

Rocky Mountain Nationals

by **Barbara R. Boucher**

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Leftovers from Christmas dinner had barely cooled in the refrigerator when skaters began to gather in Colorado Springs. Their meeting place, the old-worldly Broadmoor Hotel and World Arena. Their goal, a medal in the 1976 United States Figure Skating Championships. The significance of these championships, particularly to those entering the senior events, was obvious. At stake were ten berths on the U.S. team for the Olympics and, later, the World Championships. The added incentive provided by the XII Olympic Winter Games would run through Nationals '76 like an electric current—lighting up some performances, short-circuiting others and even shocking the spectators from time to time. Younger but scarcely less brilliant lights would dominate the Junior and Novice events. In all, four days of competition would determine ten national titles. To earn the right to contest those titles, 141 competitors representing 50 clubs and two USFSA Individual Members had trained a long time. They wanted to be ready. So although Nationals would take place January 7-10, the first arrivals unpacked their bags at The Broadmoor on the day after Christmas.

No doubt the rarefied atmosphere of Colorado Springs concerned them. At an altitude of 5,890 feet, this central Colorado resort community hugs the base of Pikes Peak, about 80 miles south of Denver. Sufficient practice time would allow

the skaters to adjust to the high altitude, while the Peak and its snow covered neighbors would provide an incomparable backdrop for the championships. As it happened, nature made the most of the scenery, while members of the Broadmoor Skating Club did their best with the practice ice.

The host club members knew firsthand what a major competition would require. With still-fresh memories of the 1975 Worlds on their home ground, the Broadmoor folk could also draw on the experience of hosting four previous World and six National Championships. Just as it had for those earlier events, the facilities of the Broadmoor Hotel and the assistance of its staff would contribute to the success of Nationals '76.

The days of "just practice" ended Wednesday, the 7th. Snow flurries throughout the day eventually closed the Colorado Springs airport, delaying the arrival of many spectators. For those already settled in the Broadmoor enclave, however, the powdery white stuff created just the right mood for a winter sport competition.

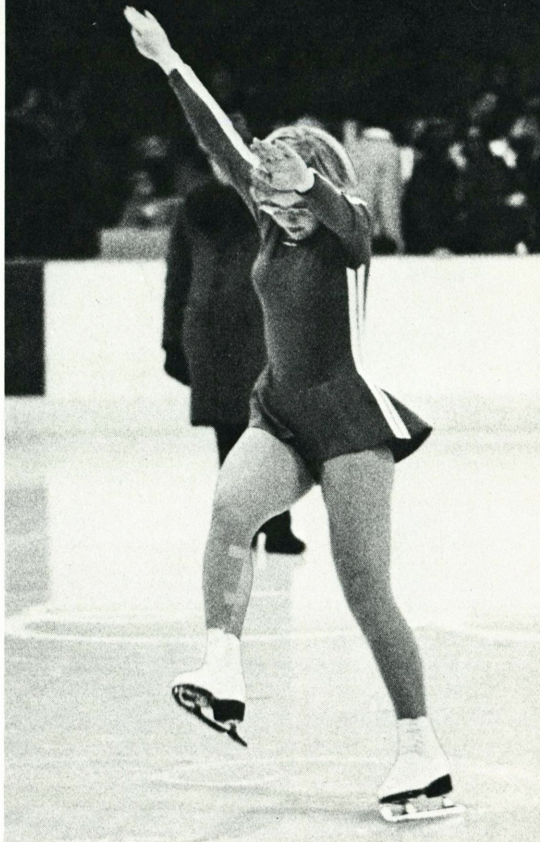
The Junior Men took the ice first that day, but not until the Senior Ladies began tracing their figures later in the morning could one feel the anticipation of a championship contest in the making. Spectators have a limited perspective during compulsory figures. With a poor view at best of the tracings, they judge instead each skater's form. On that basis, Kath Malm-

berg earned ovations for the flow and graceful execution of her RFO rocker and LBO paragraph bracket. From the judges' perspective, though, defending champion Dorothy Hamill skated consistently better figures.

