

Joseph Theodore “Ted” Allen – 1996 Inductee



Ted Allen, world class horseshoe pitcher, horseshoe manufacturer, performer at rodeos, theaters, sports and horse shows, exhibition and trick shot pitcher, was inducted into the National Horseshoe Pitchers Hall of Fame as a charter member in 1966.

Joseph Theodore Allen (always known as Ted) was born March 29, 1908, to Will and Esther (True) Allen on a wheat farm in Osborne County, Kansas, near Natoma. His family later moved into Natoma where his grandparents Mr. and Mrs. Solon True lived. Will was a well known horseshoe pitcher and his five sons and five daughters became quite good at the game. Ted started pitching when he was seven and learned to beat the best of them. At age twelve he was thrilled to hear one expert say, “If I had that boy, I’d take him to Chicago.” Little did they know that Chicago was where Ted Allen would first win a World Championship at the World’s Fair in 1933. He was just twenty-four years old and would compete in thirty-one world championships.

Ted won ten times in the first nineteen years he competed, finished second five times, third and fourth twice. His name appears in the Guinness Book of Records as having won the most World Championships, and many of his other records have never been broken.

The Allens moved to Colorado in 1922. While farming and attending school, Ted was state champion eight years out of ten, losing those times to his brother Ira. In 1932 the family moved to Oregon for a short time, and Ted won that state’s championship. They moved to California, and it was while there that he won his first World Championship.

All his life he had wanted to be somebody, and he thought his horseshoes could make that possible. He worked hard and began performing in many shows from coast to coast. For four years in a row, he strutted his ability in Madison Square Garden and the Boston Garden, performing in such shows as the Roy Rogers and Gene Autry extravaganzas. Although short in stature, Ted was a big man in horseshoe circles and on the show circuit. He instructed many famous people, including Roy Rogers, on the proper way to pitch. One time he was asked to stay and meet President Franklin Roosevelt, but his schedule made it impossible.

Ted excelled in about thirty different tricks with horseshoes. Some of these were: lighting a match with his steel missiles; knocking cigars from between the teeth of people courageous enough to serve as his targets; ringing a peg by tossing between a man’s legs; whipping the arched bit of steel forty feet to hit a dime; and tossing ringers around a pop bottle, until one bottle broke and he wouldn’t do that any more. Allen’s big regret was that he didn’t find a show willing to let him race in on a galloping horse and shoot ringers from the saddle. He said his average was fifty percent in practicing that stunt.

In the late thirties, Allen designed and began manufacturing his own pitching shoes, which later became the “most used of all shoes” by pitchers. He began this venture in Denver, Colorado, in 1937 and later moved to Boulder, Colorado. There are only two shoes known in existence that are stamped with “Denver” on them. He insisted on making a first-class shoe by doing all the work himself—he ground his shoes outdoors, painted, packaged and mailed them. The first ones were advertised for \$2.25 a pair, which included postage. At the time of his death, he had orders for one thousand pairs that he hadn’t been able to fill.

Allen took his championship responsibility very seriously, believing that it was his job to look and act respectable. He lived cleanly, worked hard at keeping physically fit and especially wanted to see that young children respected him for clean living. On one occasion in Detroit, hundreds of kids crowded and jostled him, wanting autographs. Finding it hard to write, he climbed a big sign hoping to get above and reach down. The kids climbed up, too, and the sign fell down. Ted also put in his stint in the army where he served as a male nurse in World War II.

One of his goals was to travel, and this he did. For forty years he was on the road, averaging thirty-five thousand miles a year. He gave over five hundred radio broadcasts and was the first man to pitch on television. In all his exhibitions and personal appearances, not counting millions who have seen his five newsreels and two movie shorts, it has been calculated that around eighteen million people saw Allen’s act; besides this, there have been two hundred thousand people who saw him in tournaments. He set a record of public appearances never equaled by any other horseshoe pitcher. He also performed longer than other champs.

Ted’s seventh World Championship in 1955 was his most convincing by far. He had seven 90% games, four of them over 95%. He had twelve other games over 85%. He was known as “Babe Ruth of Horseshoes.” Ted held many records, four of which remain unbeatable. He tossed seventy-two consecutive ringers in 1955; his 187 ringers in 200 shoes and eighty-five doubles in 1955 will stand forever since this type qualification is no longer used. His total victories in those thirty-one years stood at 771 in 989 games; the next closest was 488 wins. Never was Allen beaten in a play-off game.

During his later years, Allen loved to visit and spin yarns about his earlier life. One of his memories goes like this: “A rabbit hopped into my back yard one day when I was practicing and on impulse I let fly with a shoe. It was a ‘ringer’ and I had the critter for dinner.” One of his hobbies was capturing rattlesnakes and milking them of the venom, which he sold to the University of Colorado. After one trip to Oklahoma, he returned with a gunny sack full of snakes in his car trunk. Unbeknownst to him, one of the snakes had escaped from the sack and the next time he opened his trunk, he got the surprise of his life! Fortunately he wasn’t bitten.

Ted always planned to write a book but just didn’t get around to it. He did write many articles for horseshoe magazines. He continued to make his horseshoes with very little help from anyone else. Today, his nephew continues to manufacture the popular “Ted Allen” shoes at a much higher price than when the business began.

Ted Allen passed away on January 26, 1990, in Boulder, Colorado, of a heart attack. He will always be remembered as a “giant” in the horseshoe world.