

Kerrigan, Nancy (1969-) Encyclopedia Article

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The 1993 United States figure skating champion, Nancy Kerrigan, was recognized as an elegant and artistic practitioner of the sport, one of America's premier ice princesses. In 1994, the beautiful Kerrigan was catapulted into much wider and most unwelcome fame through an internationally scandalous incident that brought her arch-rival, Tonya Harding, into international disrepute, and irrevocably altered the image of the sport. Already the holder of the 1992 Olympic bronze medal, Kerrigan was the favorite for the gold at the upcoming Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, at the time of the 1994 U.S. Championships in Detroit, Michigan, which doubled as the Olympic Trials that year. On the eve of the championships, while practicing at Detroit's Cobo Arena, Kerrigan received an injurious thwack on her right leg, which put her out of competition. The assailant, Shane Stant, proved to be part of a conspiracy of four men, one of whom was Harding's husband, Jeff Gillooly, and the attack was planned to put Kerrigan out of action, thus clearing the way for Harding to win the U.S. title, and a place at the Olympics. The gifted Kerrigan, granted an exemption from the U.S. trials, won the silver at Lillehammer, finishing only a fraction of a point behind Oksana Baiul, the Ukrainian gold medalist. Harding was allowed to skate at the Olympics, and the final free skate between Kerrigan and Harding drew record television ratings. Kerrigan subsequently endured bad press when she sniped at Baiul, was overheard to complain about her corporate sponsor, and married her agent. She took a break from her career to have her son, but returned to the rink as a professional skater, enjoying considerable popularity and financial rewards, while the sport itself, thanks to the 1994 scandal, attracts major viewing figures on television.

The anti-Kerrigan conspiracy backfired disastrously. The four men involved all served prison sentences, while Harding—put on three years' probation, divorced from Gillooly, and banned from the U.S. Figure Skating Association—has remained covered in ignominy.

Further Reading:

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Brennan, Christie. *Inside Edge, A Revealing Journey into the Secret World of Figure Skating*. New York, Anchor Books, 1996.

Frey, Jennifer. "Harding, Kerrigan: Another Sad Performance." *Washington Post*, February 8, 1998.

Small, W. J. "Kerrigan Finds Balance on and off Ice." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 17, 1998.