

Hough and Ladret

Christine: Oct. 9, 1969 -
Doug: Nov. 13, 1961 -

Christine "Tuffy" Hough and Doug Ladret, under the guidance of coach Kerry Leitch at the Preston Figure Skating Club, were Canada's top pairs figure skating team in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

"Being national champion in an Olympic year was extremely special," recalled Ladret. "What made it even more special was that we were champions during the pinnacle of Canadian pair skating. Almost every year from 1983 through 1990, our country had three teams in the top 10 in the world, including world champions and several world medallists."

The pair closed out their competitive career in 1992. "We felt that our performance in the Short Program at the Albertville Olympics was the turning point," said Doug. "The audience gave us a standing ovation, the judges proceeded to dump us down out of the top 10. The audience started to whistle and boo the judges so loudly that you had to cover your ears. We knew at that point that the audience was the most important thing to us and that the judges did not want to give us what we deserved, so it was time to move on."

For Doug, his professional career was both the best of times and disappointing, all at the same time. "Tuffy and I were chosen to skate with "Stars on Ice." We were in amongst a crowd of world and Olympic champions, so we knew we had something special to be included in that group. This was at the height of skating's popularity."

Indeed, it was a magical time. 17,000 people at Madison Square Garden. Nightly standing ovations. But it couldn't last.

After four years in the pro ranks it was time to call it quits. Ladret was asked to come back as the first Performance Director in Stars On Ice history.

"This was bittersweet," Ladret admits. He was directing and coaching such international standouts as Tara Lipinski, Kristi Yamaguchi, Scott Hamilton, Kurt Browning, Torvill & Dean, Katarina Witt, and others, yet he knew his own skating days were over. For Ladret, his pro career was more than he ever expected, "but shorter than I came to hope for."

These days, Doug and his wife, Lara, are coaching together in Scottsdale, Arizona, in the new arena the Phoenix Coyotes NHL hockey team built.

"It was an odd start here," he says, "as barely anyone in Arizona knew who I was. I had come from Canada, where I was in figure skating's elite and had a level of celebrity where I was recognized in airports, shops etc... I had also been coaching International and World competitors at Doug Leigh's training center north of Toronto. The lack of recognition by the local skating crowd made me work even harder."

It's been a challenge to promote skating in the southwest. "We have gotten part-way there, and are still pushing for higher heights. We have taken skating here from an infantile state of low-level ability, to now having a pair team on the Jr Grand Prix circuit, and our first International Champion at the Triglav Trophy in Slovenia. This summer marked the first time Tuffy and I worked together since she retired in 1996. (World and co-Olympic Champions) Jamie Sale & David Pelletier asked us to choreograph a program for them in a similar style to how we used to skate. It's a nice way for Tuffy and I to rekindle our old friendship. Life is crazy for me, but it is also very rewarding to know that I have been a major part of the progression of figure skating in the desert."

Their competitive career saw them finish 9th at the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville, as well as several first and second-place finishes at the Canadian Nationals.

As professionals, they were second at the Masters Professional Championships in 1993, fourth at the World Professional Championships in 1994, and had a number of other top finishes.

