

AND THEN THERE WERE NONE

A Fond Remembrance of Compulsory Figures at the World Championships

Part II

by Susan A. Johnson

THEN THERE WERE SIX . . . 1948-1972

From 1948 through 1968, compulsory figures still comprised 60 percent of each competitor's total score. However, with all evidence pointing to burgeoning entries in future World Championships, the ISU Congress of 1947 voted to cut the number of compulsory figures in half, drawing six but alternating right and left foot starts.

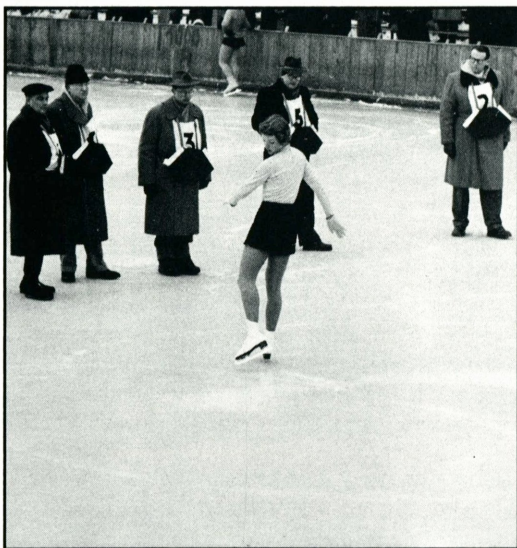
Reaction at the time was mixed. *Skating's* editor, Theresa Weld Blanchard, wrote after the 1948 Olympics, ". . . I think that most agreed with me that it was not a real test, but probably more practical from a judge's and schedule angle. If you have only one bad figure you are out of the running; in the old days all entrants could have a bad figure and still have time to recover."

The effects of winter weather on outdoor ice continued to present problems, beginning at the World Championships in Davos in 1948. Again Blanchard wrote in *Skating*: "The girls skated two figures in the afternoon and conditions were terrible. None of them could see their tracings and many had bad figures. I learned that day (Friday) that six feet of snow had fallen since the previous Sunday, and that it had been the worst snowfall in 50 years. . . . The girls did two more figures the next morning, but had

to stop because the ice was impossible. It seemed to be the general opinion that this was the worst ice that the World's had experienced for years. At nine that night the temperature was 34 degrees and no one believed the figures would continue the next day but they were resumed at 8 A.M. The judges had to judge almost entirely by what they saw as the figure was skated, because the tracings hardly showed after the figure was completed. . . . One poor girl got completely lost and put her counters all over the ice, and it was a wonder that more didn't. The ice was not so much frozen water as frozen snow. . . ." One newspaper report described the ice as "gooey as chocolate pie."

In 1949 in Paris, Dick Button became the first USA skater to win a compulsory figure event at the World Championships. (Button had become the country's first World titlist the previous year, after narrowly losing the judges' decision in the figures.) A skating correspondent wrote of Button in *The Times of London*, "He has improved his style since last year, his double three figure being skated with great power and precision."

The same reporter wrote of the 1949 ladies' event, "It may be that some of the judges found difficulty in seeing the drawings on the ice and thus were unable to differentiate between ellipses and circles and that they were blind to alignment, but they should have been able to



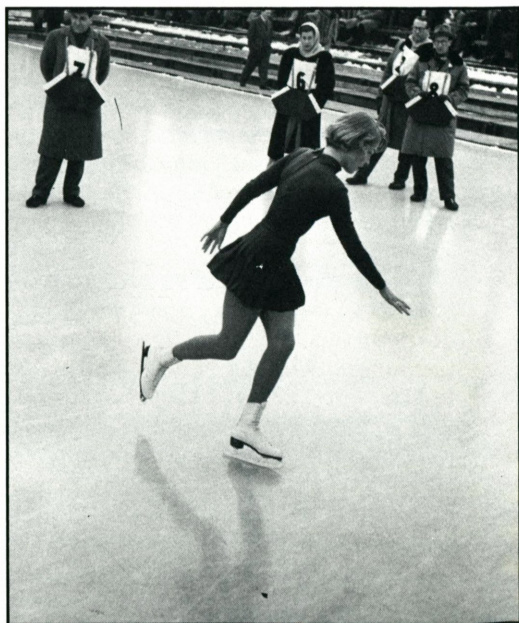
Tenley Albright

see bulging hips, with knees locked together, and ugly movements.” However, reports from throughout this postwar period give evidence that the standard of the ladies’ compulsory figures was significantly higher than that of the men. Former Champion Ulrich Salchow commented in 1947, “Of course men cannot sacrifice that much time which will be necessary to bring them to championship class.” Jeannette Altwegg of Great Britain, Lady Champion of the World in 1951, was reputedly an outstanding exponent of the discipline. Nigel Brown wrote in *Ice Skating: A History*, “This skater will go down in history as the finest school-figure skater of post-war times. She had a natural facility, ease and skill, that lent real beauty to this branch of the art.” Her unanimous first placement in figures swept her to the title with the vote of eight of the nine judges, despite her sixth-place finish in the free skating.

