

Review of Literature:

Donald Knight

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Throughout the past decade, there have been many athletes from the Hamilton area who have made it big in our world of sport. Donald Knight, a figure skater, is one of them. Knight, from Dundas, Ontario, was born on June 8, 1947. He started skating at a young age, and began to win early.¹ In his teen years while in figure skating, Knight was only 5-foot-4 and weighed 125 pounds.² When he was only 13 he became a National Junior Champion and stayed in the sport till he was 19. The young red headed figure skater was known to be one of the happiest males and enjoyed every moment of his accomplishments.³ In these seven years, Knight competed in many events such as the Olympics, North American Figure Skating Championships, and the World Figure Skating Championships and excelled as a great athlete from Ontario.

Donald Knight followed the Canadian tradition of winter sports to an excellent career in figure skating, but that was not his first contact with the ice rink. He started at an early age with the great Canadian game of hockey. He excelled at the game even being named "outstanding peewee of the year".⁴ It was his parents forcing him to take skating lessons that led to his decision to pursue figure skating. Hockey may have lost a great, if petite player, but Canadian skating gained an unforgettable hero.

¹ Skate Canada, 2008,
http://www.skatecanada.ca/en/news_views/press_room/news_releases/2008/apr30.cfm

² Toronto Star, Feb 4. 1967, "Too Small for Hockey, He's Canada's Big Chief"
<http://pagesofthepast.ca/PageView.asp>

³ Toronto Star, Feb 4. 1967, "Too Small for Hockey, He's Canada's Big Chief"
<http://pagesofthepast.ca/PageView.asp>

⁴ Toronto Star, Feb 4. 1967, "Too Small for Hockey, he's Canada's Big Chief"
<http://pagesofthepast.ca/PageView.asp>

His career developed rapidly; early in 1961 he placed second at the Western Ontario Finals. The improvement came so quickly that later that year he won the Canadian Junior title at the young age of 13.⁵

Four years after winning the Canadian Junior Title he won the Canadian title. During the time between titles, Knight was competing in the world circuit. In 1963 he placed 8th at the World Championships. The next year it was off to the Olympics in Innsbruck. He failed to place on the podium, but finished a respectable 9th.⁶

In 1965 that saw Donald Knight reached the peak of his competitive career. The Worlds were in Colorado Springs that year, and Knight hoped to break the top five. After his ninth place finish at the Olympics the year before he decided shooting for a fifth place finish wasn't unreasonable. The headline of the *Toronto Star* gives the perfect picture of his reaction, "Third Place puts Knight on Cloud Nine." The article goes on to quote him saying, "It's almost too much to believe, I skated about as well as I could, probably the best free style I've ever done."⁷ His performance was said to be extremely competent if not extraordinarily exciting. But he was more than content with it, and a bronze medal, when the best of the world are present, is nothing to scoff at.

⁵ Skate Canada, 2008, Donald Knight to be Inducted into Hall of Fame
http://www.skatecanada.ca/en/news_views/press_room/news_releases/2008/apr30.cfm

⁶ SR Olympics, 2000, Donald Knight
<http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes/kn/donald-knight-1.html>

⁷ Toronto Star, Mar 8, 1965, "Third Place puts Knight on Cloud Nine"
<http://pagesofthepast.ca/PageView.asp>

The next World's were not as successful, Knight finished a disappointing seventh.⁸ The expectations of Team Canada as well as his own had been placed higher and Knight began questioning his abilities and purpose as a skater. The manager of Team Canada told him it was "all or nothing." Knight decided to give it an honest shot. He devoted himself completely to skating, quitting school and taking a seven week tour of Europe.⁹ Apparently all the dedication accomplished something since he went on to win gold in the 1967 North American Championships.¹⁰

By 1967, Knight seemed to be the full packaged deal, not just dependant on his superior abilities with the required school figures that had got him so far before. He now had a masterful free skate to add to his repertoire. There were high hopes that this skater would once again be among the best at the next world competition.¹¹ He was among the top but failed to make it to the podium. He did put up a worthy fight, coming tantalizingly close to that bronze medal, but settled for a fourth place finish.

The 1967 Worlds were Knights last competition. A few months later, he gave up his amateur status and turned pro. He joined the Ice Capades immediately upon retiring from the world circuit. When his decision was questioned by reporters he told the *Toronto Star*, "I'd have enjoyed representing

⁸ Toronto Star, Mar 8, 1965 "Petra is Only Hope for Medal Now"
<http://pagesofthepast.ca/pageview.asp>

⁹ Toronto Star, Mar 8, 1965, "Petra is Only Hope for Medal Now"
<http://pagesofthepast.ca/pageview.asp>

¹⁰ Skate Canada, 2008, Donald Knight to be Inducted into Hall of Fame
http://www.skatecanada.ca/en/news_views/press_room/news_releases/2008/apr30.cfm

¹¹ Toronto Star, May 1, 1967, "Donald Knight Turning Pro"
<http://pagesofthepast.ca/pageview.asp>

Canada at the Olympics next winter, but I'm not sure the Olympics mean a tremendous amount unless you've got a real shot at a gold medal."¹² He left a definite hole in Canada's international figure skating team.

Knight toured with Ice Capades and Holiday on Ice until 1980 and then decided to retire from professional skating. In 2008 he was inducted into the Skate Canada Hall of Fame.¹³ Up until then Knight still kept close to the arena, coaching at the Burlington Skating Centre. There he focuses on sharing the stroking and footwork skills that made him a Canadian skating champion.

