

ATTACKER INJURES TOP FIGURE SKATER KNEE MAY KEEP KERRIGAN OUT OF '94 OLYMPIC TRIALS

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DETROIT – In the second assault against a prominent female athlete in less than a year, Olympic bronze medalist Nancy Kerrigan was injured Thursday by a man who attacked her with a crowbar and then fled from a practice rink where she was preparing for the U.S. Figure Skating Championships.

The incident left Kerrigan, 24, of Stoneham, Mass., with a badly bruised and swollen right knee. Although she is able to walk, she may not be able to skate this afternoon when the women's competition begins that determines the skaters on the U.S. team for next month's Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway.

The U.S. Olympic Committee issued a statement after the attack saying it would support the figure skating association if it decided to rewrite its rules for qualifying for the Olympic team. Under current rules, Kerrigan would have to finish first or second to make the team.

Late Thursday night, a man matching the description of Kerrigan's attacker was handcuffed and removed by police from Joe Louis Arena after practice. No other information on that incident was available.

Last April, top-ranked tennis player Monica Seles was stabbed in the back by a man who leaped from the stands during the Hamburg Open tournament in Germany. Guenter Parche, who said he was a fan of second-ranked Steffi Graf, was convicted but given a two-year suspended sentence that caused an international uproar for its leniency.

Kerrigan's attacker ran up behind her as she entered a corridor at Detroit's Cobo Arena, slammed the crowbar into her right kneecap and then fled into a blizzard by breaking through a floor-to-ceiling plexiglass window with the crowbar.

The attacker, described as wearing a black cap, black leather jacket, white pants and shoes, remained at large Thursday night.

"If you think of the nature of the injury, he clearly tried to debilitate her," said Steven Plomaritis, the orthopedic surgeon who treated Kerrigan at the scene and later at Hutzel Hospital. "I don't think that's speculating."

X-rays revealed no fractures, and Plomaritis said the question of whether she could compete "is an issue of pain." Late Thursday night the swelling extended to the back of her knee, and doctors advised her not to skate at the scheduled practice that night. Her agent said doctors would re-evaluate her knee early today.

Kerrigan, described by her agent Jerry Solomon as disturbed and frightened, returned to her hotel later Thursday afternoon with her parents, who were with her during the 2:30 p.m. attack.

Later Thursday, Kerrigan said: "I'm OK. If I can't skate, I'll deal with it. I'm OK." Immediately after the attack, Kerrigan collapsed on the concrete floor grasping her knee in pain.

'Why me? Why now?'

"She was screaming, 'Why me? Why now?'" said television producer Cynthia Pastrasso, who was on a crew working on a figure skating special.

Joan Ryan, a *San Francisco Examiner* columnist on leave to work on a book about female athletes, said Dan Kerrigan, Nancy's father, picked her up in his arms and carried her into the locker room.

"It hurts, Dad; it really hurts," Ryan quoted Kerrigan as saying.

There were incomplete details of security arrangements at Cobo Arena, part of a complex of buildings in downtown Detroit where the skating championships and an international auto show are going on simultaneously.

Three groups - Detroit police, a private agency hired by the arena management company and volunteers (primarily parents of skaters and others from the host Detroit Skating Club) - share responsibility for security.

Several witnesses said security at Cobo was the responsibility of volunteers. Kevin Cusick, another member of the TV crew who attempted to run down Kerrigan's attacker, said, "There were no cops in sight at all."

A spokesman for Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer said the attack was in an area of the arena where police officers were "not allowed."

Attack 'alarming'

Tony Morici, attending the event as chairman of the organizing committee for the 1996 national championships, which will be held in the San Jose Arena, called the attack "alarming."

Security was a major part of San Jose's bid presentation to the U.S. Figure Skating Association, he said, but he believes a review of plans is particularly in order for the twin-rink practice building that opened Dec. 21 downtown.

"Obviously we will review our security because of an incident like this," Morici said. "With what has happened (to female athletes), we have to add that concern to the issue."

Kerrigan has received numerous letters from "crazies," Solomon said, but nothing to prompt extra security concerns for Detroit.

Two-time Olympic champion Katarina Witt of Germany was sent more than 60 letters by a man who included nude pictures of himself and proposals of marriage. The writer, Harry Veltman, was arrested in 1991 in Denver, where Witt was performing in an ice show. He was sentenced to 37 months in a psychiatric facility.

Competitor threatened

More recently Tonya Harding, one of the favorites today, was the object of a telephone death threat to the Portland, Ore., rink where she was to compete in November. She declined to skate when sheriff's deputies said they could not guarantee her safety at the event.

"This is a bigger concern of the parents than the skaters," said Carole Yamaguchi, mother of 1992 Olympic gold medalist Kristi Yamaguchi. "It bothers me when Kristi is in the middle of a crowd."

Yamaguchi said her daughter was the object of a telephoned death threat to her husband Jim's dental office in 1990 shortly before competing in her first world championship. When the world event was held in Oakland two years later, extra

security was provided for her after two letters of a sexual nature arrived with a Bay Area postmark.

The closest Yamaguchi has come to an actual attack was last year in Brazil, where she was performing with an ice show. A group of young people stopped the three-car caravan in which she was riding, apparently in a robbery attempt, but armed guards arranged by Yamaguchi's managers pulled their weapons and frightened the youths away.

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