleventh in 50 kilometres.

Tomi Poikolainen (b. 27 December 1961)

1980 Archery M

Tomi Poikolainen was only 18 when he won gold in archery in Moscow 1980, which makes him the youngest Finnish Olympic Summer Games champion of all time.

The Olympic archery competition was decided by added scores of four days of shooting, 288 arrows in total. At halfway stage Poikolainen was in fifth place, and after the third day he was fourth. When twelve arrows were left, the youngster had risen to second place, five points behind leading Boris Isachenko of the USSR. A sudden downpour hit the archery field during the next set of three arrows. Poikolainen kept his nerve and scored 26 points, whereas the Soviet archer could only manage 20. Poikolainen did not surrender the lead again and won gold by three points.

Poikolainen went on to compete at five more Olympic Games, with fifth place in Los Angeles 1984 as his next best individual result. In Barcelona 1992 Poikolainen took his second Olympic medal, silver in the team competition together with Jari Lipponen and Ismo Falck. He also won the European Championship title in 1986 and bronze at the World Championships of 1989. He retired from competitions in 2001 to concentrate on his career as fireman.

Sirkka Polkunen (1927–2014)

1956 Cross-country skiing, 3 x 5 km W

Sirkka Polkunen belonged to the pioneer generation of international women's skiing. In fact, she was the first woman ever to compete at Olympic cross-country skiing, starting at number 1 for the inaugural 10-kilometre race in Oslo 1952. Polkunen finished fifth while her teammates Lydia Wideman, Mirja Hietamies and Siiri Rantanen occupied the medal podium.

In the following years Finland was overthrown by the Soviet Union as the leading power in women's skiing. At the World Championships of 1954 Finland took silver in relay with Polkunen skiing the first leg. In Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956 the USSR was highly favoured to win the first women's Olympic skiing relay. Polkunen had finished eighth in the 10-kilometre race and was again given the first leg. She lost by 24 seconds to Lyubov Kozyreva, the individual gold medallist, but Mirja Hietamies cut the deficit and Siiri Rantanen sealed a famous victory for Finland on the anchor leg.

Polkunen ended her skiing career in 1957. In later years she used her married name Sirkka Vilander. She worked as loader in a gunpowder factory.

Ville Pörhölä (1897–1964)

1920 Athletics, shot put

Shot putter Ville Pörhölä emerged to the Finnish athletics elite in 1919 while doing his military service. Identified as an Olympic prospect he was sent to train with the old master Elmer Niklander. In Antwerp 1920 Pörhölä beat his mentor as well as the American favourites and won gold with a throw of 14.81 metres. Niklander lost by a 66 centimetres and took silver for Finland.

After finishing seventh in Paris 1924 Pörhölä gradually retired from shot putting to concentrate on his career in sawmill industry. A few years later he made a comeback to athletics with a new weapon: the hammer. Pörhölä led the Olympic hammer throw final in Los Angeles 1932 after five rounds but had to settle for silver when Ireland's Patrick O'Callaghan surpassed his mark on his last attempt. In 1934 Pörhölä won gold in hammer throw at the first European Championships in Turin. He competed at his fourth Olympic Games at the age of 38 in Berlin 1936, finishing eleventh in hammer.

In 1952 Ville Pörhölä played a prominent part in Olympic ceremonies. He united the two Olympic flames, one arriving from Greece through Sweden and the other lit from the rays of

midnight sun in Finnish Lapland, in his hometown Tornio on the border between Finland and Sweden. From there the Olympic flame was carried in relay to the opening ceremony of the Helsinki Games.

Jari Puikkonen (b. 25 June 1959)

1988 Ski jumping, team competition

Jari Puikkonen made his breakthrough in Lake Placid 1980 with Olympic bronze in large hill competition won by his countryman Jouko Törmänen. In the following year Puikkonen won the World Ski Flying Championship title in Oberstdorf, and in 1982 he took silver in normal hill at the World Championships in Oslo.

Puikkonen remained in the world ski jumping elite for the entire 1980's, when the sport was dominated by his fellow countryman Matti Nykänen. In Sarajevo 1984 he earned bronze in normal hill and finished fifth in large hill. In team competitions Puikkonen was always dependable, and in Calgary 1988 he finally got to celebrate Olympic victory: Nykänen scored most points for the Finnish team, but it was Puikkonen's last jump that decided the gold medal.

In 1989 Puikkonen crowned his career with gold medal in large hill at the World Championships in his hometown Lahti in front of 50,000 adoring fans. He retired from ski jumping in 1991 with a record of three Olympic and eight World Championship medals.

Heli Rantanen (b. 26 February 1970)

1996 Athletics, javelin throw W

Heli Rantanen made steady progress in women's javelin throw elite in the early 1990's: she finished sixth in her Olympic debut in Barcelona 1992 and fourth at the World Championships of 1995 in Gothenburg, where she lost the bronze to her team-mate Mikaela Ingberg only by 12 centimetres.

The Atlanta Olympic Games of 1996 saw Rantanen in peak form. After throwing her personal best of 66.54 in qualification she knocked out her opponents by improving her record to 67.94 with her first throw in the final competition. She won gold by a healthy margin of 2.40 metres over Louise McPaul of Australia. Rantanen became the first Finnish female Olympic athletics champion as well as Finland's only gold medallist at the Atlanta Games.

Rantanen struggled with injuries in later years. She failed to qualify for Sydney 2000 and ended her career a year later.

Siiri Rantanen (b. 14 December 1924)

1956 Cross-country skiing, 3 x 5 km W

Siiri Rantanen was Finland's most prominent female skier in the 1950's. She was known as

“Mother” by all and sundry: at a time when it was usual for women to retire from sports when they got married, Rantanen was already a mother of two when she started her career.

In Oslo 1952 Rantanen took bronze in the first women’s Olympic skiing competition behind her team-mates Lydia Wideman and Mirja Hietamies. Her most famous feat came four years later in Cortina d’Ampezzo. After finishing fifth in 10 kilometres as the best Finnish skier Rantanen was entrusted with the anchor leg in the relay race. She brought Finland to victory after beating Rada Yeroshina of the Soviet Union in a thrilling duel.