Dorothy looked every inch a champion, dressed in a simply-cut but elegant black dress with black velvet bodice and cuffs trimmed in white lace and silver braid. Her poise, as much as the row of silver Radix skate pins on her shoulder, brought to mind her past titles and the ones she hopes to win this season.

When the ice shavings had been brushed away from this initial round of the Ladies' Championship, Dorothy held a unanimous lead, followed by the 1975 medalists, Kath Malmberg and Wendy Burge—no surprises there. But Barbie Smith, the girl who wowed the Oakland audience

Dorothy Hamill (below) won Ladies' figures for the third straight year, while Barbie Smith (right), still feeling the effects of an injury received last fall, placed a distant fifth.



last year and many thought would challenge for a medal this year, was locked in fifth place. Ahead of her stood 15-year-old Linda Fratianne, another free skating whiz. With 70% of the marks still to be decided, the debate was on—could Linda pull up to a medalist's spot and join the U.S. team at Innsbruck?

Before the answer came, competitors in all events skated at least part of the requirements for their respective titles. Through it all ran an awareness that this is 1976, an Olympic year, a Bicentennial year and, for the people of Colorado, a Centennial year. The spirit of the latter two meanings of 1976 surfaced in the official opening ceremonies held after the Ladies' figures. For these, the U.S. Air Force Academy band led a parade of cad-dies and messengers, dressed as Revolutionary War soldiers and U.S. Cavalry officers, around Cheyenne Lake from hotel to arena.

The skaters themselves defined the Olympic significance of 1976. First to do so were the Senior Pairs. With the retire-

ment of 1974-75 champions Militano & Johns, the favorite's role fell to twice runners-up Tai Babilonia & Randy Gardner. They quickly laid claim to the vacant title. Skating second in the short program, Tai and Randy performed a crowd-pleasing duet to the "Prologue" and "Maria" from *West Side Story* and thereby set the pace for a strong class of pairs.

In the final free skating, Tai and Randy made true believers of the spectators.

Dressed in tan outfits with turquoise sequin trim at the neckline, they skated with the same flair and unison that brought them the Junior Pair title three years ago. After their disappointing free last year, in which they just seemed to run out of steam, coach John Nicks laid down a stamina-building rule for practice sessions—to skate through their free program two times without rest in between. Tai and Randy proved the value of that exer-



Newly crowned pair champions Tai Babilonia & Randy Gardner (left) display their unmistakable poise in overheads. Alice Cook & Bill Fauver (opposite) demonstrated marked improvement to claim the second pairs' berth on the Olympic & World Team.

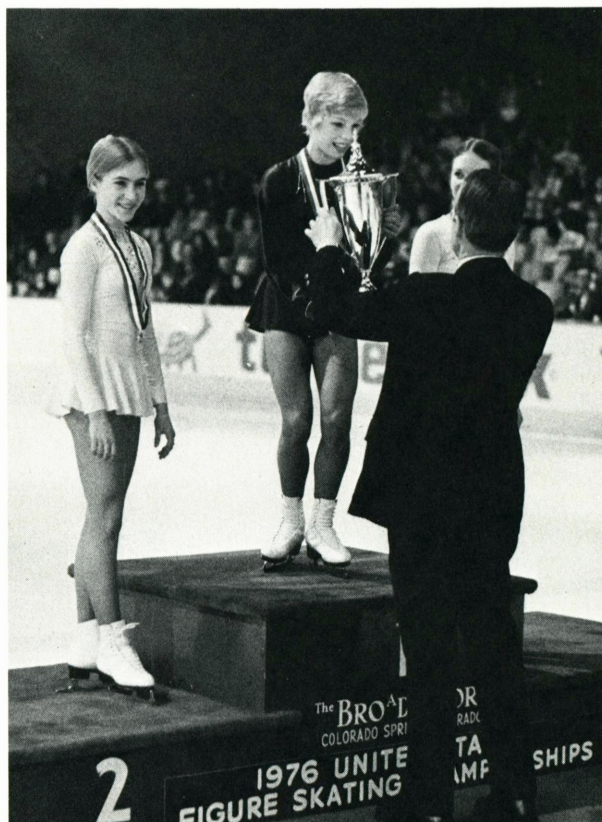
cise in the height of their throw double Axel, the seeming effortlessness of their overhead lifts (including their trademark, the "Tai-Ran star") and the balanced strength of their side by side double Axels, four-jump combination and closing pull Arabians. They skated throughout with a maturing sense of body line. A lone 5.7 for technical merit broke the double strand of 5.8's the judges awarded their program, assuring Tai and Randy of the Pair Championship crown.

