

Rebuilding Broken Dreams

Featuring Karen Magnussen

Athlete Article

FROM SNOWFLAKE TO ICE QUEEN

Prepared by Grant Kerr, The Canadian Press, Vancouver



Karen Magnussen made her skating debut at age six, as a blonde, blue-eyed snowflake in a winter carnival. Fourteen years later, she was crowned the world's figure skating queen in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. Magnussen's road to stardom wasn't without its icy detours, complete with stress fractures to both legs. But she proved to be champion material, refusing to become discouraged, even when she had to watch the 1969 World Championship from a wheelchair. "Even as I sat there, I was planning for next year's competition," she said later. "I never considered giving up; I always knew that I'd be back."

On March 1, 1973, she became just the third Canadian to win the women's world singles title, following Barbara Ann Scott in 1947 and Petra Burka in 1965. Two years after Magnussen began her skating career in the Vancouver winter carnival, she served notice that she might be something special when she won the B.C. Coast Championship in the novice division in 1961. The Magnussen household

in North Vancouver was never really the same after that. Her parents, Gloria and Alf Magnussen, knew they had a champion in the making and made the personal sacrifices necessary for her development.

Magnussen's coaches played their parts too, from Dr. Helmet May to Eddie Rada, and finally Linda Brauckmann, who would be the steadying influence during the frustrating years when Magnussen couldn't beat Trixie Schuba of Austria. Magnussen, five times Canadian senior women's champion, finished second to Schuba in the 1972 Worlds in Calgary and in the Olympic Games the same winter in Sapporo, Japan.

But Magnussen was not going to be denied the ultimate prize in skating. She trained for ten hours a day in the summer and five to six hours daily in the winter, determined that 1973 would be the year she earned her just reward. Magnussen won her fifth Canadian senior title in Calgary, and then it was on the Bratislava for a showdown with American champion Janet Lynn.

Lynn and Magnussen had never quite been able to overcome Schuba, an unexciting but technically sound skater who always took a substantial lead in the compulsory figures and held on through the free skating routines favored by North Americans. But Schuba had retired in 1973 and it was Magnussen and Lynn who were poised to take advantage of a new marking system by the International Skating Association. The compulsory figures received 20 percent of the final points total, with another 20 points for free skating exercise and 60 percent for the exciting and entertaining free skating.

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English journalist Clive James captured the moment in Bratislava when he wrote: "The spirit of the art was free to flourish and Magnussen turned in an absolute facefreezer – a display of power that ran like cold fury on silver rails. Just thirty-four days before her twenty-first birthday and six years after her first appearance in the world championships, Karen Magnussen's flair for dazzling presentation in free skating brought her to the pinnacle of her sport. The first Western Canadian figure skating champion later had an arena named in her honor in North Vancouver."

