

she could contribute. She was one of the most talented skaters I'd ever seen. When you start a career as a coach, it's a whole new beginning. It's not an ongoing gossip column."

THEY NEVER MARRIED, but Wainman and Filipowski are still together after 13 years (he coaches at the same rink). They live in Richmond Hill with their two dogs. Blade, who's 14, continues to live with his father in Utah, but Wainman is upbeat about the arrangement. She gets to see him for eight weeks every summer, and at Thanksgiving, Christmas and on school holidays. In one sense, she's doing what she's always done: getting up at 6 a.m. for work and staying on the ice some nights until 9. In her spare time, she listens to CDs for skating programs and choreographs routines.

It's a quiet life compared to the old days, but two years ago, there was a ripple of attention when a 15-year-old Quebec skater won the national title, becoming the youngest champion since Wainman. Unlike Wainman, Cynthia Phaneuf was not sent to the Worlds because Skate Canada (as the CFSA is now known) felt she was too inexperienced. Though the skating federation didn't make any direct comparisons, the media did, wondering in print if they had

learned their lesson at Wainman's expense.

"There is a widespread view," Wilkes wrote in her 1994 book *Ice Time*, "that the CFSA took one of the most talented skaters this country has ever produced and destroyed her." Both David Dore (who's currently a vice-president with the International Skating Union) and Skate Canada declined to be interviewed about Wainman. But Dore once told Wilkes that he thought "the CFSA was used as a whipping boy to obscure the [Wainman] family's mistakes."

Whatever the case, 10 years after Wainman retired, the International Skating Union introduced a new regulation that prohibits skaters under the age of 15 from competing at the World Championships and the Olympics. Reaction in the skating community was mixed. There are many in the field—Burka is one—who think it's good for talented kids to sweat it out in the big leagues. And yet, placing the entire hopes of a country on the shoulders of a 13-year-old is exploitative. You can't help but wonder how things would have played out had Wainman's talent been nurtured gradually. That she was able to come back at 18 proves she was more than just a flash in the pan.

Wainman is philosophical: "OK, so I never won the world title. You can speculate

and say, 'If we had just done this, if we had just done that,' but you can't live your life that way. Besides, if they had held me back, I might never have got to compete at the Worlds. I'm just glad I got to go." Her girlish giggle has been replaced by a husky laugh, but there's a whiff of the brave front about her. Fair enough. She's tired of being remembered as the tragic child star. But at least they remember.

Because, for all of their triple-jumping wizardry, the majority of today's champions seem plastic. Their lipsticked smiles, \$4,000 costumes and intricate choreography can't mask the fact that they lack the charisma of Toller Cranston, Kurt Browning or Tracey Wainman. Even when she choked, Wainman oozed humanity. And she's trying to share some of that, something beyond technical know-how, with her students. As the choreographer David Wilson observes, "She gives herself to those kids the way she used to give herself to the audience." At the recent junior nationals, it seemed to be working: there were more singles skaters from Wainman's school than any other club in the country. But, unlike many coaches, she helps her kids keep it in perspective: she, better than anyone, knows there's more to life than landing a double axel. **END**



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