Rantanen earned her third Olympic medal, bronze in the relay, in Squaw Valley 1960 at the age of 35. At World Championships she collected five medals between 1954 and 1962. After retiring from international competitions Rantanen continued her skiing career at national level for many more years. She also won Finnish championship medals in cross-country running and road cycling.

Tapio Rautavaara (1915–1979)

1948 Athletics, javelin throw M

Tapio Rautavaara was one of Finland’s most beloved popular singers, entertainers and film stars as well as an Olympic champion in javelin throw.

Rautavaara’s first major achievement as a javelin thrower was second place at the Workers’ Olympiad of 1937 in Antwerp. War took the best years of his sports career but he became a popular voice on soldiers’ radio, and by the time Rautavaara took up the javelin again at war’s end he was already a national celebrity.

In 1946 Rautavaara took bronze at the European Championships in Oslo. Two years later, at the age of 33, he won gold at the first post-war Olympic Games in London: his relatively modest first-round result of 69.77 metres proved sufficient, as all throwers struggled with the soft surface at Wembley Stadium. Rautavaara was the only Finnish Olympic champion in athletics in London 1948, whereas in the pre-war years Finland had been a dominant power in track and field sports.

After finishing with javelin throw Rautavaara embarked on another sports career: he took up archery and won gold in team competition at the World Championships of 1958.

Esko Rechardt (b. 9 May 1958)

1980 Sailing, Finn class

Esko Rechardt surprised the sailing world and Finnish sports fans in equal measure by becoming Finland’s first Olympic sailing champion in 1980. Two things worked in favour of the engineering student from Helsinki: many of the world’s best sailing nations boycotted the Moscow Games and the Olympic regatta took place almost on his home waters, just across the Gulf of Finland in Tallinn, Estonia.

Recharadt took the lead in the Finn class after winning the second start. Disqualification on the fourth day dropped him to fourth place, but he rallied again by finishing third in the next start. Victory on the sixth day of competition put him back on top. In the seventh and last race Recharadt needed only to trail his closest rival Wolfgang Mayrhofer of Austria to secure his Olympic victory.

Four years later Recharadt finished fourteenth in Finn class at the Olympic sailing regatta in Los Angeles. He served as head coach of the Finnish Olympic sailing team between 2009 and 2015.

Ville Ritola (1896–1982)

1924	Athletics, 10,000 m
1924	Athletics, 3000 m steeplechase
1924	Athletics, cross-country race, team competition
1924	Athletics, 3000 m team race
1928	Athletics, 5000 m

Winner of eight Olympic medals, Ville Ritola was one of the best long-distance runners of all time. In Paris 1924 he won six medals at one Olympic Games, which is a record in the history of athletics.

Ritola left Finland at the age of 17 and emigrated to the United States, where he lived all through his athletics career earning his living as a carpenter. After making a name for himself in the American track circuit Ritola returned to Finland in 1924 to represent his home country at the Paris Games. In the Finnish Olympic team Ritola was joined by Paavo Nurmi. The two great runners divided the honours in Paris: Ritola won gold in 10,000 metres and the 3000-metre steeplechase and took silver behind Nurmi in 5000 metres and the individual cross-country race. He earned two more gold medals in the cross-country team competition and the 3000-metre team race.

Nurmi and Ritola resumed their famous rivalry four years later in Amsterdam. Ritola had to settle for silver in 10,000 metres but in 5000 metres he finally turned the tables and beat Nurmi in the final sprint by two seconds. After the Amsterdam Games Ritola spent three years on the sidelines. In 1932 he entertained hopes of running the marathon in Los Angeles Games but failed to find his form and retired for good. Ritola returned to Finland at the age of 75 and lived his last years in an apartment donated by Paavo Nurmi.

Marjut Rolig (née Lukkarinen, b. 4 February 1966)

1992	Cross-country skiing, 5 km (Classical) W
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Marjut Lukkarinen was a late bloomer in the Finnish skiing elite: she made her major international debut at the age of 25 at the World Championships of 1991, finishing in sixth place in 5 kilometres. Her breakthrough to the very top was not long in coming: in the opening 15-kilometre race of the Albertville Olympic Games of 1992 Lukkarinen took silver, losing only to Lyubov Yegorova of the former Soviet Union.

Many skiers struggled in high altitude at the Olympic skiing centre at Les Saisies. The women's 5-kilometre race in Classical technique took place in a blizzard, which made matters worse. Lukkarinen was undaunted and beat Yegorova by mere 0.9 seconds to win gold. Less at ease with Freestyle technique, Lukkarinen dropped to fourth place in the ensuing 10-kilometre pursuit race, which was won by Yegorova. She rounded up her successful Albertville Games with fourth place in the relay and tenth place in the 30-kilometre Freestyle race.

Skiing under her married name, Marjut Rolig took bronze in 15 kilometres at the World Championships of 1993. She retired from skiing after Lillehammer 1994, where her best result was eighth place in the Classical 30-kilometre race.

Olavi Rove (1915–1966)

1948 Gymnastics, team competition M

Olavi Rove was a versatile athlete in his early years: among his favourite sports were ski jumping and slalom skiing. After the war years he decided to concentrate on gymnastics and soon developed special expertise in the vault. In 1948 Rove was one of the first names selected for the Finnish Olympic gymnastics team. In London Rove finished tenth in the overall competition as the fourth best member of the gold-medal winning Finnish team. In the vault he earned an individual silver medal, beaten only by his team-mate Paavo Aaltonen.

Rove found the best form of his career in 1950: he took bronze in overall competition and three silver medals in apparatus events at the World Championships in Basel. Two years later he gained one more Olympic medal, bronze in team competition in his hometown Helsinki. After finishing his career Rove went to business selling gymnastics appliances. One of his employees was his former team-mate Veikko Huhtanen, the overall Olympic champion in London 1948.