Alice Cook & Bill Fauver landed the second pair's berth for the Olympic team. Skating to the *Gayne Ballet* and film scores from *Spartacus* and *El Cid*, they included charming variations of familiar items—heads bowed on each other's shoulder during a pair sit spin and an optically beautiful Ina Bauer spread by Bill backed by Alice in spiral position. Trying to top that performance proved to be impossible

for Emily Benenson & Jack Courtney, though not as much so as this pair's "impossible spin," in which Jack spins in camel position while Emily extends below, parallel to his torso and free leg and completely off the ice, of course...This pair also demonstrated the most mature choreography, but two slips proved costly.

Future promise as well as present achievement characterized the Novice Ladies, who preceded the Senior Pairs to the victory dais Thursday night. First from the start was a poised little blonde, Kelsy Ufford. Not content to rest on her 13½ point lead in figures, she skated a program of beautiful spins, high double Lutz and stylish spiral positions on her jump landings to win the free skating as well. Curiously, Kelsy clinched the Novice Ladies' title in the very same arena where, 24 years before, her coach Mary Ann (Dorsey) Sundin earned the same honor.





Senior Pair Emily Benenson & Jack Courtney (right) won their second consecutive National bronze medal on the same night Kelsy Ufford (left), flanked by Vicki Heasley and Lori Benton, accepted the Novice Ladies' trophy from USFSA President Benjamin T. Wright. Up and coming in the men's ranks are Novice medalists Adam Leib (above left), Champion Robert Taylor and Reggie Raiford. Silver Dancers Carol Fox & Richard Dalley (opposite top), who made their strongest challenge for the gold medal in the American Waltz, finished second.



History also repeated for Lori Benton, whose coach Wanda Guntert ranked third in this event in 1959. Lori did the same with a free program that brought life to all too familiar excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. Not one to be outshone, Vicki Heasley dressed in eye-catching apricot and presented a high content program topped by double Axel and flying camel/sit spin to take the silver medal.

Where Novice Ladies began with fairly well defined candidates for medals after the initial round, Novice Men looked as though one dynamic free performance would break the title bid wide open. Robert Taylor gained a tenuous lead in figures, holding the lowest majority of five second-place votes. Reggie Raiford, James Santee, Greg Kajfez and Adam Leib followed closely enough to pose a threat. But no challenger emerged in the free skating. Instead, Taylor presented a solid program of doubles in combination and good footwork to win both free skating and championship—all in his first appearance at Nationals. Reggie Raiford gave a creditable performance to an orches-





The ladies are the strength of American figure skating, as demonstrated once again in 1976, when five of the top eight ladies at the Olympic Winter Games were native Americans. The U.S. was well represented by National medalists Linda Fratianne, Dorothy Hamill and Wendy Burge (above, left to right). Michelle Ford & Glenn Patterson (right) tried a more conservative free dance than they had used in the past, but narrowly missed a spot on the Championship Dance podium. Competition over, Senior Pairs (opposite) Cook & Fauer, Babilonia & Gardner and Benenson & Courtney receive the spectators' applause. The trophy Randy Gardner holds was given in memory of Henry Wainwright Howe, second President of the USFSA (1925-28). Mr. Howe's skate blades form the trophy handles.



trated "Eleanor Rigby" (much used this year) to hold second. The visual appeal of Reggie's deep bending, two-foot back spiral earned deserved applause, but his overall choreography did not match that of bronze medalist Adam Leib. With sure double Axel and double Lutz, Adam staged the only successful come-from-behind burst in free skating to pull up from fifth after figures.

Free skaters could hope to fare better in the Junior Singles events. Certainly this first year of senior style competition—using a compulsory short program and counting free skating for 50% of the total marks—witnessed dramatic changes of fortune in some Regional and Sectional Championships. At Nationals, though, medals went more often than not to those of balanced ability in each phase of competition.