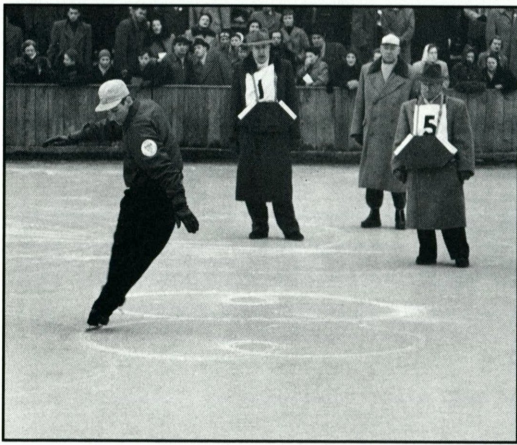
American skaters achieved almost total domination of World championship figure events during the 1950’s. In 1953 in

Davos, Tenley Albright became the first American woman to triumph in compulsory figures; after winning again in 1954 and 1955, she was succeeded by Carol Heiss, who did so from 1956 through 1960. U.S. men who were consecutive victors were Dick Button (1949-1952), Jimmy Grogan (1953), Hayes Jenkins (1954-1956), David Jenkins (1957), and Tim Brown (1958-1959).

Wind presented the greatest challenge to the men skating figures in Vienna in 1955. *Skating* reported, “The weather was quite cold and the figures were skated under extremely difficult wind conditions. The gusts were so strong that at times they seemed to throw a skater off balance, and in one instance brought a contestant almost to a standstill. Hayes Jenkins’ experience was valuable to him; he seemed to take his time and evaluate the wind before starting a figure. . . . David Jenkins . . . at one time stopped in the middle of a figure



Carol Heiss



Hayes Jenkins

to let a gust of wind go by. Hugh Graham seemed to draw more than his share of 'ill wind' as the gusts seemed to hamper him consistently . . ."

In Garmisch in 1956, the problem was bitter cold. *Skating* again reported, "Enough cannot be said about the terrific cold. Before and during the competitions temperatures ranged from 27 degrees below zero to a few degrees below. Even on the few sunny days it rarely was as high as 15 degrees. The skaters had to bundle up with so many layers of clothing it is amazing they could perform, and many suffered frostbite. Such extreme weather conditions made the ice so brittle that it would crack under the skates; this created a difficult situation during the figure competition, when the ice would chip during the first tracing and the competitor had to worry about getting caught in his own tracks."

Worlds returned to the United States in 1957 (for the first time since 1930), held then and again in 1959 in Colorado Springs. Ironically, it was now the Europeans who struggled with unfamiliar ice conditions during the figures. "The Europeans were hampered during this phase because their blades are hollow ground for skating on outdoor ice, which

is much harder than indoors. When on the softer indoor surface, it was extremely difficult for these competitors to prevent themselves from double tracking—and in most cases they didn't," reported *Skating*.

Dick Button turned reporter to cover the 1966 World Championships in Davos and provided some colorful commentary. Describing the men's figure competition, he wrote, ". . . Emmerich Danzer, for a reason unknown to this writer, was given first place by a substantial margin. Some of the figures were performed in snow. I stood two feet away from Mr. Danzer's rocker, in which his lack of push, or the snow, or something resulted in his skating a figure with no speed and therefore no edge. The wobbles at the end of the '8' were a sight to behold, and one beautiful wiggle was neatly and expertly traced in the second print. Because the snow on the ice made the print exceedingly clear, every spectator was able to see the figure plainly. When it was completed, one of the judges cleared the snow off the print with his feet. If this was an attempt to see the edge more clearly, couldn't the official snow removers have done a much better job with their brushes? Perhaps a new ISU ruling is needed."

In 1966 in Davos, Peggy Fleming became the first American since the tragic loss of the 1961 World Team to win the compulsory figures at World Championships. *Skating* described her as ". . . a surprise leader at the end of the figures with an almost unbeatable margin of 49 points." She was to become the unanimous winner of the figures and the World title in 1967 and 1968.