Yrjö Saarela (1884–1951)

1912 Wrestling, Greco-Roman over 82.5 kg

Yrjö Saarela was one of the first Finnish wrestlers of international fame. A farmer from Oulu in the north of the country, Saarela dominated the heavyweight division in Finland since 1908. At the Olympic Games in London that year Saarela proceeded to the final where he met Verner Weckman, his famous countryman who was living in Germany. Saarela had to settle for silver after losing the final in two bouts to one.

In 1911 Saarela won a world championship title in Helsinki, and in Stockholm 1912 there was no denying him the Olympic gold in the heavyweight division. The medal rounds between the top three men were rather anticlimactic. Saarela beat Denmark's Søren Marinus Jensen after three hours of wrestling under scorching sunshine. Too tired to continue, the Dane forfeited his match against Finland's Johan Olin, who in turn forfeited against Saarela.

After the Stockholm Games Saarela wrestled as a professional for a few more years and then returned to his farm.

Veli Saarinen (1902–1969)

1932 Cross-country skiing, 50 km

Veli Saarinen was Finland's first Olympic skiing champion.

Fisherman from the south coast of Finland, Saarinen first made a name for himself by winning the 30-kilometre race at the Nordic Games of 1926 in Stockholm. In 1928 he finished fourth behind three Norwegian skiers in 18 kilometres at the Olympic Games in St. Moritz and in the following year he won the 18-kilometre race at the FIS Games in Zakopane, later recognized as World Championships.

In 1932 Saarinen led a five-man Finnish skiing team to the Olympic Winter Games in Lake Placid. In the opening 18-kilometre event he took bronze. The 50-kilometre race took place in rough terrain; due to scarce snow conditions the course had been changed and actually measured 58 kilometres. Saarinen led the race at halfway point by more than a minute and in the end won gold by 20 seconds ahead of his countryman and village neighbour Väinö Liikkanen.

Saarinen repeated his victory in 50 kilometres at the FIS races of 1933 in Seefeld. He ended his career in 1934 but his services to skiing were by no means over: Veli Saarinen served as head coach of the Finnish skiing team 32 years between 1936 to 1968 during which time Finland won a total of 28 Olympic skiing medals.

Julius Saaristo (1891–1969)

1912 Athletics, two-handed javelin throw

Julius Saaristo was the first Finnish Olympic javelin throw champion.

Aged only 20, Saaristo made an unofficial world record of 61.45 at the Finnish Olympic trials in 1912. At the Stockholm Games he challenged Sweden's Eric Lemming, who had dominated javelin throw for more than a decade. In the Olympic final with better hand Saaristo had to settle for silver after throwing 58.66 to Lemming's 60.64. Luckily for him, the Olympic program in Stockholm included also two-handed throwing competitions, where results with left and right hand were added together. Saaristo threw a new world record of 61.00 with his right hand and 48.42 with left hand for an aggregate result of 109.42, also a world record. Väinö Siikaniemi and Urho Peltonen took the other two medals for Finland as well, leaving Lemming in fourth place.

After fighting in the German army in the First World War and as officer in the government forces in the Finnish Civil War of 1918 Saaristo made a return to athletics. In Antwerp 1920 he finished fourth in the Olympic javelin competition as the fourth-best Finnish thrower.

Aleksanteri (Ale) Saarvala (1914–1989)

1936 Gymnastics, horizontal bar
1948 Gymnastics, team competition M

Ale Saarvala won his first Finnish overall championship title in gymnastics at the age of 17 in 1932. He narrowly missed qualification for the Los Angeles Games but in the next four years he became a permanent fixture in the Finnish gymnastics team and one of the world's best specialists in horizontal bar. In Berlin 1936 Saarvala performed a spectacular bar routine with a double somersault landing, which earned him the gold medal, Finland's first in Olympic gymnastics. His other medal in Berlin was bronze in the team competition.

Saarvala returned to the Olympic Games 12 years later in London and won his second gold medal as member of the Finnish team. He also placed fourth in horizontal bar and eighth in the pommel horse. Saarvala had lost his home in Viipuri as a result of the war. In 1957 he left Finland altogether and emigrated to Canada, where he lived for the rest of his life.

Sylvi Saimo (1914–2004)

1952 Canoeing, K-1 500 m W

Sylvi Saimo was the first sportswoman to win an individual Olympic gold medal for Finland at Summer Games.

Saimo was a talented cross-country skier in her early years. She took up canoeing only at the age of 32 after being resettled after the war: her home had been in the area ceded to the USSR. Two years later in 1948 she finished sixth in her Olympic debut in London. Progress continued, and in 1950 Saimo won gold in both kayak singles and doubles at the World Championships in Copenhagen.

In Helsinki 1952 Saimo won gold in the only women's canoe race by beating Gertrude Liebhart of Austria by 0.4 seconds. She was the only female medallist of the home nation at the Helsinki Games. Finland had to wait 44 years for the next women's gold medal at Olympic Summer Games.

The secret of Sylvi Saimo's strength was hard work at her own farm. After finishing her sports career in 1957 she turned to politics. She represented the agrarian-based Centre Party in the Finnish parliament from 1966 to 1979.

Sulo Salmi (1914–1984)

1948 Gymnastics, team competition M

Sulo Salmi won two Finnish championship medals in diving before concentrating fully on gymnastics after the war years. Hailing from Vaasa, which was not a hotbed of gymnastics at the time, Salmi had to train mostly alone, but he still won a place in the eight-man Olympic team for London 1948. As Salmi finished last in overall points among the Finnish gymnasts,

his score did not count towards the team total, but he was awarded gold medal as all team members were. His best individual result was eighth place in the vault competition.

Salmi finished his gymnastics career after the London Games and turned to coaching. His protégé Eugen Ekman won Olympic gold in pommel horse in Rome 1960.

Ilmari Salminen (1902–1986)

1936 Athletics, 10,000 m

Non-commissioned officer in the Finnish army, Ilmari Salminen had tried in vain to qualify for the Olympic Games of 1928 and 1932. He finally made his breakthrough to the Finnish and world distance running elite at the age of 32 with gold in 10,000 metres and bronze in 5000 metres at the European Championships of 1934 in Turin.