Reggie Stanley looked likely to epitomize this trend in Junior Men. Last year's National Novice champ, he took the lead in figures, but then he sprained his ankle

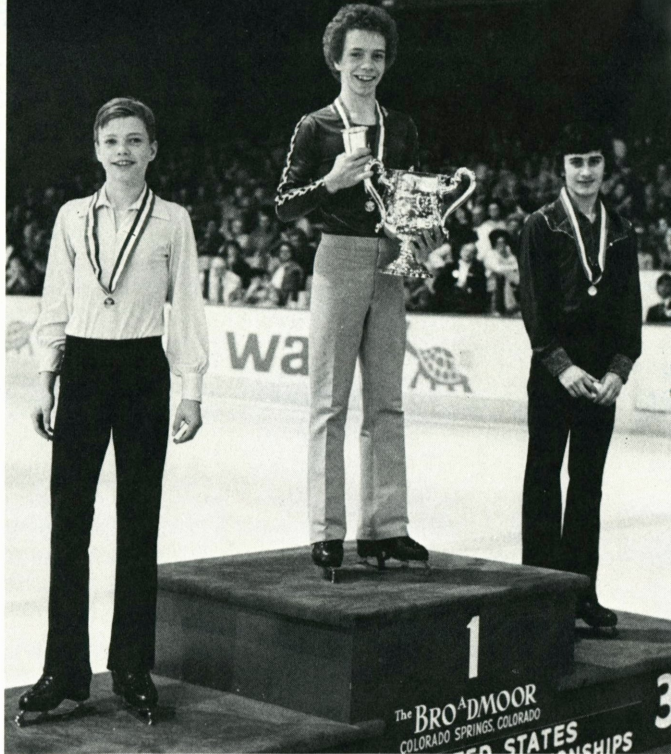
just before the short programs commenced and had to withdraw. The two free segments that followed produced several individual gems, including Orest Jowyk's first placed short program and Allen Schramm's individual interpretation of jazz-influenced music, which ranked second among long programs.

Top honors in Junior Men went to Scott Hamilton, and deservedly so. Ranked fourth in a close race for the figure lead, Scott claimed the title with consistently strong free skating. His winning long free, in particular, demonstrated a flow and an ease in jumping matched by no other competitor in this event. Mark Cockerell continued his rapid climb up the competitive ladder, placing second this year just as he did last year in Novice Men. At 13, Mark's youth in comparison to the other Junior Men put him at some disadvantage in program presentation, but his mastery of double and triple jumps could not be denied. Dave Kinser, the bronze medalist, completed this trio of well rounded tal-



The first National Junior Champions and medalists to be selected under the new rules using a compulsory short program found that consistently strong figure and free skating proved most successful.

Pictured (right) are Junior Men's runner-up Mark Cockerell, Champion Scott Hamilton and bronze medalist Dave Kinser; (opposite, from left) Junior Ladies' Champion Carrie Rugh, runner-up Jeanne Chapman and bronze medalist Sandy Lenz. Dance Championship silver medalists Judi Genovesi & Kent Weigle (below) showed that ice dance can be both beautiful and fun to watch.



ents. Though somewhat overshadowed by the flashier free style of Hamilton and Schramm, Dave presented an athletic program with confidence.

The Junior Men as a group chased after the triple jump as a "must" accomplishment, while the Junior Ladies concentrated on polishing the basics—double jumps, combinations and varied spins. So it came as a surprise when most of the girls scored marginally lower in figures than the men did. One notable exception was Jeanne Chapman, who dominated the initial round as she had last year in this same event. Carrie Rugh stood in second, close enough to win the title with two good free programs. Sprightly Carrie did just that. Her top-ranked short program and her long free demonstrated peerless spins and solid jumps, presented with flowing grace. In the free skating, Carrie's extension in her layback spin, her camel/sit/camel spin combination and her footwork stood out.

Although Jeanne Chapman could not outdistance Carrie Rugh for the title, she held the silver medal confidently. Dressed in hot pink for the free program, she weathered some insecure jump landings

to perform other jumps, singly and in combination, and a well extended Bauer spread with style. Below Jeanne ranked two very feminine free skaters who had improved their placements substantially. Sandy Lenz, the 1975 Novice champion, combined second in the short program with first in the free to pull up to the





bronze medal. Her long program featured a sure double Axel, five-jump combination and attractively varied spin positions. Fourth placed Martha Jowyk, a delicate presence on the ice, also competed in Junior Pairs with brother Orest.

