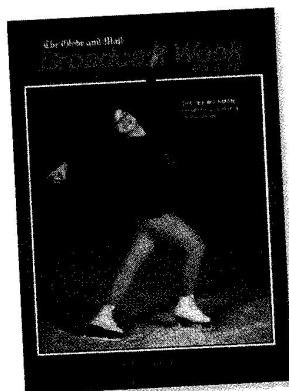




Rise and fall (clockwise from left): competing in 1979; with her mother in 1980; in Manitoba, when she crashed, in '82; and as a cover girl before the fall



"Skating is a sport that eats its young. Tracey was treat of the week, then she was old news"

watch the Battle of the Brians at the 1988 Calgary Olympics. But in 1980, when Wainman emerged on the scene, Canadian figure skating was in the doldrums. Toller Cranston had retired. None of the champions of the day had great prospects. And a Canadian woman hadn't won Olympic gold since 1948. The fans and the skating federation were hungry for a new star.

Tiny Tracey, as the media christened her, had huge celebrity potential. Though her tender age and diminutive size (four-foot-seven and 72 pounds) were talking points, it was her joie de vivre that captivated audiences; grown men cried in the stands. "Tracey knocked everybody's socks off," says Debby Wilkes, the veteran CTV skating commentator. "Before she skated, she was like a little racehorse at the gate: 'Let me out, let me out, let me out.' She was absolutely fearless. And when she hit the ice, it was sparkle, sparkle, sparkle—you couldn't help but fall in love." Wilkes says she still receives an e-mail a month asking whatever happened to Tracey Wainman.

David Wilson, the skating choreographer who styled the Olympic routine of U.S. champion Sasha Cohen, saw Wainman compete when he was a teenager and calls her one of his biggest inspirations. "I get chills reminiscing about it," he says. "Tracey had more charisma than Michelle Kwan

ites. Cranston, with whom Wainman used to practise at the Toronto Cricket, Skating and Curling Club, dubbed her "the Canadian diamond in the sky." Though she was a shameless charmer—she grinned and wiggled her bum at the judges—she had the talent to back it up: her powerful stroking could rival speed skaters (one of her programs was choreographed to "Flight of the Bumble Bee"), she knocked off double axels and triple jumps with ease and was a ferocious competitor. "She had everything," remembers her former coach Ellen Burka. The grand dame of skating teachers, Burka has taught everyone from Cranston to Dorothy Hamill. "She could jump, she could spin, but she was also very expressive. And she was the most gifted skater of school figures I have ever seen."

When top brass at the Canadian Figure Skating Association opted to send Wainman to the 1980 Worlds, it was a highly controversial decision; the national champion,

and Katarina Witt put together."

The press ran out of superlatives: "pint-sized dynamo" and "bundle of energy" were two favour-

21-year-old Heather Kemkaran, who had expected to go, was so upset that she retired. The decision was viewed as a symbolic statement by the CFSA's incoming president, David Dore, who was trying to shake up the skating establishment. As far as Dore was concerned, the name of the game was medals. He had no qualms about showing off Wainman: "We're going to stage manage her entrance," he told *The Globe and Mail*. "She will arrive later than the rest of the team and we have arranged for the West German press to meet her at the airport... She will leave the judges talking."

Wilkes, who was doing TV commentary, says the attention lavished on Wainman fuelled resentment among other skaters. "In a sick sort of way, a lot of people hoped she was going to fall flat. Everyone was waiting for it to blow up in the CFSA's face." But the gamble paid off: Wainman finished 10th in the free skating and 14th overall—an impressive showing for someone her age. "Tracey steals the show," wrote Howard Bass, the figure skating correspondent for London's *Daily Telegraph*. He also predicted she'd win gold at the Sarajevo Olympics.

Tracey quickly became Toronto's most famous 12-year-old: she was invited to perform with Olympic champions at a presti-