In 1936 Salminen won Olympic gold in 10,000 metres, the opening event of the Berlin Olympic Games, leading Arvo Askola and Volmari Iso-Hollo to a famous Finnish sweep of medals. In 5000 metres he finished sixth after falling and hurting his ribs on the penultimate lap.

One year after his Olympic triumph Salminen made a world record in 10,000 metres: 30:05.6. He renewed his European Championship title in Paris in 1938. Salminen's hopes of defending his Olympic victory in Helsinki 1940 were ended by war, but he continued his running career almost until the age of fifty.

Jouko Salomäki (b. 26 August 1962)

1984 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 74kg

Finnish wrestling fans had high hopes for a gold medal at the 1984 Los Angeles Games, which were boycotted by strong Eastern Bloc countries. Few had expected it to come from the 21-year-old Jouko Salomäki, whose best achievement so far was the European Junior Championship title of 1982. Salomäki progressed to the final of his weight class after defeating the pre-tournament favourite Ștefan Rusu of Romania. The gold medal match against Roger Tallroth of Sweden was a thriller: Salomäki made a surprise throw that gave him a 5–0 lead and foiled the Swede's relentless attacks to win by points 5–4.

In 1987 Salomäki took his second major victory, gold at the World Championships in Clermont-Ferrand, France. He carried the Finnish flag at the opening ceremony of the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul but failed to place in the wrestling tournament.

Heikki Savolainen (1907–1997)

1948 Gymnastics, team competition M

1948 Gymnastics, pommel horse

Heikki Savolainen won a total of nine medals at five different Games in a remarkable Olympic career that spanned 24 years.

Savolainen's bronze in pommel horse in Amsterdam 1928 was Finland's first individual Olympic medal in gymnastics. He collected his largest medal haul in Los Angeles 1932: bronze in the overall competition, silver in horizontal bar and bronze in parallel bars and the team competition. Team bronze from Berlin 1936 completed his medal tally before the Second World War.

In 1948 Savolainen, aged 40, finally became Olympic champion against many odds. Work as the only doctor in a town caught by paratyphoid epidemic had left him little time for training, and once in London he suffered a fractured toe. Savolainen won gold in the Finnish team and another one in pommel horse in an unusual three-way tie with his team-mates Veikko Huhtanen and Paavo Aaltonen.

Four years from that Savolainen came back for one more Olympic occasion. After swearing the athletes' oath at the opening ceremony of the Helsinki Games he earned bronze in the team competition and nearly won one more individual medal, finishing fourth in horizontal bar.

Julius Skutnabb (1889–1965)

1924 Speed skating, 10,000 m

Julius Skutnabb was one of the best skaters in the world in long distances in the early 1920's. He emerged to the speed skating elite in 1914, just before the First World War cancelled international championships for several years. When competitions were resumed Skutnabb became overshadowed by his illustrious team-mate and neighbour Clas Thunberg.

At the Chamonix Winter Games of 1924 Skutnabb took silver in 5000 metres and finished fourth in 1500 metres, as Thunberg won gold in both. In 10,000 metres the tables were turned: skating in pair with Thunberg, Skutnabb built a strong lead by halfway point and won gold by three seconds. Skutnabb's third medal in Chamonix was bronze in the overall points competition.

In St. Moritz 1928 Skutnabb took silver in 5000 metres behind Ivar Ballangrud of Norway, as Thunberg's race was spoiled by blizzard conditions. He did not get a chance to defend his Olympic title in 10,000 metres: the whole race was cancelled when a sudden heatwave melted the ice.

As a specialist in longer distances Skutnabb did not usually do well at World or European Championships which were decided by overall points, but in 1926 he won the European title in Thunberg's absence. By profession Skutnabb was a fire insurance inspector.

Jani Soininen (b. 12 November 1972)

1998 Ski jumping, normal hill

Jani Soininen made an impressive Olympic debut in Lillehammer 1994, finishing fifth in large hill and sixth in normal hill as the best Finnish jumper on both occasions. He was a member of the gold medal winning Finnish team at the World Championships of 1995 and 1997.

Soininen had taken two World Cup victories at the outset of the 1997/98 Olympic season, but favoured to win gold in Nagano were the two home jumpers Kazuyoshi Funaki and Masahiko Harada. In the normal hill competition Soininen jumped 90 metres on the first round and took second place behind Harada. His second jump was equally good, carrying 89 metres, and when Harada reached only 84.5 metres, Soininen won gold by a narrow one-point margin over Funaki. In the large hill competition Soininen resumed his rivalry with the Japanese: he made two solid jumps and gained silver after Funaki, who took an overwhelming victory.

After Nagano Soininen never reached quite the same form again. He finished his career after a team silver medal at the World Championships of 2001 in Lahti.

Albin Stenroos (1889–1971)

1924 Athletics, marathon

Albin Stenroos took bronze in 10,000 metres in Stockholm 1912, a race dominated by his countryman Hannes Kolehmainen. He hoped to win a medal in the cross-country race as well, but sprained his ankle and finished sixth. Stenroos's injury proved fatal, as Finland had to settle for silver in the team competition after losing to Sweden by one single point.

Stenroos ended his running career in 1918, but after spending four years on the sidelines he decided to make a comeback with the marathon race in Paris 1924 on his mind. In 1923 he made a world record in 20 kilometres. In the Olympic marathon Stenroos, aged 35, took the lead before the halfway point and undeterred by hot weather built up his advantage steadily. He crossed the finish line at Stade de Colombes almost six minutes before the silver medallist, Romeo Bertini of Italy. Stenroos's victory crowned Finnish supremacy in long-distance running at the Paris Games: Finland won gold in every event from 1500 metres to the marathon.

In 1926 Stenroos finished second at the Boston Marathon. He retired from competitions after failing to qualify for Amsterdam 1928. In later years Stenroos worked as caretaker of the Helsinki Olympic Stadium.

Thorvald Strömberg (1931–2010)

1952 Canoeing, K-1 10,000 m

Thorvald Strömberg, young fisherman from Ekenäs on the south coast of Finland, made his breakthrough to the world canoeing elite in 1950 when he beat Sweden's famous Gert Fredriksson to win gold in kayak singles 10,000 metres at the World Championships in Copenhagen.