Donald Knight was an outstanding figure skater with many accomplishments. He excelled greatly in his sport, after deciding hockey was not going to go far for his career path. Knight experienced competition at the highest levels throughout the 1960's, and even walked away with a bronze at the World Championships. His career as a skater was one to be proud of as he even moved on to tour and be part of shows instead of competitions. Knight is recognized by figure skaters all over the country, as his final achievement was getting into the Skate Canada Hall of Fame. We are proud to have local athletes like Donald Knight who made an impact in Canadian sports history.

¹² Toronto Star, May 1, 1967, "Donald Knight Turning Pro"
<http://pagesofthepast.ca/PageView.asp>

¹³ The Spec.com, April 29, 2008, Knight Inducted into Hall of Fame,
<http://www.thespec.com/article/361822>

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<http://www.skatecanada.ca/en/news_views/press_room/news_releases/2008/apr30.cfm>
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<<http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes/kn/donald-knight-1.html>>
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5. Petra is only Hope for Medal Now; Feb 25, 1966. The Toronto Star.
<<http://pagesofthepast.ca/pageview.asp>>

6. Donald Knight Turning Pro May 1, 1967. The Toronto Star.

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7. Knight, Stong, Proudfoot, and Gross to be inducted into Skate Canada Hall of Fame, April 29, 2008. The Hamilton Spectator.

<<http://www.thespec.com/article/361822>>

INTERVIEW WITH DON KNIGHT

Beginnings:

Who introduced you to your sport?

I was living in Dundas where I first started playing hockey. My parents wanted me to improve my skating so I joined the Dundas Figure Skating Club. So I guess I was introduced through my parents and hockey

How did you get involved in your sport?

It started with just needing to improve my skating so I could be a better hockey player. However with figure skating I was able to get a lot more ice time, which I enjoyed. That was the beginning of my figure skating career!

Best experiences

What were the greatest highlights of your sporting career?

After all the hard work getting through the various levels of competition, being able to represent Canada at the national level for five years was one. Another would be competing in the 1964 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria. And also placing third at the World Championships was a major highlight.

What was the greatest highlight of in your Olympic experience?

I remember the Opening Ceremonies. They were outside at the ski jump with all the teams standing inside the ski jump. That's a picture I will never forget.

What do you think was your greatest achievement?

As an amateur, my 3rd place finish at the World Championships at the age of 17 was pretty amazing.

As a professional just the length of time that my career lasted I think was a great achievement for me. I was able to perform with the Ice Capades and Holiday on Ice (Europe) for 13 years!

How did you develop?

Were there sport mentors/heroes that inspired or assisted you?

My coaches were my mentors. Each one helped me develop and excel in a different way. Ellen Burka was my first coach when I started in Dundas. She helped me get onto my 1st world team.

I had Dennis Silverthorne for only a short year.

Sheldon Galbrath was my third coach and an excellent mentor. I spent three years with him and he helped me understand competing at a higher level. Just showing me how to raise my level of competition drastically.

What motivated you to reach or surpass your goals?

Motivation came from the fact that every year you had to compete to get on the Canadian team. You knew every one else would improve so you had to strive to do more and to do it better. Also just competing at World Championships you were competing against the best in the world so you had to be at your very best.

Which major obstacles did you have to overcome and how did you do it?

One challenge was a young amateur trying to make on to the world team, to do that I faced the bigger challenge of getting ice time. I had to move to Toronto in order to meet the requirements I needed for training time. I trained at the Toronto Cricket, Skating, and Curling Club, but it was hard to adjust since I had to switch schools too. I was only in grade ten at this time so adjusting was another test.

Which major pressures did you need to deal with as an elite athlete? How did you deal with them?

The most pressure I had was from myself. I wanted to do well and do my very best every time, but that not always possible. You have to learn to be accepting of the fact that a perfect practice doesn't always translate to your best performance. There was also the pressure of being in the competition. To deal with that it was important to train and build confidence in my program and my ability to perform it at the competition.

Did the following levels of government assist you in pursuing your dreams?

a) Dundas (that's where he started out not Hamilton)

The local rotary club helped me get a start in the beginning days. They gave me some small grants to assist financially and they also gave me extra ice time which was something I really needed.

b) Ontario and Canada

There was no such thing as carded athletes back then so I didn't really receive any assistance from federal or provincial government. All my finances came from my parents and friends who were willing to help. It was tough and expensive to compete at that time.

What have you been doing since your amateur/professional skating career?

I met and married my wife Janet while skating in the Ice Show and we skated together as a part of the show for a few years.

In 1980 I moved back to Burlington and ran a Pizza Delight until 2003.

Since then I have gone back to my skating roots and am coaching with the Burlington Skating Club.

I also keep busy with my family. I have two children, Kelly and David, and two grandchildren.

When looking through the interview and comparing it to the information we were able to gather from newspaper articles and the Internet, both are fairly similar. Both make mention of his accomplishments and placings in competition and of his long career with the Ice Capades. One interesting difference is the fact that Mr. Knight made no mention of the struggle that the newspaper said he went through between 1965 and 1967. The article says he struggled to decide if he would continue competition. Perhaps the newspaper articles go into slightly more analytical detail about his career than he does in the interview. Although he didn't give us a lot of new information the interview was still worth it. It's important to get a personal side of the athlete, not just a statistical one. After all only the athlete themselves can give you information about their driving force, inspiration, and most favorite moments.