

Melinda Kunhegyi & Lyndon Johnston

Figure skaters Melinda Kunhegyi and pairs partner Lyndon Johnston reached the very heights of their sport, not only in Canada, but internationally.

Kunhegyi, who was born December 1, 1965 in Guelph, made her mark on the international figure skating stage at 16, when she paired with Johnston to win the 1981 Prague Skate championship, as well as the 1981 Grand Prix International St. Gervais event, an annual senior-level international figure skating competition held in Saint-Gervais-les-Bains, France.

Skaters from the Preston club have done well at the event, beginning with Kathy Hutchinson and Jamie McGregor, who won in 1974.

The Kunhegyi and Johnston victory came a year after their clubmates, Lloyd Eisler and Katherina Matousek finished second in this event. A year before Kunhegyi and Johnston, the Preston pairs team of Becky Gough and Mark Rowsom finished second. And notably, Canadians Barbara Underhill and Paul Martini won gold there in 1978.

Eventually Preston pairs teams Christine Hough and Doug Ladret (1985) and Michelle Menzies and Kevin Wheeler (1987) and Lyndon Johnston, with new pairs partner Cindy Landry (1988) would capture gold at the St. Gervais event.

Early in her skating career Melinda began skating with the Preston Figure Skating Club where coach Kerry Leitch paired her with another talented and promising skater by the name of Lyndon Johnston.

That pairing came early on when coach Leitch, recognizing her talent, called Mark Rowsom over and said, "I want you to try pairs with this girl."

It was a tryout of sorts for Melinda as she had never skated pairs before. She had come to Leitch's school to improve her figures.

Leitch asked them to do a single axel, something she'd never tried before. They landed it without a problem.

"Well, let's try a double axel," said Leitch.

Mark threw her and Melinda landed on her face. It must have hurt like hell.

She got up and came back to Leitch with a stoic look on her face. Others would have had tears in their eyes.

All Leitch had to do was look at her and how she handled that fall. "You're a pairs skater."

No one realized at that moment that Melinda would mature and grow taller, given that her parents were not tall. But when skating with Johnston they broke the mould of a small female skater skating with a taller male skater.

It was like a man and woman skating instead of a man and girl.

Together Kunhegyi and Johnston won three international medals, including silver at the Nebelhorn Trophy—named after a nearby German mountain—, an annual international figure skating competition in Oberstdorf organized by the Deutsche Eislauf-Union.

After the Olympics that year they finished fifth at the World Championships that same year.

They were two-time Canadian national silver medalists (1984-Regina), (1985-Moncton).

Figure skating at the 1984 Winter Olympics took place at the Zetra Olympic Hall in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.

They had hoped to finish higher than 12th that year, but the field was exceptional, with Soviet skaters Elena Valova and Oleg Vasiliev winning gold, followed by Americans Kitty Carruthers and Peter Carruthers.

Fellow Canadians Underhill and Martini finished seventh, while club-



Lyndon Johnston and Melinda Kunhegyi compete in the figure skating pairs competition at the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympic Games. (CP Photo/Tim O'lett).



mates Matousek and Eisler were eighth.

At those Olympics Great Britain's Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean won the dance competition, receiving twelve perfect scores (6.0), (a maximum 9 of them for artistic impression, the others in the technical merit mark) in the free dance segment of the ice

dance competition, an unprecedented feat.

In their final season together, Kunhegyi and Johnston won silver at the Ennia Challenge Cup and Canadian Championships and placed fifth at the 1985 World Championships in Tokyo, Japan.

Kunhegyi and Johnston won three national titles in Four Skating, taking gold in 1982, 1984, and 1985. Four skating is a figure skating and artistic roller skating discipline in which many world-class skaters have competed, such as Isabelle Brasseur and Lloyd Eisler, but not being an Olympic event, the sport was discontinued following the 1996-97 season at the Canadian Figure Skating Championships.

Melinda retired from competitive skating in 1985, while Johnston continued, pairing with Cindy Landry, with whom he won the Canadian title in 1990 at Sudbury.

Although their time together as a pair was not long, Melinda and Lyndon not only achieved world class results, but beyond that, they were quite extraordinary to watch.

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