The skaters' final battle with inclement weather conditions was waged in Vienna in 1967. "Skating outside is much more invigorating than skating inside some stuffy arena. Skaters should be able to handle all kinds of conditions

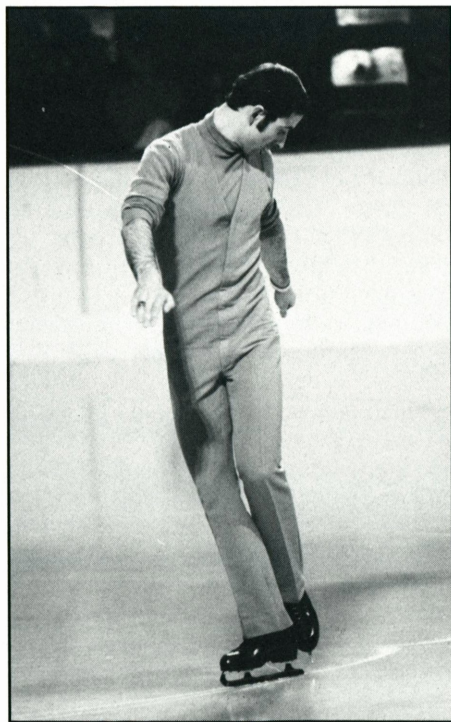
and elements since, after all, skating is an outdoor sport. But I guess it's depressing to work a whole year and then have your one chance hampered by a gust of wind or your enthusiasm dampened by a driving rain . . ." said Button.

In June of 1967, the ISU Congress made two momentous decisions. One was that beginning in 1968, ISU and Olympic championships were to be held in artificially refrigerated, covered rinks. The other was that after September 1, 1968, and thus at the 1969 World Championships, equal weight would be given to figures and to free skating, each counting for 50 percent in the final accounting.

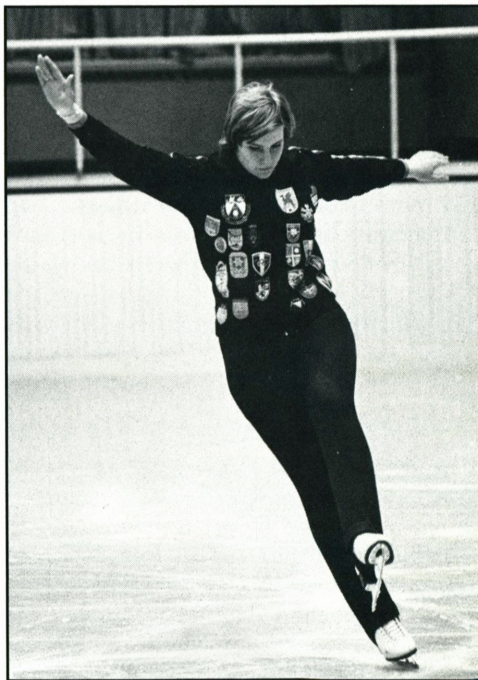
American Tim Wood won the figures in the first World Championships forced indoors in Geneva in 1968, and again the following year. Mrs. Gillis Grafström (widow of the champion of the 1920's)

was a spectator at the 1969 championship. According to *Skating*, "Tim Wood's figures delighted her. 'They exactly equaled my husband's,' she said."

Also in 1969 began the reign of Beatrix Schuba of Austria, widely acknowledged as one of the supreme artists of compulsory figure skating history. Although an indifferent free skater (during the years in which she won the figures, her free skating placements were sixth, seventh, and ninth), the excellence of her figures carried her to the title of Lady Champion of the World in 1971 and 1972. From *Skating's* report of the 1971 Championships in Lyon: "The ladies' competition brought out one very clear fact: compulsory figures are still the deciding factor when a specialist is at work, and this year the specialist was Beatrix Schuba of Austria. With hardly an error to be found, Miss Schuba was machine-like in her figures, and so far ahead of the



Tim Wood



Beatrix Schuba

rest that it was impossible to catch her. Reaching the same heights of perfection that Jeannette Altwegg achieved in the 1952 Olympics, Beatrix is distinctly 'in a class by herself' in figures." Although Janet Lynn of the United States won the free skating that year, she could finish no higher than fourth.

Figures were once again de-emphasized by the ISU at its meeting in June of 1971. It was there decreed that beginning with the 1972-73 championship season, only three compulsory figures would be skated, to count for 40 percent; a short program would be introduced, with a weight of 20 percent; and the free skating would be 40 percent of each skater's score.