Strömberg and Fredriksson resumed their rivalry two years later at the Helsinki Olympic Games. In 10,000 metres the men paddled side by side until Strömberg pulled ahead in the last kilometre and won gold by eleven seconds. The following day saw a new duel in the final of 1000 metres: this time Strömberg had to settle for silver.

In 1953 Strömberg retired from canoeing to concentrate on his new career in industrial sales. He made a comeback for the next Olympic Games, but Melbourne 1956 was a disappointment: suffering from stomach pains, Strömberg finished fourth in 10,000 metres. In 1958 he won his second World Championship title in 10,000 metres in Prague. Strömberg finished his career in 1963. He later served briefly as head coach of the Finnish canoeing team.

Sten Suvio (1911–1988)

1936 Boxing, 66.6 kg

Sten Suvio became Finland's first Olympic boxing champion in Berlin 1936.

Suvio was a versatile athlete in his youth: in addition to boxing he practiced wrestling, football and speed skating. In 1933 he dethroned Bruno Ahlberg, Olympic bronze medallist from Los Angeles, as Finnish champion in welterweight division and never lost to another Finnish boxer again.

In Berlin 1936 Suvio progressed to the Olympic welterweight final by defeating boxers representing Japan, Australia, Hungary and Denmark. In the gold medal match he faced Michael Murach of Germany. The home ring favourite started aggressively but in the second round Suvio took control with a powerful right hook. Murach never regained his composure, and the judges awarded the match to Suvio by unanimous decision.

After his Olympic triumph Suvio turned professional. He won 34 of his 46 matches in a career that straddled the Second World War. Later he coached the national boxing teams of Sweden and Turkey.

Armas Taipale (1890–1976)

1912 Athletics, discus throw
1912 Athletics, two-handed discus throw

Discus thrower Armas Taipale first emerged from the shadow of his compatriot Elmer Niklander in the Finnish trials for the 1912 Olympic Games. In Stockholm Taipale led the discus competition after the qualifying rounds with a result of 43.91 and improved his mark on the final rounds to 45.21, beating the silver medallist, Richard Byrd of the USA, by almost three metres. On the next day he won another gold medal in the two-handed discus throw competition, which made its first and last appearance in the Olympic program in Stockholm 1912. Niklander took silver for Finland in that event.

Taipale was a keen traveller and competed in many European countries in the next two years. He broke the world discus record several times but none of his results were ratified as official

new records. World war dashed Taipale's dream of defending his Olympic victory in 1916, but he was back in Antwerp 1920 and took silver behind Elmer Niklander. Taipale retired from athletics after competing at his third Olympic Games in Paris 1924. He emigrated to the United States, where he lived more than 50 years before returning to Finland for the last two years of his life.

Helena Takalo (b. 28 October 1947)

1976 Cross-country skiing, 5 km W

Helena Takalo made her Olympic debut in Grenoble 1968 under her maiden name Kivioja. Four years later in Sapporo she earned her first Olympic medal, silver in the relay race. Her first individual medal was bronze in 10 kilometres at the World Championships of 1974 in Falun.

In 1976 Takalo won Olympic gold in 5 kilometres at the Innsbruck Games. Coming to the skiing stadium she was a few seconds behind Raisa Smetanina of the USSR but fierce finish sprint gave her victory by 1.04 seconds. The same two women resumed their rivalry in 10 kilometres three days later. This time Smetanina beat Takalo by an even smaller margin, 0.87 seconds. In the relay Takalo faced a hopeless task of catching the Soviet anchor and brought Finland to second place. One gold and two silver medals made Takalo the most successful Finnish athlete at the Innsbruck Games.

Two years later Takalo complemented her Olympic gold in 5 kilometres with World Championship title in the same distance in front of home crowds in Lahti. She also led the home team to gold medal in the relay race. Takalo ended her skiing career after taking her fifth Olympic medal, bronze in 10 kilometres, in Lake Placid 1980.

Jaakko Tallus (b. 23 February 1981)

2002 Nordic combined, team competition

Jaakko Tallus was known as the best ski jumper among Nordic combined athletes in the first years of the 21st century. He made his debut at the World Championships of 2001 in Lahti, earning bronze in the team competition.

At the Salt Lake Winter Games of 2002 Tallus, aged 20, won the ski jumping section of the individual normal competition of Nordic combined, which gave him a 48-second advantage at the start of the 15-kilometre skiing leg. Tallus usually struggled in skiing, but this time he let only his team-mate Samppa Lajunen pass him and was rewarded with the silver medal. In the team competition Finland was favoured to win gold and did not disappoint: Tallus was second in jumping and kept Finland safely in the lead on the third leg of the skiing relay. He concluded his Games with fourth place in the individual sprint competition, while Lajunen won his third gold medal.

Tallus was back in good form in Turin 2006: he finished fifth in both two individual competitions as the best Finnish athlete and earned bronze in the team competition, his third Olympic medal. In 2007 Tallus won team gold at the World Championships in Sapporo. He

retired from competitions after participating at his third Olympic Games in Vancouver 2010 and concentrated on his career as fireman.

Einari Teräsvirta (1914–1995)

1948 Gymnastics, team competition M

Einari Teräsvirta was only 17 when he was selected to the Finnish gymnastics team for the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. He came home with two bronze medals, one from team competition and one from horizontal bar. He narrowly missed another medal in vault, finishing in fourth place. Four years later in Berlin Teräsvirta earned once again Olympic team bronze.

After the war Teräsvirta, by now a qualified architect, kept training and set his sights on London 1948. He honed his skills in his weaker events and won the Finnish overall championship title in 1947. In London Teräsvirta finished twelfth in the overall competition as the fifth-best member of the Finnish gold medal team. He placed seventh in vault and eighth in horizontal bar.

Teräsvirta had a successful career in architecture. He designed many university buildings and sports facilities as well as the prominent Kalastajatorppa and Marski hotels in Helsinki.

