

May 26, 2023

Obituary – Terry McDermott (USA)

The Speed Skating community sadly lost an Olympic champion. On Saturday, May 20 2023, Richard “Terry” McDermott (USA) passed away at age 82. McDermott won 500m gold at the 1964 Olympic Winter Games in Innsbruck (AUT), and was inducted into the US Speed Skating Hall of Fame in 1977. Terry is also famous for his television appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show* during which the Beatles pop band was also invited.

Born on September 20th 1940 in Bay County, Michigan (USA), McDermott started skating at club level and quickly rose through the ranks in regional competitions, qualifying for the 1960 US Olympic squad at age 19. The “Essexville Rocket”, as he was nicknamed, finished seventh in his favorite 500m distance at the Games in Squaw Valley (USA).

At that time, in the midst of the Cold War, the Soviet Skater Yevgeny Grishin dominated the Speed Skating scene. “Grishin intimidated me,” recalled McDermott in an interview on [Olympics.com](https://olympics.com). “He intimidated everybody because he was winning all the events, the 500m and 1,500m. He was very strong.”

Four years later, McDermott, was not quite so intimidated anymore. Despite having to borrow his coach’s pair of skates, because he broke his own, the Essexville Rocket won the 500m at the 1964 Olympic Winter Games in Innsbruck (AUT). He beat the reigning Soviet Olympic champion in a record time of 40.1s, holding Grishin off a third consecutive 500m gold. “When they put the Olympic medal around your neck and you’re standing on that podium and they’re playing our national anthem and the flag is being raised, it’s quite thrilling,” shared Terry as echoed on [Olympics.com](https://olympics.com).

McDermott won the only gold medal for the United States during the 1964 Olympic Winter Games. At the time he was an apprentice barber in his uncle’s shop, which caused his nickname to be changed to the “Essexville Barber”. To celebrate his Olympic triumph, Terry was invited to the renowned *Ed Sullivan Show* right upon his return to the United States. It was in that very same show that The Beatles had their historic first television performance in America.

“We didn’t really know of them at the time, but we definitely followed them the rest of their careers. Who didn’t?” said McDermott in a 2014 interview with mlive.com.

Meanwhile, McDermott went on as a Speed Skater, and got the honor to carry the USA flag at the Opening Ceremony of the 1968 Olympic Winter Games in Grenoble (FRA), where he shared 500m silver medal with Norway’s [Magne Thomassen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magne_Thomassen), behind Erhard Keller (GER).

After he hung up his blades, McDermott held several positions at the US Speed Skating Association, and maintained close ties with the Olympic and Speed Skating community, working as a radio and TV commentator at 12 consecutive Winter Games. McDermott was chosen to recite the Olympic Oath on behalf of the officials at the 1980 Olympic Winter Games in Lake Placid (USA).

The ISU pays tribute to Terry McDermott’s legacy and will remember him with affection.

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