

gious gala in London and to skate at Madison Square Garden; she appeared on magazine covers and TV shows. Canada, it appeared, had found its next big winner.

SITTING AT HER DESK in a small, shared office at the Ed Sackville Arena, Wainman's eyes light up when she talks about Dortmund. "It was huge for me. I was so excited to be there, skating with my idols, all these stars I'd seen on TV. I spent the whole week running around with an autograph book." And being chased herself. Crowds would turn up to watch her practise. There was such a mob scene that security guards had to escort her out of the rink. While there, she made dozens of new acquaintances, but one was particularly memorable: a 13-year-old Polish skater named Gregor Filipowski, who was also making his big debut. Their paths would cross again years later.

Fame had its downside, though. The rumour mill at the Toronto Cricket Club, where she trained, ranged from ruthless to ridiculous. "Kids said that I was taking drugs to stunt my growth, that I was secretly 27," she recalls. "The best one was that my parents had doctored my birth certificate and locked me in a room to prevent me from growing."

Indeed, Tracey's mother, Gaye Ascah, had a reputation as a "skating mother," a notorious breed whose control freakery wreaks havoc at rinks the world over. Ascah admits she got wrapped up in her daughter's career, which cost the family roughly \$30,000 a year. She drove Tracey to the rink at 5 a.m., watched all of her practices, and gave her tips on technique. At competitions, she would put her whole body into Tracey's moves, raising her knees from her seat whenever her daughter tried a jump. In hindsight, she wishes she'd acted more like a mother and less like a coach, but her daughter shrugs it off: "My parents always said I could quit whenever I wanted to."

There were familial pressures of a different kind. As Wainman's career took off, her parents were in the process of getting a divorce. "At the time, I wondered if they split up because my mom spent so many hours with me at the rink," she says. "It wasn't true, but as a child you feel responsible."

IN JANUARY 1981, Wainman nailed the Canadian championship at the Nationals in Halifax. Two months after that, she made a brilliant start at the Worlds in Hartford, Connecticut, by finishing sixth (out of 31) in the compulsory figures. But she revealed a chink in her armour: in two routines, she took a surprise tumble on a double axel—a move that was normally easy for her—and

finished 10th. Burka blamed the mistakes on a growth spurt. Wainman says it was her mind, not her body, that was hindering her.

Much has been written about the pressures of being a child prodigy, and how the majority fail to fulfill their promise. Early success burdens them with high expectations; anxiety impedes progress. The promise of glory and fame can be equally seductive to parents, coaches and skating federations, who often end up nurturing the champion at the expense of the child.

After the Hartford Worlds, doubts about Wainman's Olympic prospects crept into the press coverage, and she came under intense scrutiny. People would approach her mother at the Cricket Club and ask, "How's Tracey's double axel?" instead of "How's Tracey?" That summer, Wainman raised eyebrows by leaving coach Burka and moving to Orillia to work with Doug Leigh, who was also training Brian Orser. Under Leigh's tutelage, she won gold medals at two international competitions that fall. She was named the Female Athlete of the Year by the Canadian Press (Wayne Gretzky won the male equivalent). And she appeared in a McCain orange juice commercial with Crazy Canuck skier Ken Read. But success was fleeting.

In January 1982, when she arrived in Brandon, Manitoba, to defend her Canadian title, she was the favourite, but she fell three times in the long program and slipped to third place. It was a spectacular flame-out. During the performance, she never stopped smiling, but when the battle was over, she hid behind a curtain and sobbed.

She was dropped from the world team—a huge blow. "Normally, if you're 14 and you have a bad performance, you say, 'OK, I'll learn from that and move on.' But for me, there was so much publicity, it was, 'Oh my God, disaster strikes.' I really started to over-analyze it. All the negativity started to seep into my subconscious." Though she vowed to make a comeback, she fell into a deep hole. "Every time I made a mistake it was magnified. The media would report every fall. And then I started being afraid of making a mistake. So in training, I would try a jump and change my mind in mid-air."

That's the trouble with talented kids, says Sandra Stark, a sports psychology consultant who counsels Canada's elite figure skaters. "Things have always come easily to them. So when they have a setback, they don't think, 'Oh, here's that wall that everybody hits, I'll just work through it.' They think, 'What's wrong with me? I'm no good anymore. I've let my family down, my fans down, the CFSA down.'" If this happens in



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