Pertti Teurajärvi (b. 20 February 1951)

1976 Cross-country skiing, 4 x 10 km M

Pertti Teurajärvi hailed from Kolari in Lapland, which makes him one of Finland's most northerly Olympic champions. He took up cross-country skiing following the example of his uncle Eero Mäntyranta, who won three Olympic gold medals in the 1960's.

In Innsbruck 1976 Teurajärvi was selected to the Finnish relay team after finishing fourteenth in the individual 15-kilometre race. Juha Mieto had built a lead of 50 seconds on the second leg, and Teurajärvi added ten more seconds to Finland's advantage on the third leg. Anchorman Arto Koivisto did the rest, and Finland won gold by almost two minutes before Norway.

Teurajärvi enhanced his reputation as a dependable relay skier in the following years. In 1978 he earned silver at the World Championships in Lahti. In Lake Placid 1980 Finland took a disastrous start in the Olympic relay but won bronze in the end after Teurajärvi had lifted the team back to medal contention on the second leg.

Clas Thunberg (1893–1973)

1924 Speed skating, 1500 m
1924 Speed skating, 5000 m
1924 Speed skating, overall points
1928 Speed skating, 500 m

1928 Speed skating, 1500 m

Winner of five Olympic gold medals, Clas Thunberg is the most successful Finnish winter sports athlete of all time. Often compared with his contemporary countryman Paavo Nurmi, Thunberg dominated speed skating at the first two Olympic Winter Games.

In Chamonix 1924 Thunberg won a medal in all five speed skating competitions, which took place in two days. After taking bronze in the opening 500 metres he won gold in 5000 metres. On the second day Thunberg won the 1500 metres but had to settle for silver in 10,000 metres, beaten by his team-mate and Helsinki neighbour Julius Skutnabb. These results earned Thunberg his third gold medal of the Games in the overall points competition, which was in the Olympic program for the only time.

Four years later in St. Moritz Thunberg tied for gold in 500 metres with Bernt Evensen of Norway. In 5000 metres he was caught in a blizzard and finished only 12th, but on the following morning he took his second consecutive Olympic victory in 1500 metres. The 10,000-metre race later in the day was cancelled when a sudden heatwave melted the ice.

In 1932 Thunberg was quarrelling with the Finnish Skating Association and decided not to travel to the Olympic Winter Games in Lake Placid. Another reason was that speed skating medals there were decided in mass start races, which he did not like. Thunberg finished his career in 1935 after winning a grand total of seven Olympic medals, five World Championship titles and four gold medals at European Championships.

Juha Tiainen (1955–2003)

1984 Athletics, hammer throw

Juha Tiainen finished tenth in his Olympic debut in Moscow 1980. Three years later he became the first Finnish hammer thrower to break the 80-metre barrier. In the Olympic year of 1984 he improved his Finnish record to 81.52, which was still a far cry from the world record of 86.34 made by Yuri Sedykh of the USSR.

Olympic boycott declared by the Soviet Union and its allies affected hammer throw more than any other men's athletics event at the 1984 Olympic Games. Tiainen was fifth in the world list but first among athletes who came to Los Angeles. In the Olympic final his third-round throw of 78.08 brought him victory by ten centimetres over Karl-Hans Riehm of West Germany.

Tiainen never reached his best form again after the Los Angeles Games, as Soviet throwers resumed command. He finished his career after competing at his third Olympic Games in Seoul 1988. Tiainen worked as a policeman. He died of pneumonia at the age of 48.

Jouko Törmänen (1954–2015)

1980 Ski jumping, large hill

Jouko Törmänen was not considered Finland's top prospect in ski jumping before the Olympic Games of 1980 in Lake Placid but was known as a solid performer: he had finished fifth in large hill at the World Championships of 1974 and tenth in the same event on his Olympic debut in Innsbruck 1976. In Lake Placid Törmänen finished eighth in the opening normal hill competition as the second best Finnish jumper.

The large hill competition was Finland's last chance of winning a gold medal at the Lake Placid Games. In the first round Törmänen made an excellent jump of 114.5 metres, which put him into second place behind surprise leader Hansjörg Sumi of Switzerland. His second jump was even better: 117 metres, equalling the hill record. Sumi failed in his last jump, and Törmänen won gold ahead of Hubert Neuper of Austria and the young Finn Jari Puikkonen.

Olympic gold in Lake Placid was Jouko Törmänen's only international medal. Later he became a prominent sports official: he served as chairman of the ski jumping commission of the International Skiing Federation from 2004 until his death in 2015.

Vilho Tuulos (1895–1967)

1920 Athletics, triple jump

Vilho Tuulos first came to the fore as triple jumper in 1913 but his promising career ebbed during the First World War. In 1919 he returned to form and made a new European record of 15.30. The Olympic triple jump competition in Antwerp 1920 suffered from rainy weather and soft surface. Tuulos could not do better than 14 metres and 50.5 centimetres but that proved enough for victory, as his closest rival Folke Jansson of Sweden could only muster 14.48.

In Paris 1924 Tuulos took Olympic bronze with a result of 15.37. His last jump was much longer but was disallowed by referees. The victory went to Nick Winter of Australia who tied the world record of 15.52. Four years later in Amsterdam Tuulos earned once more bronze after jumping 15.11, ten centimetres less than Mikio Oda of Japan who became his country's first Olympic champion.

Tuulos ended his remarkably long career after failing to qualify for the Los Angeles Games of 1932. He remains the only Finnish Olympic champion in jumping events.

Aale Tynni (1913–1997)

1948 Art competitions, literature, lyric works

Aale Tynni was born in Russia near St. Petersburg. Her family belonged to the Ingrian Finnish minority and moved to Finland after the Russian revolution. Tynni studied literature at the University of Helsinki and published her first collection of poems in 1938.

In 1947 Tynni was commissioned to write a poem for the grand festival of the Finnish Gymnastics and Sport Federation. She had never been interested in sports but was well versed in Ancient Greek poetry and had recently published a prize-winning collection of sylvan

poetry. Her poem, titled *Hellaan laakeri* (Laurel of Hellas), was an ode to the tree that crowned ancient Olympic champions.

