

Jean Lessard – Builder; Contributor, Snowsport Professional

Jean Lessard (1932–2013) was a pioneering Canadian alpine skier and a key figure in the development of skiing in Quebec. Born in Sherbrooke, he became a standout competitor, first as junior champion of the Eastern Townships (1948–1952) and then as senior champion (1953–1959). Lessard achieved national prominence by winning five consecutive International Adams Memorial races at Mont Orford and, in 1959, capturing the “Quebec Kandahar” special slalom at Mont Tremblant. That same year, he became the first French-speaking Canadian to win the national alpine skiing championship in slalom, giant slalom, and combined events.

In 1960, Lessard represented Canada at the Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley, placing 31st in the giant slalom. Shortly after, he retired from competition and became instrumental in the creation and growth of Mont Sutton ski resort. He founded the Mont Sutton Ski School and ski shop, leading both for 30 years. Under his leadership, the school became one of the most renowned in Canada and the Eastern United States, attracting large numbers of students and introducing innovative programs such as ski-study initiatives and instructor training courses.

Lessard was also a director of the Canadian Ski Instructors’ Alliance and played a vital role in developing ski instruction standards nationally. His reputation, charisma, and commitment to quality instruction drew top instructors and students to Sutton. He was known for hiring European assistant directors and ensuring all instructors were certified, offering higher salaries, and fostering a strong team spirit.

His contributions extended beyond the ski slopes: Lessard was deeply involved in community development, supporting local businesses, and organizing ski events that put Sutton on the map. His legacy includes the success of many skiers who trained under him and the enduring reputation of Mont Sutton as a premier ski destination. Lessard was inducted into the Sherbrooke Sports Hall of Fame, reflecting his lasting impact on Canadian skiing and his community.