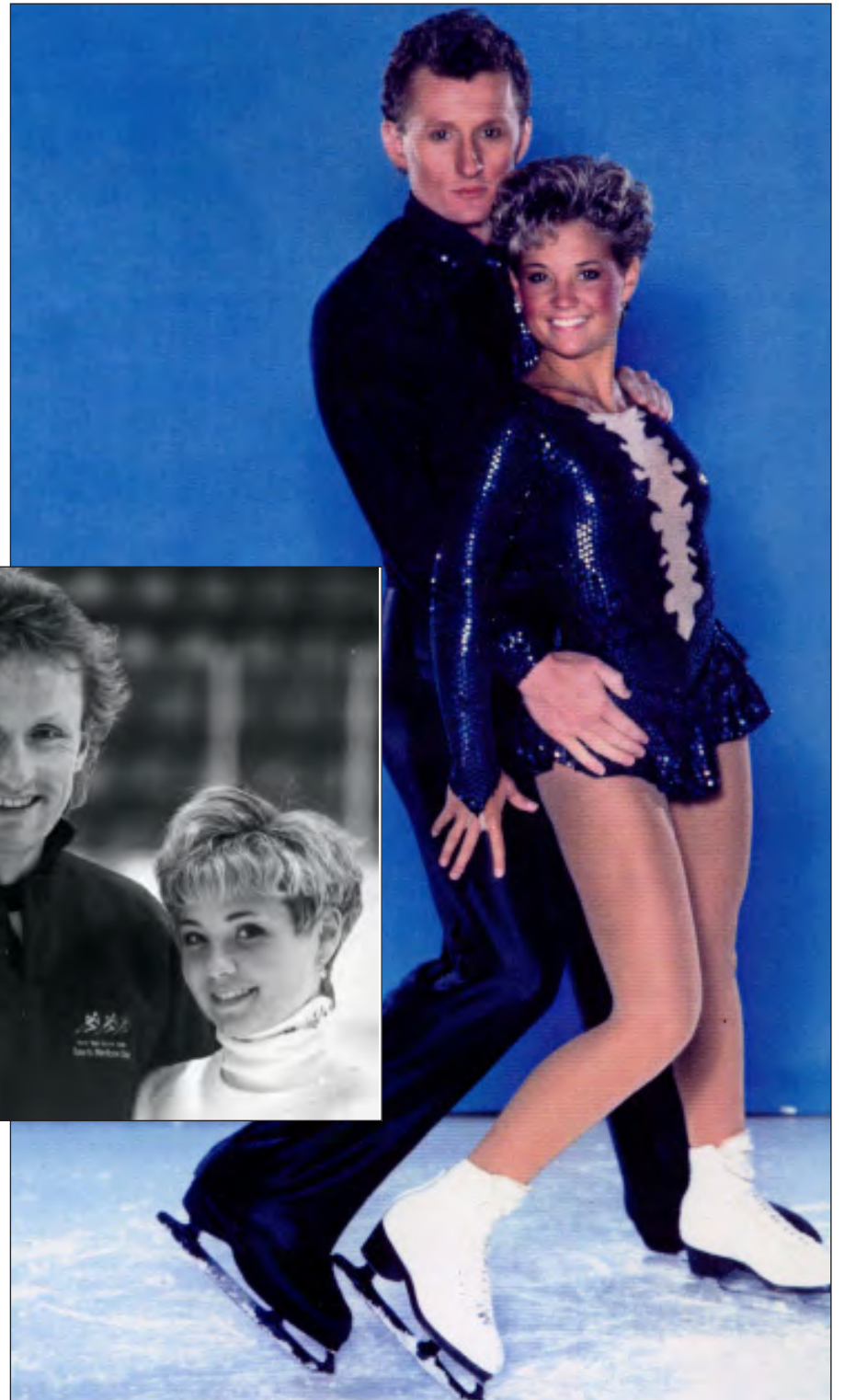
They have also appeared on the big screen in such movies as "The Cutting Edge," playing the Russian pair, in "Kurt Browning, You Must Remember This," and CBC Disney's "Scott Hamilton: Upside Down."

Among their credits are also several high-profile exhibitions and shows like the Eatons Skate the Nation tour '94-'95, Chrysler Stars on Ice '96, Sunlife Stars on Ice '92-'95, and Discover Card Stars on Ice '93-'96.

Through it all, Hough and Ladret worked hard, and toughed out some serious injuries. There was the spine-tingling time at the Olympics when Hough fell hard, but got up to skate again. Her nickname was Tuffy, after all.

Following the Olympics, she gave a talk to students at Tait street Public School in Cambridge. The video of her fall, and her Olympian effort to return to the competition, inspired a gym full of youngsters. They had seen a true Olympian.

Then there was the time Doug fractured his skull in 1986 when he hit a rut during a lift in a practice session. He saved Christine, but fractured his skull "in a couple of places." It was a near life-threatening injury, but a week later he was out on the ice, with a helmet. They were off the ice for five weeks, then they made the world team for their



first time. They placed 8th.

When Christine retired from skating, she was able to start a family with her husband, NHLer Don Sweeney. They have two children and live in Boston.

Christine chose her longtime pairs partner and friend, Doug Ladret, to walk her down the aisle on July 27, 1996 at St. Cecilia's Church in Boston. "He has been in my life for the past 13 years," she said at the time. It was a natural choice, given their close friendship, a relationship cemented through years of skating pairs together.

Interestingly, she and Sweeney met on a blind date set up by a mutual friend, professional golfer Billy Andrade. For two years they dated, before deciding to get married.

The ceremony was followed by a reception at the posh Copley Plaza Hotel. Among the guest were many figure skating and hockey celebrities, including Ekaterina Gordeeva and Rosalynn Summers, who were bridesmaids along with Tiffany Copperthwaite. The maid of honor was Hough's long time friend, Lori Merrill. Other skaters at the wedding were Kristi Yamaguchi, Scott Hamilton, Brian Orser and Lloyd Eisler, a former teammate with the Preston Figure Skating Club.

Sweeney's Bruin teammates, like Cam Neely, Ray Bourque and Kyle McLaren, were also on hand.

After all the years of training and travelling and competing, said Christine, it was now time to slow down.

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