When a competition declared by the Finnish Olympic Committee to find entrants for the Olympic art competitions of 1948 produced no satisfying results, Aale Tynni's poem was translated into English and sent to London instead. To the author's own surprise it was awarded the gold medal in the category of lyric works. Tynni was celebrated as Olympic champion in Finland but she never returned to the subject of sports again. Art competitions were removed from the Olympic program after London 1948.

Pertti Ukkola (b. 10 August 1950)

1976 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 57 kg

Pertti Ukkola made his Olympic debut in Munich 1972, but struggled to make weight in the 52-kilogram category and was eliminated in the early rounds. In 1975 he conquered a place in the Finnish team in his own weight class, 57 kg, and won his first major medal, bronze at the World Championships in Minsk.

In Montreal 1976 Ukkola reached the three-man medal rounds despite losing one match in the earlier in the tournament. The other two wrestlers still in contention were Farhat Mustafin of the USSR, whom Ukkola had already beaten by points 6–5, and Ivan Frgić of Yugoslavia. The deciding match between Ukkola and Frgić was a thriller: the Yugoslav took a 4–3 lead but when less than a minute remained on the clock Ukkola made a throw that earned him two points. He won the match 5–4 and became Finland's first Olympic wrestling champion in 20 years.

In 1977 Ukkola was in the best form of his life: he won gold at the European Championships in Bursa, Turkey as well as at the World Championships in Gothenburg, Sweden without losing a single match. His Olympic title defense in Moscow 1980 was not successful. Ukkola's last international medal was bronze in the 62 kg division at the World Championships of 1981. He later worked briefly as head coach of the Finnish wrestling team.

Emil Väre (1885–1974)

1912 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 67.5 kg

1920 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 67.5 kg

Emil Väre began his wrestling career in St. Petersburg where he worked as a railwayman before the First World War. He won an unofficial World Championship title in Helsinki in 1911 and a European Championship belt in Budapest in the following spring. In Stockholm 1912 Väre took Olympic gold in the lightweight division, defeating Sweden's Gustaf Malmström in the last bout in convincing fashion.

In Antwerp 1920 Väre returned to the Olympic wrestling mat. He proceeded to the final of the Greco-Roman lightweight category where he faced his team-mate Taavi Tamminen. The match was decided in advance: Väre won gold and Tamminen secured one-two victory for

Finland in subsequent matches for silver. Väre kept the title of Olympic champion, but the gold medal was secretly given to Tamminen when the team returned home.

Pekka Vasala (b. 17 April 1948)

1972 Athletics, 1500 m M

Pekka Vasala made an inauspicious Olympic debut in Mexico 1968 at the age of 20: he caught ill and failed to qualify from his heat in 1500 metres. The following years were also disappointing: Vasala finished ninth at the European Championships of 1969 and 1971. In the Olympic year 1972 harsh training finally paid dividends: Vasala made world best results in both 800 and 1500 metres. He decided to concentrate on 1500 metres at the Olympic Games in Munich.

The defending Olympic champion Kipchoge Keino of Kenya led the 1500-metre final in Munich at blistering pace, and on the last lap only Vasala could trail him. In the final stretch Vasala moved ahead and won by three metres with a time of 3:36.3. His victory crowned an unforgettable evening for Finnish athletics: half an hour earlier Lasse Viren had won gold in 5000 metres.

Vasala's reign at the top of world middle distance running was short. He missed the entire 1973 season due to foot operation. In 1974 Vasala finished sixth at the European Championship in Rome after of which persistent foot troubles forced him to end his career. He later worked as chief financial officer of the Finnish Athletics Association.

Lenni Viitala (1921–1966)

1948 Wrestling, Freestyle 52 kg

Lennart (Lenni) Viitala won gold in the flyweight category at the first post-war European Championships of Freestyle wrestling in 1946 in Stockholm. At the following year's championships in Prague he took bronze in Greco-Roman style.

Viitala became Finland's only wrestling champion at the Olympic Games of 1948 in London. He defeated his most dangerous opponent, Halit Balamir of Turkey, on the first round by split decision. Easier victories followed, and in the last bout Viitala beat Sweden's Thure Johansson to win the gold medal. In fact, the only thing that defeated Lenni Viitala in London was London itself: he missed the medal ceremony at Wembley Stadium after getting lost in the Underground.

In 1949 Viitala suffered a shoulder injury, from which he never fully recovered. He retired from wrestling after winning his last Finnish championship title in 1956.

Lasse Virén (b. 22 July 1949)

1972 Athletics, 5000 m

1972 Athletics, 10,000 m

1976 Athletics, 5000 m
1976 Athletics, 10,000 m

Four-time Olympic champion Lasse Virén has been Finland's most successful Summer Games athlete since the Second World War.

Lasse Virén emerged to the world distance running elite in 1971. World record in two miles in August 1972 made him a medal contender for the Olympic Games. Still, few could have predicted what would take place in Munich. Virén won Olympic gold in 10,000 metres with a new world record of 27:38.4 – in spite of falling to the ground in the middle of the race. One week later he won another gold medal in 5000 metres, yet again defeating his rivals in a fierce final sprint. Four days from that Virén clocked a world record in 5,000 metres, 13:16.4, in his homecoming race in Helsinki.

Foot injuries troubled Virén in the following years, even if he did take bronze in 5000 metres at the European Championships of 1974 in Rome. In Montreal 1976 Virén was back in winning form. Boycott of African nations made him favourite to renew his Olympic title in 10,000 metres. Carlos Lopes of Portugal trailed Virén for most of the race but was forced to surrender on the penultimate lap. The 5000-metre final was a much closer affair: Virén applied his trademark tactics, picked up pace two laps before the end and wore out milers who had relied on their sprint finish. On the very next day Virén started for the Olympic marathon and finished fifth.

Virén placed fifth in 10,000 metres at his third and last Olympic Games in Moscow 1980. He worked as a policeman during his career and was later involved in transport business. He was elected to the Finnish parliament in 1999 and 2003.

