

ISU International Adult Figure Skating Competition

June 1- 3, 2006

Oberstdorf, Germany

Where to begin? Perhaps the best place would be the location of Oberstdorf.

Oberstdorf is approximately 2 1/2 hours by car south and very slightly west of Munich.

It is in the Allgau region of Bavaria. Oberstdorf is a very small town tucked in a valley surrounded by the most incredible mountains on three sides. It is a classic alpine village complete with cows and a cow pasture in the middle of town.

Oberstdorf also has a three surface international training center for ice sports, a soccer pitch, the Nebelhornbahn gondolas, and two ski jump towers (60 and 90 meters), within a stone's throw of each other. The food was excellent, the people helpful and friendly, the service everywhere exemplary, banks with international money machines hard to find, the cars were very small, and everyone walked. The center of town was designated as a walking area. Cars may drive through but people had the right-of-way even in the streets. It rained or snowed every day except the day we left.

Jim and I left Albuquerque Saturday May 28 at 8:30 am and chased the day to Munich. We arrived in Munich in the rain at 7:50am Sunday May 29. We exchanged currency at the Munich airport, figured out how to buy tickets for the S-Bahn (city train), found the S-Bahn station in the center of the airport, and caught the S8 to the Munich Hauptbahnhof (main station). At the Hauptbahnhof we had a bite to eat, paid 1,5 Euro's (\$1.95) to use the public restrooms which were so clean you could have preformed surgery on the floors and been fine, and caught our regional train to Oberstdorf. Jim and I had a First Class compartment to our selves. It was wonderful. The rain poured down while Jim slept and I watched 2 ½ hours of countryside flow by.

We arrived in Oberstdorf about 3:00pm (15:00 hr. as local time is 24 hours rather than 12.) and caught a cab to our hotel. The cab ride was about 2 minutes. Like I said everyone walks! It was only a four minute walk to our hotel but we didn't know the way and it was raining after all. We spent the rest of the day getting our directions down,

finding the Ice Arena, figuring out when and where my Monday Practice Ice would be, and generally settling into this wonderful place.

International competition, registration, practice ice, official practice ice, music, judging, awards, are different. Of course nobody tells you this. You have to figure it out on your own, and in a different language. No problem. I admit the very little German I speak was very useful. At least I found the rink. That was a better start than a skater who approached me as I was leaving the rink and asked in a very desperate voice if I spoke English. I said yes, and she asked me if I knew where the rink was. There was nothing much to be said except that it was right in front of her. In her defense she had been traveling for 30+ very difficult hours.

As it all worked out practice ice was scheduled on a day-by-day basis. This made planning a bit difficult. We adult skaters were scheduled to practice on the same ice as the local and international skaters who usually trained here. OK! Practice ice went like this: Sessions were available every hour from 7:00 to 20:00 hrs. Each session was 50 minutes long with an ice resurface after each session. Each session was mixed in ability level from Adult Bronze to Senior Men and Ladies. Each session was limited to about 15 skaters.

Music was played on a when-ever-the-CD-player-was-available basis and this worked well. I had three CD's of my music with me. The first CD I played sounded like a catfight. The other two were fine, thank goodness. Everyone was very courteous and polite. All the skaters work hard 100% of the time. There was almost no taking on the ice except between skater and coach. The training styles, obvious high level of technique, choreography, attention to the International Judging System, and work ethic was great to see and was a real inspiration. But not even the opportunity of skating with Carolina Kostner would get me to the rink at 7:00 when she trained!

My practices on Monday and Tuesday were not what I would have liked. I felt unable to focus and struggled to find a sense of balance. Maybe it was jetlag or maybe it was the snow.

Wednesday was our trip to Neuschwanstein, the castle built by King Ludwig II and used as a model for the Disneyland castle. The trip to see Neuschwanstein was excellent. The castle was a real treat with beautiful woodcarving, paintings, and architecture. The views from the castle and the local scenery were stunning even with rain, hail, and two minutes of sunshine.

Thursday I had a short practice in the morning, which was better than my previous practices but not as solid as I would have liked. I also had my Official Practice Ice later in the day. In fact all skaters had their Official Practice Ice on Thursday. This was a 20-minute session with music and was limited to 6 skaters total. It was at the Official Practice session that skaters were expected to turn in their competition music.

After I skated my program I heard the announcer say my program time was 1:43. 1:43 meant my program was 3 seconds overtime for a 1.00 time deduction. I about had a heart attack. After some inquiring I found out that the 1:43 was the Music Time and had been announced incorrectly as the Program Time. Phew!

Thursday night at 18:00 hr. was the Draw for each skaters start order. The Draw was held in the Curling arena sans curling stones. There were speeches by the ISU President, Ottavio Chinquata, the Vice President of the German Ice Skating Union, Sissy Krick (also a judge for my event), an ISU Council Member, Phyllis Howard, and a representative for the ISU Adult Figure Skating Working Group, Rhea Schwartz.

Snacks and champagne were served while the skaters in each event skated up to a table with a row of chocolates. The number of chocolates in the row corresponded to the number of skaters in the event. Each skater was asked to pick a chocolate, turn it over and read the number on the bottom to an official, who announced the number as that skater's start number. I was the tenth skater in my group to choose a chocolate. Out of three chocolates left I picked the chocolate with start number one.