From the multiple exposures of the Junior Singles, several judges made the

difficult transition to the one-shot Junior Pairs Championship. Many talented young pairs made that change a difficult one; how to choose between them? Ultimately, the three qualifying teams from the Pacific Coast Section, two of whom began their rivalry earlier at Southwest Pacifics, swept the medals.

Tracy & Scott Prussack tipped the balance in their favor with a program of technical difficulty. A throw double Axel, side by side double Axels and flip-over death spiral were their highlights. Tracy and Scott's well cut blue green outfits and air of confidence made them stand-out performers. Trying hard not to be outdone, Dana & Ed Reisman claimed the silver medal with an effective around-the-world death spiral and somersault exit by Dana from an overhead lift. Danelle Porter & John Maddison, who earlier had won the Pacific Coast title, gained third place for an attractively devised program. They included a step-through lift exit—as did several other pairs—which was certainly beautiful and certainly dangerous.

Danger rarely enters the picture in ice dancing, and one can sit back to enjoy the circling couples. In Silver Dance, cham-





pions Bonnie & Bill Burton met their strongest challenge in the first compulsory dance, the American Waltz. Carol Fox & Richard Dalley, runners-up throughout the event, have a graceful, often lilt-ing style that lends itself to waltzing. Bonnie and Bill expressed best the stirring Spanish dances. Their proud carriage and aloof manner earned unanimous firsts for the Paso Doble. This ability served them well in the final round original set-pattern to tango rhythm. Their OSP dance, bearing the unmistakable influence of coach Doreen Denny Macsalka, flowed from step to step with an ease that disguised its difficulty.

In Championship Dance, the tantaliz-

ing prospect of competing in the first Olympic ice dance championship heightened the suspense tenfold. The defending champions Colleen O'Connor & Jim Millns and 1975 runners-up Judi Genovesi & Kent Weigle demonstrated from the start that they would earn the first two places. But who would capture the third?

Michelle Ford & Glenn Patterson, bronze medalists for the past two years, knew they faced a serious challenge by the end of day one. After two compulsory dances they held third, but Susan Kelley & Andrew Stroukoff had equalled their points for the Kilian. The following day Susie and Andy earned slightly higher marks for their fast-paced OSP rumba, which included consecutive twizzles—first one by Susie, then by Andy—in one corner. Michelle and Glenn, who still held third place after the initial round, pulled out all the stops in the free dance. Abandoning their sexy blues of the past two seasons, they blended Latin rhythms ranging from bold Spanish to swaying Latin American in a thoroughly “dancey” program. Susie and Andy, dressed in unadorned but beautifully fitted turquoise outfits, had already presented a flawless display in the Russian-romantic tradition to “Two Guitars,” “The Gardens of Marmara” and “Nyet Tovarich.” With this performance they pulled above Michelle and Glenn overall. Later Susie told about calling her mother with the news that they would go to Innsbruck. “People don’t understand that my mother doesn’t follow skat-

Tracy & Scott Prussack, flanked by bronze medalists Danelle Porter & John Maddison (left) and runners-up Dana & Ed Reisman, claimed the Junior Pair Trophy with a high content program. Kim Krohn & Barry Hagan (above) skated pleasing compulsory dances to place third in Silver Dance, but they could not match the flair of Champions Bonnie & Bill Burton (opposite).





ing," she explained. They do now after Susie's report, "Mom, we made the team!" brought this response: "What team?"

While the audience fidgeted through three days of uncertainty over third place, O'Connor & Millns and Genovesi & Weigle skated serenely into first and second place. What their performances lacked in suspense, they made up in advancement of personal styles. Judi and Kent demonstrated the maturity gained as first-year members of the World Team. Always expressive waltzers, they used the waltz from *Murder on the Orient Express* to good advantage in their free dance. They were equally engaging as they rock 'n rolled to "Sunday Jumps," though their finale—when Judi skated a shoot-the-duck through Kent's legs into a split, only to find Kent sprawled on the ice beside her—must have surprised them as much as it did the audience. Or, considering Kent's ear-to-ear grin, did they plan it that way?

