

WELCOMING CHANGE: FIGURE SKATERS' COACH IS PREPARED FOR TRANSITION – SHE'LL CASH IN AS THEIR AGENT

Author(s):

JODY MEACHAM, Mercury News Staff Writer

Date: February 3, 1992

Section: Sports

NOVOGORSK, Russia – Under communism, Soviet citizens weren't allowed to exploit another individual.

That was the state's job.

Soon it will be Tamara Moskvina's.

As coach of pairs figure skaters Artur Dmitriev and Natasha Mishkutenok, she is heir to an honored tradition of Soviet sports – seven consecutive gold medals in Olympic pairs competition and 21 of the last 24 world championships.

As their future agent, she will violate the other tradition of non-exploitation.

Yet she sees her coming career of negotiating with ice shows and movie makers in less pejorative terms. She will make money from her skaters' talent, of course, but her knowledge of the Western entertainment business and her skaters will benefit them in return.

"I produced a very expensive product that the country can sell," Moskvina said. "I can sell, too, and I hope to get my share back."

Dmitriev, 24, from St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad), and Mishkutenok, 21, of Minsk, Belarus, have skated under Moskvina for six years. They were bronze medalists at the 1990 world figure skating championships and champions last year.

As a "merited" coach under the old Soviet system, Moskvina, 50, from St. Petersburg, makes 2,300 rubles per month – a huge salary by Russian standards – and has the luxury of coaching only these two skaters. Before them, she coached Oleg Vasiliev and Elena Valova, three-time world champions and gold medalists at the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympics.

Because of Russia's struggling economy and the collapse of Gosspport, the Soviet state committee for sport that once handled everything from visas to airline reservations, Moskvina lately has played a larger role in her skaters' lives.

Shortly after this interview, she took Dmitriev and Mishkutenok to the European championships in Switzerland, which they won. But they did not return to Russia where the possibility of bureaucratic bungling might complicate their departure for the Winter Olympics in Albertville, France.

Moskvina's ability to foresee problems has been a key to her success.

"I traveled the world with my eyes open," Moskvina said. "I'm very pleased that Mr. Gorbachev started our changes. I saw from traveling that they would have to come.

"They were inevitable. Going back through history, I could see empires never lasted. This is life."

Although she has no experience as an agent, she feels it's time to end her coaching life and believes she has the talent for a new career.

"In this work, I can speak with people and negotiate with them," she said. "This is like playing with the person. I did it my whole life trying to bring my skaters, who were ordinary people, to the podium of the world. And I succeeded."

Copyright (c) 1992 San Jose Mercury News