

Red Big Bk

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Preston is Canada's best

By STEPHANIE INNES

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In 1985, which was the last post-Olympic year, Canada's Figure Skating title went to a 19-year-old Elizabeth Manley. Since then, Manley went on to win two more national titles and picked up silver medals in both the Olympic and World championships.

1989 is another post-Olympic year and this time around it's Mississauga's Karen Preston who is leading the emerging crop of elite skaters. Last week in Chicoutimi, Quebec Preston dazzled the crowd and shocked her competition by winning the national crown.

Like Manley, Preston is a compact, muscular skater who is an excellent jumper. With four triples solidly under her belt, she's working on two more — a triple flip and triple lutz jump, which she is keeping out of her program until they are more consistent.

"After I found out I had won, David Dore (President of the Canadian Figure Skating Association, CFSA) took me aside and told me not to change anything. I'm just going to keep training as usual," she says.

Her coach Osborne Colson of the Toronto Cricket Skating and Curling Club agrees.

"It's the wrong time to put in those jumps (the triple lutz and flip). There is too much risk involved."

Colson, who is himself a former Canadian champion, was ecstatic over his pupil's success.

"I thought she would probably be in the top five," he said. "She was third in novice and third in junior — always a bridesmaid but never a bride, you know? But it did happen and I'm very pleased for her. I think she will stand up to the world scene very well."

Preston has what it takes to be a champion in the competitive sense as well.

"It is easy for her to focus in on the job," says Colson. "She doesn't need talking to. She doesn't watch the other performers, but every now and then she'll ask how they have skated."

It takes a good pressure skater to move up an entire division for

two consecutive years and not get dissuaded by the higher calibre. In addition, it is rare to make the progression from junior to senior, having not been a junior titlist and win right away — so rare in fact that Preston is the first female to do so since Dorothy Caley did it in 1937.

"I was talking to a friend last year about staying in junior because I wanted to win a national title. I didn't think I could get a national title in senior," she says.

It must have been at the back of her mind though, that she thrives under the atmosphere of competition. In November 1987 she won the International Blue Swords competition in Europe, and her more recent sixth and fifth-place finishes at Skate America and Paris's L'Alique Trophy, raised a few eyebrows at the CFSA.

"When Karen and I were in Paris last year for the L'Alique Trophy I said wouldn't it be nice if we could come back here for the worlds? She said yes, so we made a little agreement to work on it, says Colson.

Was Preston always championship material?

"I saw the potential," says Colson, who started coaching the skater when she was 11. "She has a strong body, and her parents are sports people. I saw the talent but I wasn't sure whether the concentration span would last. She went for it though."

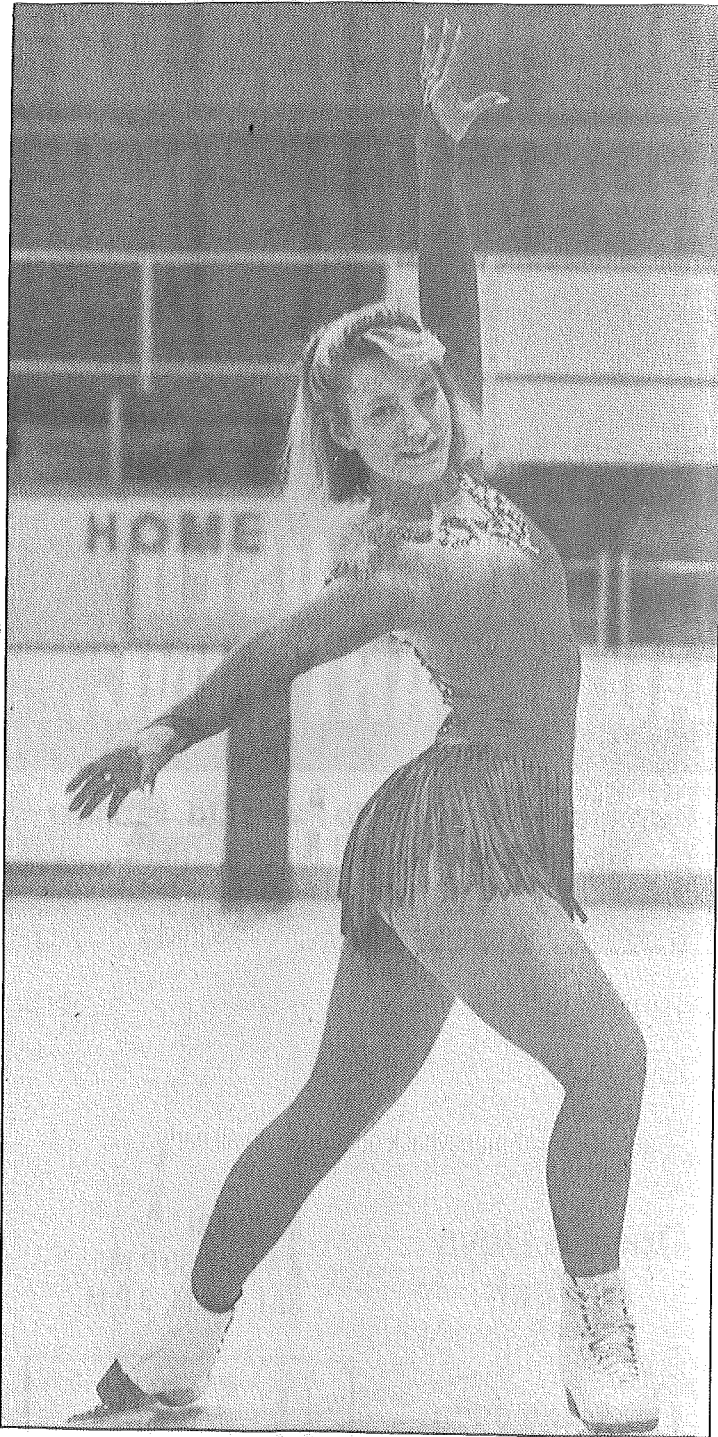
Combining her on-ice training with weights and aerobic workouts helps keep the Canadian champ in shape.

"I've been on a diet for the past month-and-a-half," she says. "I lost 10 pounds already, but I'm not trying to lose anymore. I just want to keep it off."

Her diet included lots of rice cakes and tuna, but no bread, fried foods, or chocolate bars.

"It was hard at first," she says of the diet, "but not anymore."

It's a little like being a champion. Right now, Preston is a rookie at fielding questions and being the topic of national attention, but at 17 she's breaking into the international scene at a prime time.



Canada's best female figure skater is Mississauga's own Karen Preston. Moving up from eighth place after figures, Preston snatched the gold after last week's Canadian championships, leaving skaters like Olympian Charlene Wong and 1988 junior champion Tanya Bingert in her wake.