

## INDUCTEE PROFILE



Doug served as the flag bearer for the United States national team in the 2007 world championships in Astoria and was USA's team captain in 2009.

# *The mark(s) of a national champion*

## **Hoover showed perseverance to gain fame in biathlon**

By John Hartsock  
*Altoona Mirror*

Tyrone native Doug Hoover made his mark both nationally and internationally in the sport of biathlon competition — which combines distance running with rifle shooting.

Hoover, 44, who has been the head coach of both the men's and women's cross

country and track and field teams at Saint Francis University since 2012, was a five-time United States national biathlon champion who also competed internationally three times in world-championship competitions.

His 15th-place finish in the sprint in Italy at the 2003 world competition was his best personal international

effort, and Hoover also served as the flag bearer for the United States national team in the 2007 world championships in Astoria in eastern Europe. He was named the captain of the 2009 USA team.

But all his international success didn't come quickly, and for that, Hoover is most grateful.

Between the time that he was first picked to be a member of the United

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**A pair of national biathlon champions: Stephanie Blackstone Strittmatter and Doug, her mentor.**

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States Biathlon Association's (USBA) Summer Biathlon Team in 1997, and when he earned his first spot on a world-championship team in 2003, Hoover had fallen short in several attempts to qualify for the world competition.

"There are world championship trials each year from which the world team is selected, and I failed seven times before I made a world championship team," said Hoover, who won 92 of the 194 races that he competed in during his biathlon career, which wound up with his winning his fifth USBA national championship at his final competition, at the age of 40, in 2012.

"That hurt," Hoover admitted about his initial tries at making a world championship team falling short. "But it was a learning process. Then I won my first national championship in 2006, and went on a roll for about six years. It hurt a lot to lose when I was losing, but it made the victories all the more rewarding."

The biathlon is a unique sport in that it combines two very diverse types of disciplines — running and rifle-shooting.

Contestants in the summertime biathlons in world and national championship-caliber events participate in a 4K (2.4-mile sprint), a 6K (3.7-mile) pursuit, and a mass start, which is similar to the pursuit, in the running competition.

The shooting competition involves two stops during the sprint portion, and four shooting stops during the pursuit and mass start portions.

At each stop, contestants shoot at metal knockdown targets from 50 meters (164 feet) away, and for every target that

is missed, contestants must leave their rifles at the target stop and run a penalty lap of 70 meters (roughly 230 feet).

"It's a very unique sport, because the running and shooting are two very opposing skills," said Hoover, who holds a bachelor's degree from Penn State and a masters degree in business administration from Saint Francis.

"The running is a very dynamic and very aerobic sport, and the shooting is a mental game, a process which requires you to remain remarkably calm."

Hoover ran cross country and track at Tyrone Area High School, from which he graduated in 1990. He qualified for the PIAA Class AA state cross country meet as a Tyrone senior in the fall of 1989, but didn't become enamored with biathlon competition until 1992.

"I fell in love with it the first time I did it," Hoover said. "My first race was in 1992, and I bought my first rifle after my first race. I spent the next year competing in a handful of races, and I figured that I had an aptitude for it."

He figured right. His long list of biathlon accomplishments on both the national and international levels bears that out.

He competed in the world championships in 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009, and surprised even himself with his 15th-place finish in Italy in 2003.

"I was frankly shocked that I finished that high," Hoover said. "I was in really good shape that year. I had a really good race, and only one pen-



## Hoover bio

**Sport:** Biathlon

**High school:** Tyrone Area

**College:** Penn State

**Hall of Fame achievement:** Five-time United States biathlon champion from 2006 through 2012 and USA captain in the 2009 world championships.

**Current residence:** Loretto

ality in the shooting range. It all came together."

At the 2006 world championships in Russia, Hoover finished 17th in the sprint competition — "one of my better finishes in the worlds, and being in that venue was awesome," he said — and in 2007 he was picked to be the flag bearer for the United States team in the world competition in Astoria.

"There's no comparison to wearing that U.S. jersey and representing your country," Hoover said. "It's incredibly humbling, and it's a tremendous honor."

Hoover has mentored several younger athletes in the biathlon over the years, including Everett High School graduate Stephanie (Blackstone) Strittmatter, who won two national summer biathlon championships in 2008 and 2009, and BG graduate Sonja Hinisch, who qualified for the junior world championship team in 2002.

Strittmatter, who is married to former two-time NCAA wrestling All-American and Cambria Heights PIAA champion Jody Strittmatter, went on to earn a Division I track scholarship to Kent State University. She credits Hoover's influence with helping her turn the corner as a runner.

"When I was in high school at Everett, we didn't have a full cross country team, and he would put together a schedule of summer running workouts for me and another group of girls in the area," Strittmatter said of Hoover. "He's an all-around great guy who helped me to really see what running is all about, and helped me to see what a runner's life should be like from a training standpoint. You have to put in the hours and the miles."

"Running helped me pay for college, and when I graduated from Kent State, he took over my training when I started in the biathlon," added Strittmatter. "He does everything right, works hard, takes everything he does seriously, and takes it to the next level."

Although he's done as an active biathlon competitor, Hoover's coaching tenure in track and cross country at Saint Francis has been a labor of love for him.



**Biathlon is a combination of rifle shooting and distance running.**



"I don't feel like I've worked a day there, because I love what I do," said Hoover, a lifelong bachelor who now lives in Loretto. "It's rewarding to see not only the athletic development, but also the personal development, of our student-athletes."

Hoover was stunned and surprised when he was notified of his selection among the Hall of Fame's 2016 induction class.

"The word that comes to mind is humbling," Hoover said. "There's an

incredible group of people that are in there, and I'm excited to be going in with this (year's) class.

"I was shocked when I got the call, and I'm very happy for the recognition of my sport, and thankful for all those people who helped me get there," added Hoover, citing the support of his parents, Bill and Deb, as well as his coaches, teammates and training partners. "A lot of people kept me encouraged along the way. This wasn't a one-man journey."