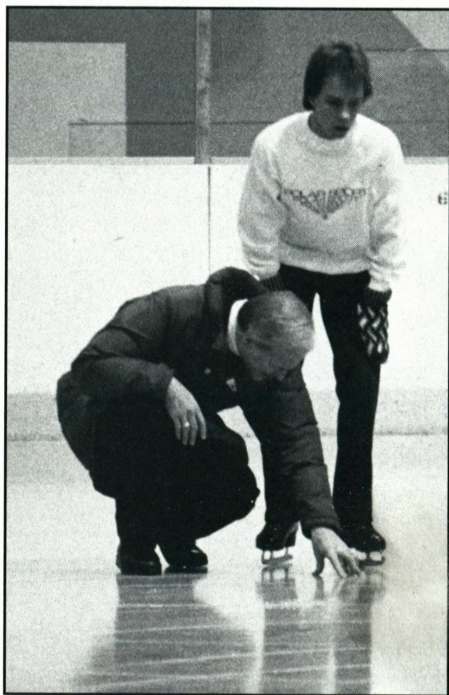
FOR A WHILE THERE WERE THREE . . . 1973-1988

Moving the Championships indoors did not necessarily mean the end of extreme cold. In 1973, *Skating* reported on the ladies' figures at Bratislava, "In a bitterly cold ice rink—the first of many events to be skated under frigid conditions. As usual, it was a lengthy event, even with only 3 instead of 6 figures, and generally opinions seemed to favor having just 3 figures."

At its meeting in 1975, the ISU Congress voted to change the figures/short program/free skating percentage weighting from 40/20/40, in effect for only three years, to 30/20/50. Perhaps as a result, Isabel de Navarre of the Federal Republic of Germany finished sixth in the Ladies' Championship in 1976, despite winning the compulsory figures. This was the lowest finish ever, up to then, for a figure victor. Only Richard Zander would eventually eclipse this record, by placing first in figures and finishing seventh in the 1990 Men's Championship.

In 1981 in Hartford the de-emphasis of figures continued, when the factored placement system of scoring was introduced. No longer would total points accrued in the figures (or any other event segment) carry through in the calculation of the final result. Nevertheless, Hartford attracted, ". . . surely the largest crowds ever to watch the compulsories . . ."

No American skater won the compulsory figure segment of the World Championships during the 1970's. The only U.S. representatives to triumph in figures in the 1980's were Rosalynn Summers, in Helsinki in 1983; and Scott Hamilton, in Ottawa in 1984. The Soviets Kira Ivanova and Alexandr Fadeev dominated the figures for much of the decade. In Cincinnati in 1987, an overflow crowd at the Sabin Convention Center watched in fascination what would be the last



Scott Hamilton

World Championships figures ever skated in the United States.

VERY BRIEFLY THERE WERE TWO . . . 1989-1990

The death blow to figures at the World Championships was finally struck by the ISU Congress of 1988, when it approved a change to two figures, an original program, and free skating, weighted 20, 30 and 50 percent, respectively, for the 1988-89 and 1989-90 championship seasons; and the total deletion of figures from the ISU Senior and Junior championships beginning July 1, 1990. The United States, Canada, Great Britain, and New Zealand were the only countries to cast dissenting votes against this momentous change.

And so it was that the last figures were etched into World Championships ice in Halifax one year ago. The same figures were drawn by both men and ladies: ISU numbers 37b (LBO, RBI Paragraph Double Three) and 38a (RFO, LFI Paragraph Loop).

Monday, March 5, was an unforgettable day for all who were present at the men's figure competition. It would be particularly memorable for Richard Zander, a former Pacific Coast competitor now skating for the Federal Republic of Germany, who won the first-place ordinal of all nine judges; for David Liu, American-trained and skating for Chinese Taipei, who skated the last men's figure; and for U.S. Champion Todd Eldredge, who was congratulated by Referee Sonia Bianchetti for the excellence of his loop, and finished seventh among 31 men at his first World Championships.

On Wednesday, March 7, with American Referee Benjamin T. Wright presiding, Jill Trenary became the last skater ever to win figures at the World Championships. Her compatriot Holly Cook

scored the highest marks for the loop and finished fourth. Perhaps it was appropriate that Trenary's victory in the figures weighed heavily in making her the 1990 Lady Champion of the World. The nine-place edge which she gained over her chief rival, defending Champion Midori Ito of Japan, ultimately earned her the title.