While skaters waited for their turn to pick a chocolate each skater was given a handmade fleece neck scarf with the ISU International Adult Figure Skating Competition logo embroidered on the end. After all the skaters had drawn their start numbers there was a group picture. The USA skaters had a separate picture of just the USA skaters. We were a BIG group.

Friday was the first day of competition. The competition arena was decorated with flowers. The "Kiss and Cry" was set in place. The announcement board for each skater's name and country was up in lights, and the skaters and fans were ready for action. Fanfare was played before the beginning of each event. Skaters entered the ice for their warm-up and skate at one end of the ice, and after their skate exited the ice at the "Kiss and Cry" to wait in the "Kiss and Cry" for all the skaters to finish their programs. It was loud with support for each skater and there were more things thrown out to the skaters than one could imagine. It was electric!

The International Judging System was used and it took about 1½ minutes for the scores to be announced. This was true for all the events. No longer than about one minute after the final skater's score was announced the results for the entire event were announced. Trophies for places 1st to 3rd and participation medals were presented to the skaters at the end of the day's competition in an Awards Ceremony at center ice. The awards Ceremony was complete with dignitaries, red carpet, flowers, certificates, trophies, medals, and a huge podium. Cameras were everywhere.

I had a practice ice session during the first part of the competition. I ended up on the ice a little longer than I anticipated due to being interrupted by a very bad collision between an adult skater and a senior man. The adult skater was a very petite woman who was hit very hard by the senior man. She was unconscious for a couple of minutes and went to the hospital. Fortunately she was not badly injured and was able to compete the next day. After my practice I went to the competition arena to cheer everyone on to do his or her best.

Saturday was my competition day. I scheduled a practice session about 2 1/2 hours before my event and used this session as a 20-minute warm-up. I finally felt good on the ice. Things were going very well. I missed having my coach, Kevin, with me but Jim, my husband, did a great job of being there in his place. I changed into my competition dress and waited for my event to begin.

Fanfare was played, my event was announced, the first four skaters were called to the ice for our warm-up, and it was time to skate. My warm-up went smoothly. I was a little nervous but that was OK. After the time was called for one minute remaining in the warm-up I got really shaky. The call was made to clear the ice and my name was announced. I did not look up to see my name on the announcement board. I was shaking as I stood in my beginning pose. I told myself I would be very disappointed if I didn't go for this program with all I had and then my music began.

I stopped shaking and skated the best skate of my life. I did not miss or bobble a single element or step. I even added a second Loop jump to my Lutz-Loop combination and it went well. I had not done the Lutz-Loop-Loop combination in practice since the US Adult Nationals two months earlier. I couldn't believe I skated so well. I wished that Kevin could have been there to see this skate. It was over too quickly. I skated to the "Kiss and Cry" to watch and cheer the other skaters on.

I brought gold medals with the message "For your passion to skate and your courage to compete." for all the skaters in my group. Sitting first in the "Kiss and Cry" was a perfect place for me to throw the medals on the ice for each skater. Nobody left the ice without at least the medal.

I had no idea what my score was. I missed it when it was announced. I thought it was 12 or 13 something, whatever that meant. The fourth skater to skate was Jean from Scotland. Jim and I met Jean and her husband Fergus earlier in the week and became fast friends. I figured Jean would be the best skater in our group. She was beautiful and a beautiful skater, and she had a level 3 Spiral sequence in practice. Jean had a rough skate but not a bad skate. She ended up with a level 2 Spiral sequence in her

program and 14.11 points to take the lead. She had no idea where she stood in the standings and I had no idea where I was either.

Our husbands knew. Fergus had each score written down. Jim and Fergus knew Jean was in first and Jim, bless his heart, kept counting down the skaters as they competed with “well Terry! will be at least sixth, no fifth, no fourth, no third. NO! She is second”!

When the final results were announced I knew Jean had won but when her name was called as first she just sat in her chair in total disbelief. Then she burst into tears and stood up. Then they announced my name as second. I was surprised and gave Jean a big hug and she said she wished we had tied and that it was great to have had a friend on the ice during the warm-up. It was simply amazing. The scores were so close that had I not added the second Loop to the Lutz-Loop combination jump I would have been in 3rd place! That evening at the Awards Ceremony it was very emotional. I still can't believe Jean and I got to share the podium with each other. It was perfect.

After the awards were over there was a mad dash to our hotel for pictures and more champagne before we went to the Closing Banquet. As it turned out, our hotel had 13 USA skaters staying in the hotel and 11 of us placed 3rd or better. The hotel proprietor made arrangements to take our picture with our trophies in front of the hotel so there would be a record of this forever on the wall. Jean was included in the photo too.

Then off to the Closing Banquet for more speeches, information about what went well and what needed work from the Technical Specialists, our protocols (or complete set of marks), excellent food, and friendship. It had been a long and emotional day. Walking back to the hotel in a slight drizzle was welcome. It was all suddenly over.

Sunday was a very mellow day. The adrenaline was gone; the skies were somehow a bit grayer. Jean, Fergus, Ann-Marie (another newly made dear friend from Buffalo, NY) took the Nebelhornbahn up the mountain to the first gondola stop. We had a snack and quiet conversation before our trip back down. It seemed fitting to have a tiny sun break shine over Oberstdorf as we came down the mountain.

Monday was a day of good-byes to friends made, and the little town of Oberstdorf. The sun finally broke through the clouds to stay for the first time in eight days. It was, I think, a reminder of how bright my memories of this experience would always be even though it was sad to see the experience end.