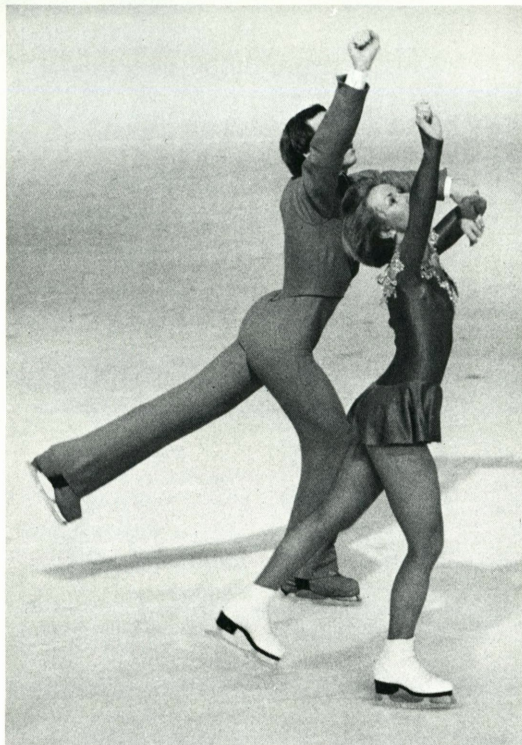
The audience expected to see performances of champions, and Colleen O'Connor & Jim Millns gave as much. Winning their third National Dance Championship,

they underscored both their technical ability and creative dance expression. In their new free dance, Colleen and Jim have developed further their flair for modern dance rhythms. Ranging from jazzy "Africano" and "The Sound of Philadelphia" to Stephen Sondheim's "Send in the Clowns," they convey a distinctly American style. This, coupled with their speed, deep edges and difficult footwork, will undoubtedly serve them well in the Olympic and World Championships.

Olympic prospects stood uppermost in every mind as the final phases of the Ladies' Championship unfolded. Dorothy Hamill won the short program convincingly. Skating to a piano selection played by Arthur Rubenstein, she interpreted the rippling notes particularly well in her Axels, landed with her arms floating up and down. The conjecture over Linda Fratianne's prospects got a boost when Linda skated a flawless two minutes to rank second in the short program. But Kath Malmberg and Wendy Burge also skated well, so the overall standing of the leaders remained the same. Winsome Priscilla Hill replaced Barbie Smith, who missed her double Axel, in fifth. Barbie was obviously still troubled by the stress fracture to her right leg received last fall, and this led her to withdraw before the free skating. Tears brimmed in her eyes as she watched the other girls warm up for the final free, but this year she could not join them.

First among the final group to take the ice, Dorothy skated with the assurance of a two-time defending champion. Her music, the same as last year, combined Erich Korngold's "Sea Hawk" with film themes from *Anna Karenina* and *Captain Blood*, and she interpreted it skillfully through varied connective movements and polished jump landings. After her opening of soaring delayed Axels and double Axels, the program seemed conservative, though. With double victories in figures and short program, Dorothy needed to take no chances, but one wonders whether she would have skated with more fire had she anticipated what was to follow.

"What" came immediately afterward in the diminutive package of Linda



Fratianne. Her neon orange and pink dress, studded with gold sequins, lit up the ice as much as did her opening triple Salchow jump. Before the cheers subsided, she tossed off a triple toe-loop, a double Axel/double toe-loop combination, a back spiral/double Lutz/back spiral and a closing butterfly to back sit spin. She skated throughout to *Scheherazade* with the abandon that only a 15-year-old going all out can muster. Linda told reporters later, "I just tried to do my best." The standing ovation that greeted the end of her four minutes told what the audience thought of her best.

