

## **Rolf Thorsen**

Born out of a long tradition of outstanding Norwegian scullers, Rolf Thorsen was a typical Viking. He stood out with striking blonde hair, piercing blue eyes and a fierce determination to win. Like his seafaring ancestors from the fjords, Rolf excelled in the arts of moving a boat with the minimum of effort. Yet at the same time, he could race with passion and fire. He won nine medals in fourteen years.

Rolf first learnt his trade under the watchful eye of the great Alf Hansen. Hansen was looking for a partner to replace his brother Frank and he saw in Rolf the necessary qualities. Their first Championships together in 1981 produced a Bronze medal.

That set up a stunning contest on the Rotsee the following year, when the two men harried on to the East Germans and killed them off with a devastating finishing burst. That racing zest was to be a hallmark of Rolf's career, though the following year, he and Alf had to settle for Silver behind a new East German double with fellow Keller Medal winner Thomas Lange on board.

But Rolf had to overcome disappointment and learn to regroup over the next few years. Neither he nor Alf found their form at the Olympic regatta on Lake Casitas, Los Angeles. Rolf chose to take a year out, but by then it was clear that Norway had the potential to take on the challenge of producing a quadruple scull. The development work paid off in Copenhagen in 1987, when Rolf was part of the crew that took Silver behind the Russians.

That contest set up the challenge for the Seoul Olympics and Rolf's hopes were high for a Gold medal. He knew that his crew had phenomenal pace over the second half of the course but they had to compete with a new super-quick Italian boat. In the end Rolf had to settle for Olympic Silver, though he was convinced his boat could have won.

If he needed proof, he only had to look at his result on Lake Bled the following year, when teaming up with Lars Bjoenness, from the quad, he won his second Gold. Though by now a back injury –let alone his work- was beginning to seriously affect his training. He returned to the Norwegian quad in Barcelona to take yet another Olympic Silver, this time behind Germany.

Rolf never lost his motivation though and returning to the double, he and Bjoenness took Silver in 1993, and then struck Gold in the fast tail breeze of Eagle Creek, Indianapolis the following year. It was to be his last competition medal.

Rolf eventually received a Gold medal on the Olympic podium in Atlanta when he received his Thomas Keller Medal. He was well known to many of his fellow rowers who were pleased to call this 'Little Viking' their friend.