

YAMAGUCHI'S WORLD CHANGES OVERNIGHT

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ALBERTVILLE, France -- The world is different than it was Friday.

Kristi Yamaguchi has her gold medal; the world has a new best friend.

The children pressed against the fence around the Olympic Ice Hall after practice for Saturday's skating exhibition are holding pens and tickets, postcards and Kristi photos. "We're going to have to get used to this," Jim Yamaguchi says to his wife, Carole, as they slip out the gate, leaving their daughter to fend for herself against the ankle-biters.

He's wearing a white sweat shirt with a picture of Kristi on skates in a layback spin, her leg held up behind her head by a scarf stretched between her hands. The gothic letters on the shirt say: "My girl."

It has been only a few hours since he and Carole got to bed in the wee hours of the morning.

They parted with Kristi and their other daughter, Lori, after 1 a.m. The daughters were headed for the athletes' village in Brides-les-Bains, the parents for a celebration at Albertville's finest restaurant at the Hotel Million.

Owner Philippe Million, whose family has owned the hotel for more than 200 years, had bottles of Perrier-Jouet on ice, French chocolates and cookies for the Yamaguchis, skating coach Christy Kjarsgaard-Ness and her husband, Andrew, Kevin Albrecht, Kristi's new agent, Katarina Witt and her parents, Brian Boitano, and Mary and Evy Scotvold, who coach Nancy Kerrigan and Paul Wylie.

Up in the mountains at Brides, Kristi and Lori watched Eurosport TV replays of Friday's Olympic events at the athletes' favorite pub, La Phoque, with the U.S. ski jumpers and speedskaters until 6 a.m.

Her medal, a gold-rimmed disc of Lalique crystal with the five rings and the inscription "Les XVIes Jeux Olympiques d'Hiver, Albertville" was in its case, hidden with the travelers' checks at Jim and Carole's apartment in town.

"I picked it up and touched it all over," Jim says as Kristi catches up after finishing with the autographs. "I just wanted to hold it."

Although the women's figure skating competition had been built up into a battle between Kristi and Midori Ito of Japan, the Yamaguchis had simply hoped for a medal. The 1994 Lillehammer Olympics, they figured, were Kristi's best hope.

Now life will be lived on a different timetable.

"You're going to have to change your tour plans," Carole tells Kristi of the 45-city U.S. figure skating tour after the March world championships in Oakland. "You're going to have to do all the stops."

"No vacation?" Kristi semi-whines.

"This is the responsibility that comes with the turf," Carole says. "Kevin is going to cut the deal."

"Will he get enough extra to offset his commission?" Kristi asks.

"You've been getting \$400 a show," Carole says. "I found out the other skaters have been getting \$2,000."

They are headed to lunch at Crêperie du Val des Roses, a small neighborhood restaurant near the Yamaguchis' apartment. As Mme. Thevenot escorts them to a table, she stops and picks up a copy of *Le Dauphine*, the local sports daily, which has a picture of Kristi on the cover.

"Elle est la championne Olympique," she whispers to herself.

Heads turn.

Little girls and their mothers approach with their paper placemats and pens. *"Votre nom, s'il vous plait?"*

"Oui," Kristi answers, and she signs Kristi Yamaguchi USA.

Lunch is crêpes filled with cheese, ground beef, ham and sausages. Lemonade. "I want meat," Kristi says.

Dessert is ice cream-filled crêpes and coffee.

"I talked to Marcus in Edmonton today," Kristi says, referring to her boyfriend. "He said he'd been getting calls from newspaper reporters from all over. He told me not to worry, he didn't tell them the whole story."

"There's a story to tell?" Carole asks. "What's the story?"

Kristi leaves for a nap before the afternoon exhibition of Olympic champions. Carole and Jim discuss the future.

The road to an Olympic gold medal was two years shorter than they had thought. Will Kristi want to do it again in '94?

"A mix of silver and gold I would have liked," Jim says. "Gold and silver? I wouldn't want that."

But the decision is in Kristi's hands. She likes the competition and the training. She thinks if she gets a triple Axel by Lillehammer, she'd like to go again.

She did not, as many figure skaters have done in the past, isolate herself in an apartment away from the Games. She lived with the other athletes, she marched in the opening ceremonies and she will do so again today in the closing ceremonies.

She will stay in the village until Tuesday, not fly off to New York or Los Angeles in a chartered jet to appear on a talk show, as downhill skiing champion Bill Johnson did after the 1984 Sarajevo Games to talk with Johnny Carson.

"Maury Povich called and wanted to put her on," Carole says. "Jim said 'no.' It's not the right kind of show."

"It's tabloid," Jim says.

"Even though we watch it," Carole laughs.

But Kristi will appear next week on Arsenio Hall's show. It's the only show she wanted to do.

Mme. Thevenot says there is no charge for the lunch. Relaying her thoughts through a reporter's high school French, she says it was an honor for the Olympic champion and her family to eat in her restaurant.

"We wanted Surya (Bonaly, the French skater) to win," she says. "But if she could not, we wanted it for your daughter. She deserved to win."

The Yamaguchis are touched. They leave some Olympic pins.

C'est incroyable.

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