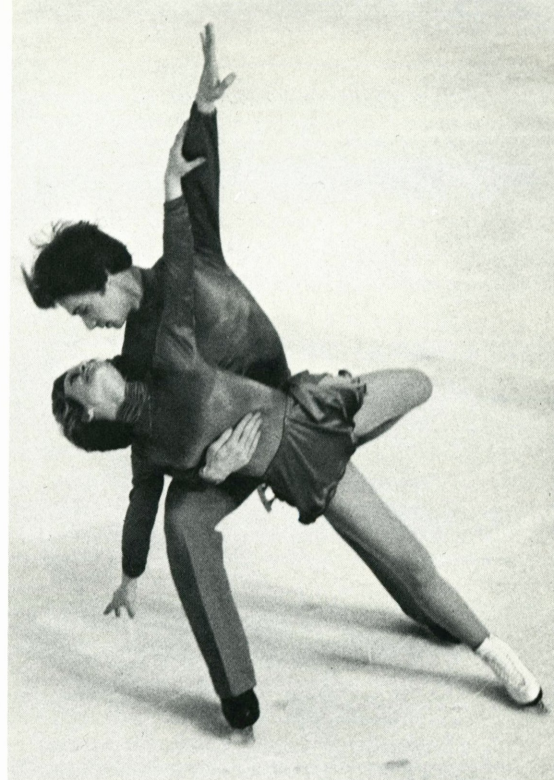
That performance put the pressure on Kath Malmberg and Wendy Burge. Kath's opening to "The Way We Were," which set lyrical, slow moves—beginning with a layback and ending with a full-circle spiral—on the center line running the length of the ice, should be remembered as the most gorgeously feminine sequence of these championships. She could not



maintain that pace through the rest of her program, however, and when she slipped on a final flying sit spin, there seemed little doubt that Kath would drop in the standings. Wendy skated a program that said she was determined not to lose her chance for a medal. From her two double Axels in a row to her Russian splits and closing layover camel (which was laid over to an extent usually seen only in roller skating) into sit spin, Wendy was athletic energy personified. One mistake on a double jump could not detract from the program's impact.

When the marks for free skating alone were tallied, Dorothy's more mature flow and choreography rated narrowly ahead of Linda's vivacious technical achievements. This assured Dot of a third Ladies' title and pulled Linda up to second place. Wendy's free program completed her trio of steady performances, bringing her the bronze medal.

While the Ladies' event kept everyone buzzing for the first three days of competition, the Men's Championship built to a fitting climax to Nationals. Now that Gordie McKellen has retired from competition, Terry Kubicka, runner-up for two years, found himself in the favorite's spot experienced earlier by Senior Pair Babilo-



nia & Gardner, but without the encouraging lead they held from the start. Instead, David Santee ranked first after figures, followed by Ken Newfield, Kubicka, Charlie Tickner and Scott Cramer.

The short program then shuffled this



Free skating talents—Scott Cramer (left) earned a bronze medal in the Men's Championship with a triple jump-studded long program. Triples also capped the repertoire of Linda Fratianne (opposite, below), the surprise runner-up in the Ladies' Championship. Expressive moves to jazz rhythms featured prominently in the free dance of Dance Champions Colleen O'Connor & Jim Millns (opposite, above), while Susan Kelley & Andrew Stroukoff (above) pulled up to third in the same event with a romantic free program.



Terry Kubicka (left) warms to the audience as he unwinds jump after triple jump in his free program to claim the Men's Championship. Dance Championship finalists (below, from left) Kelley & Stroukoff, Champions O'Connor & Millns and Genovesi & Weigle.

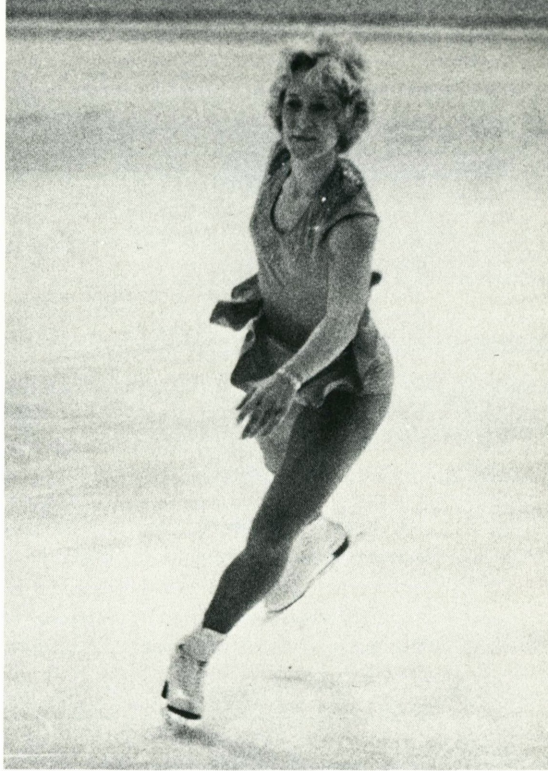
Opposite: Three girls who shaped the Ladies' Championship—Fourth ranked Kath Malmberg (top) again used Copland's "Rodeo" for a neatly timed short program; Champion Dorothy Hamill (lower right) achieved beautiful extension in her layback spin, while bronze medalist Wendy Burge (lower left) showed her mastery of the layover camel.