Verner Weckman (1882–1968)

1906 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 85 kg
1908 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 93 kg

Wrestler Verner Weckman was the first Finnish Olympic champion.

Weckman won the Finnish heavyweight championship title in 1904. Later in the same year he moved to Germany study for a degree in engineering at the technological institute in Karlsruhe. He continued his successful wrestling career in Germany and in 1905 won a world championship title in Duisburg.

In 1906 Weckman and three field athletes travelled to Athens to represent Finland at the Intercalated Olympic Games. The first ever Finnish Olympic team won two gold medals, the first of which was taken by Weckman in the middleweight category of Greco-Roman wrestling in overwhelming manner. In a subsequent competition between division winners he finished second behind the heavyweight champion.

Two years later in London Weckman, still based in Germany, wrestled again for Finland at the Olympic Games. He faced his countryman Yrjö Saarela in the best-of-three final of the heavy middleweight category. Weckman lost the first bout but won the next two to win Finland's only gold medal at the London Games. The Olympic final in London was the last

match of Weckman's wrestling career. After graduating he worked as a mining engineer in Russia and later managed a cable company that became one of the forerunners of Nokia.

Edvard Westerlund (1901–1982)

1924 Wrestling, Greco-Roman 75 kg

Edvard Westerlund was the youngest of three Helsinki brothers who all became famous wrestlers. The eldest brother Emil participated at the Olympic Games of 1912 and 1920, the middle one Kalle took bronze in the lightweight division in Paris 1924. Edvard had won the World Championship title in lightweights in Stockholm in 1922, but he went to the Paris Games as a middleweight.

Westerlund found little resistance in Paris, as the division's previous ruler Carl Westergren of Sweden had moved up in weight. He won all his seven matches with relative ease, while his countryman Arthur Lindfors secured the silver. Olympic champion at the age of 23, Westerlund still had a long wrestling career ahead of him. He took Olympic bronze in the lightweight category in Amsterdam 1928 and gained his last European Championship medal in 1933. He made his final Olympic appearance in Berlin 1936.

Lydia Wideman (1920–2019)

1952 Cross-country skiing, 10 km W

Lydia Wideman was the first ever female Olympic champion in cross-country skiing.

Finland was a pioneering country when international competitions in women's cross-country skiing were begun in the late 1940's. Lydia Wideman and her identical twin sister Tyyne had been among the best Finnish skiers for several years. Tyyne retired from skiing in 1951 but Lydia decided to continue until Oslo 1952, where women could compete for Olympic medals for the first time.

Wideman won gold in women's 10 kilometres in Oslo by an overwhelming margin of 59 seconds. Finland enjoyed a clean sweep of medals, as her team-mates Mirja Hietamies and Siiri Rantanen took silver and bronze. Wideman won all her races in the Olympic season and then announced her retirement from skiing. In later years she served in various advisory capacities in the Finnish Skiing Association.

Lydia Wideman-Lehtonen was the oldest Olympic champion in the world upon her death at the age of 98.

Kurt Wires (1919–1992)

1952 Canoeing, K-2 1000 m

1952 Canoeing, K-2 10,000 m

Kurt Wires won his first Finnish canoeing championship title in 1939. He was training for the following year's Olympic Games in his hometown Helsinki, but war intervened. Wires was wounded in the head and lost almost all sight from his right eye, but he made a comeback to canoeing when peace resumed. In London 1948 he took Olympic silver in kayak singles 10,000 metres on the river Thames.

Wires retired from canoeing after the London Games. He was supposed to work at the 1952 Helsinki Games as a result service technician, but in the preceding winter he decided to return once more. As there was no room in the Finnish Olympic team in kayak singles, Wires needed a partner for doubles. He chose young Yrjö Hietanen.

With only two months of training together Wires and Hietanen won gold medals in both 10,000 metres and 1000 metres on home waters in Helsinki. On both occasions they defeated a Swedish pair by a razor-thin margin. Wires happily retired again as two-time Olympic champion, even if the 1000-metre victory hung in the balance until 1953, when the protest lodged by Sweden against the photo-finish decision was finally overruled.

Tuomo Ylipulli (b. 3 March 1965)

1988 Ski jumping, team competition

Tuomo Ylipulli took bronze at the World Junior Championships of 1983 in Kuopio. In 1985 he took part at his first senior World Championships in Seefeld, Austria, earning gold medal in the Finnish team. Two years later in Oberstdorf Ylipulli achieved his best individual world championship result, seventh place in normal hill. In the team competition he won another gold medal. In the same season Ylipulli took his only World Cup victory in Bischofshofen.

At the Olympic Winter Games in Calgary 1988 Ylipulli was not selected for individual events but was trusted again in the team competition, which made its debut in the Olympic program. Matti Nykänen led the Finnish team to victory, while Ylipulli played his part by landing two secure jumps of 105.5 and 102 metres.

Ylipulli ended his career after the 1988 season. He came from a well-known family in Nordic sports: his elder brother Jukka won Olympic bronze in Nordic combined in Sarajevo 1984, and younger brother Raimo took part in ski jumping in Lillehammer 1994.

Paavo Yrjölä (1902–1980)

1928 Athletics, decathlon

Paavo Yrjölä was a versatile athlete who trained with self-made implements on his family farm. He finished ninth in his Olympic decathlon debut in Paris 1924. Yrjölä won his first Finnish championship title in 1925 and made his first world record, 7820.93 points, in the following year.

Yrjölä travelled to Amsterdam 1928 as the gold medal favourite but faced a strong challenge from his team-mate and training partner Akilles Järvinen, son of Finland's first Olympic athletics champion Verner Järvinen. Yrjölä's best events were shot put, discus throw and high

jump, while Järvinen excelled in sprinting and long jump. Järvinen led the competition after six events but Yrjölä took the lead in discus throw and won gold with a new world record of 8053.29 points (6587 in the 1985 table). Järvinen took silver for Finland.

In 1930 Yrjölä made his last world record, 8117.30. The result was not ratified, however, due to insufficient documentation. He finished his career after placing sixth in the Olympic decathlon in Los Angeles 1932.