Sizable crowds offered appreciative applause throughout both the men's and ladies' events in Halifax. When Zeljka Cizmesija of Yugoslavia, the final lady to skate, had completed her loop, spectators thronged onto the ice for one last look at the prints, while others threw roses to the ice. Cizmesija's loop, a fine one which left her in fifth place among the 29 ladies, was outlined with roses and photographed for posterity. More than a few tears were shed, by skaters, judges, and spectators alike. It was the end of a long and fascinating era in the history of the sport. World Championships *figure* skating would have no more figures.

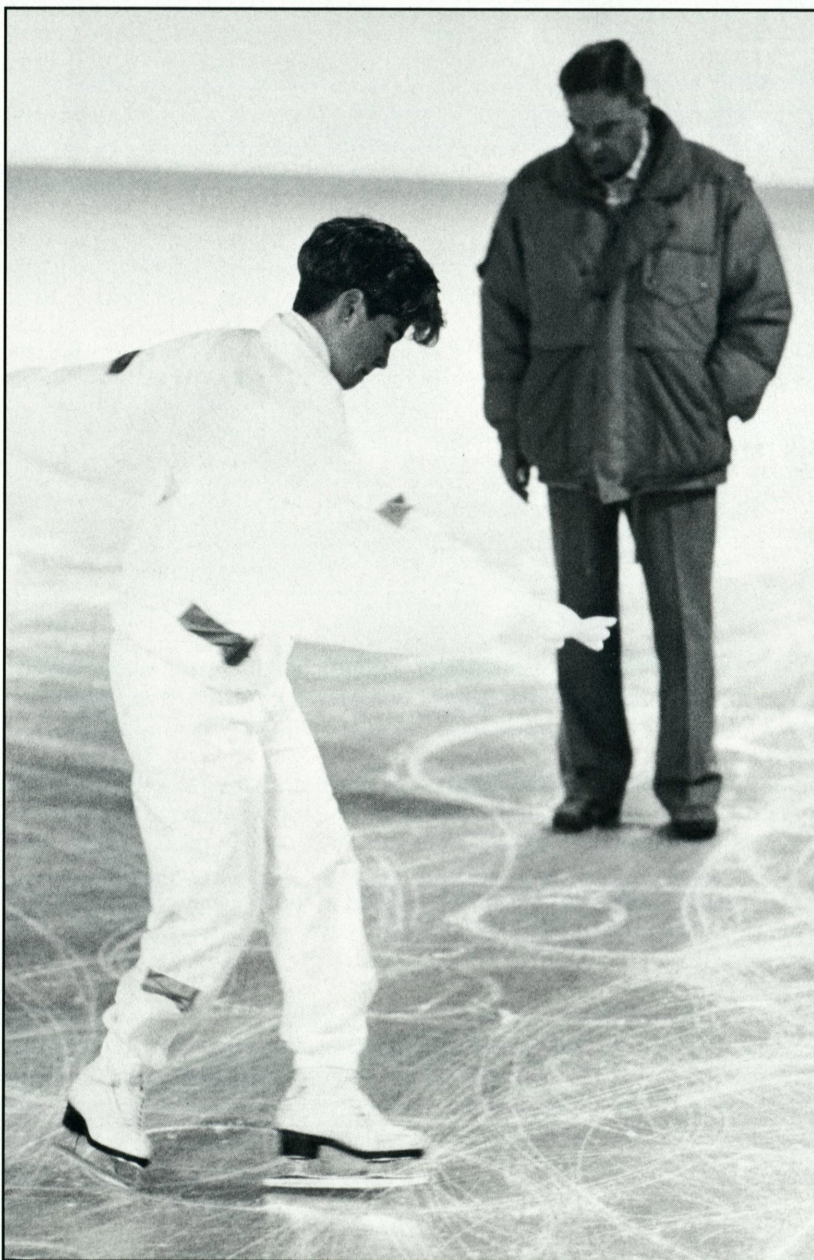
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Perhaps the following observations make the strongest statement about the importance of figures in the history of the World Championships: In 80 years of Men's Championships, only six times (in 1978, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1989, and 1990) did a winner of the figures who completed the competition not become an overall medalist. And in the 70 years in which the Ladies' Championships were contested, only four times (in 1974, 1976, 1986, and 1987) did the winner of the figures fail to win a medal.

The author wishes to express her thanks to Benjamin T. Wright for his assistance with the articles.

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tional judge, chairman of the USFSA Tests Committee, and former chairman of the USFSA Judges Committee.



Jill Trenary