order in a way that belied its weighted value of 20% of the total marks. Charlie Tickner skated with just the right debonaire touch to Glenn Miller renditions of "In the Mood" and "A String of Pearls." He not only won the short but leaped to first in the combined standings. Ken Newfield, on the other hand, found he put too much stress on the ankle he had injured earlier; he dropped to sixth and then withdrew before the long program. David Santee was nearly as unlucky, falling on his triple flip/double toe-loop combination, but managed to rank second overall, followed by Kubicka and Cramer.

Of the final group to skate, Santee bid for the title first. He opened with a triple flip and followed that with triple Salchow and triple toe-loop/double toe-loop. Skating in part to Gliere's *Red Poppy* and Rachmaninoff's *Symphony No. 2*, he demonstrated mature flow and expression throughout.

Santee's multiplicity of triple jumps set



the standard that Terry Kubicka would have to top in order to win the Men's title. The pressure Terry felt showed in the way he clenched and unclenched his fists, while waiting for his name to be announced. Then from a slow sequence he burst into a triple Salchow, and the sigh of relief that rippled through the audience nearly matched the applause. Terry was "on." Triple Lutz, triple flip/mazurka/double Axel combination and spread eagle into triple Salchow quickly led to the move everyone was waiting for. With half a minute left, Terry's back somersault brought the crowd to its feet, and the cheers continued long after his six consecutive Arabians concluded the program. Terry creates a rapport with his audience based on shared pleasure; he enjoys what he's doing, and the audience responds wholeheartedly. On this occasion the judges responded as well, awarding a string of 5.8's and 5.9's broken only by judge Matthew Zats, who opted in favor of Santee's greater choreographic ability. Whether these marks would be enough for the title depended on the performances of the remaining skaters.

Scott Cramer got the difficult task of following Kubicka, but he came through in the same style that earlier brought him the Southwestern and Midwestern titles. After an opening triple toe-loop, he performed a delayed Axel, several double Axels and a triple Salchow/triple Salchow combination. More triples followed to the delight of the spectators, who were by now thoroughly triple happy.

That mood warmly greeted Charlie Tickner, dubbed "Mr. Five Triples" after the '75 Nationals. With the 1976 title perhaps only five minutes away, Charlie began confidently with a huge triple toe-loop. Then he fell on his triple Lutz, fell again on his double Axel and muffed the landing of another triple. What else can you say? Despite a well devised program, which included an unusual one-man death spiral, Tickner dropped from first to fourth in the final standings.

Mahlon Bradley, an unheralded Harvard freshman, came out and demonstrated why he has been Eastern Men's Champion

for the past two years. Two solid triples and a double Axel out of footwork highlighted the program that brought Brad fifth place overall and ended competition in Nationals '76 on a positive note. The accountants then determined that Terry Kubicka had indeed captured the Men's Championship, followed by David Santee and Scott Cramer.

Competitors and spectators bound for the closing championship party met the chill Colorado night in a festive mood. At the party they relived the week's events through a three-screen color slide show jointly sponsored by Ice Follies, Ice Capades and Holiday on Ice. The applause, cheers and occasional laughter that greeted different pictures said as much about Nationals as the show's title—"The Week That Was."

David Santee put together a free skating program of mature expression and technical quality to claim the silver medal in the Men's Championship. The 18-year-old has been a National Senior competitor since 1972, the year after he won Junior Men.

