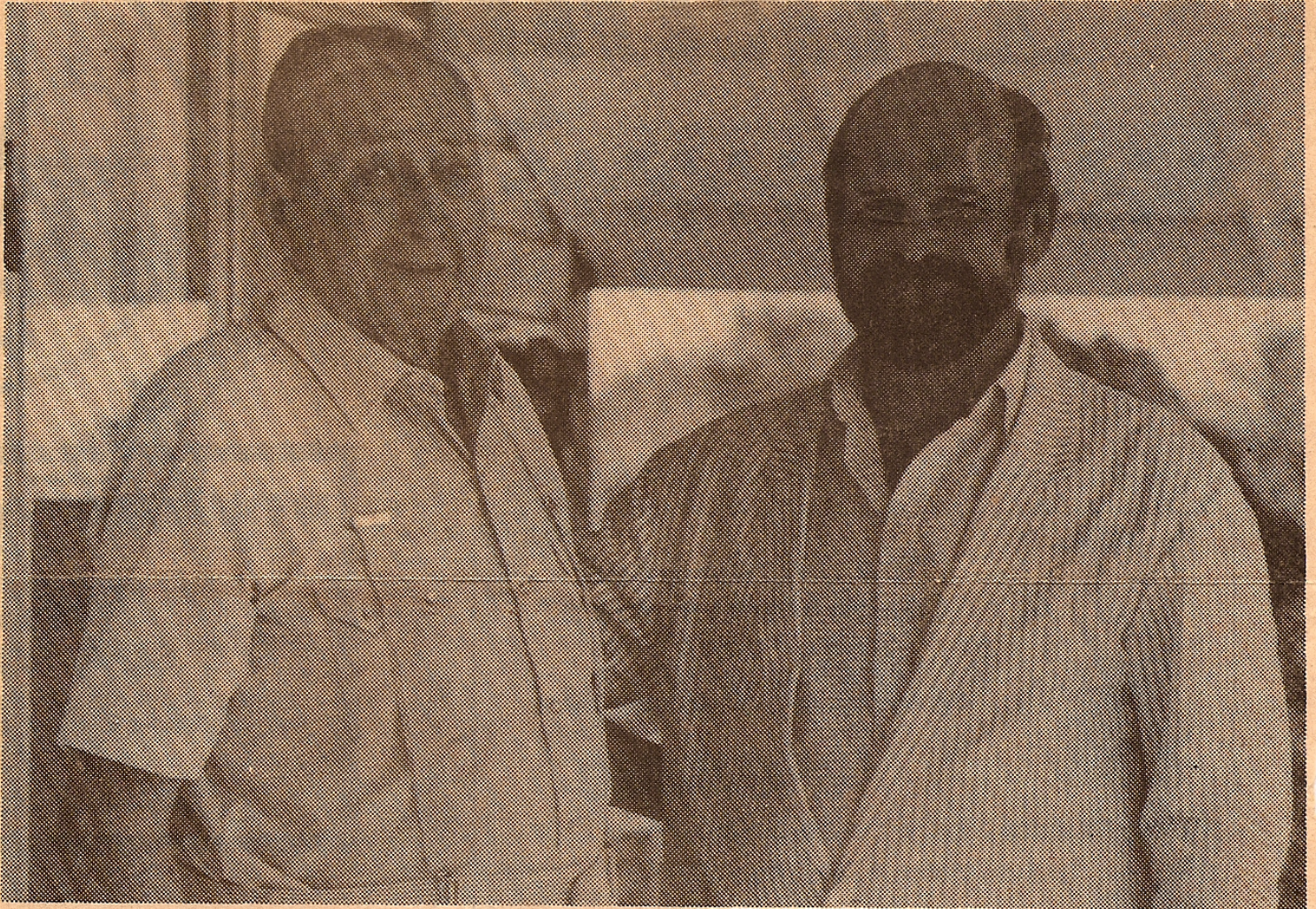
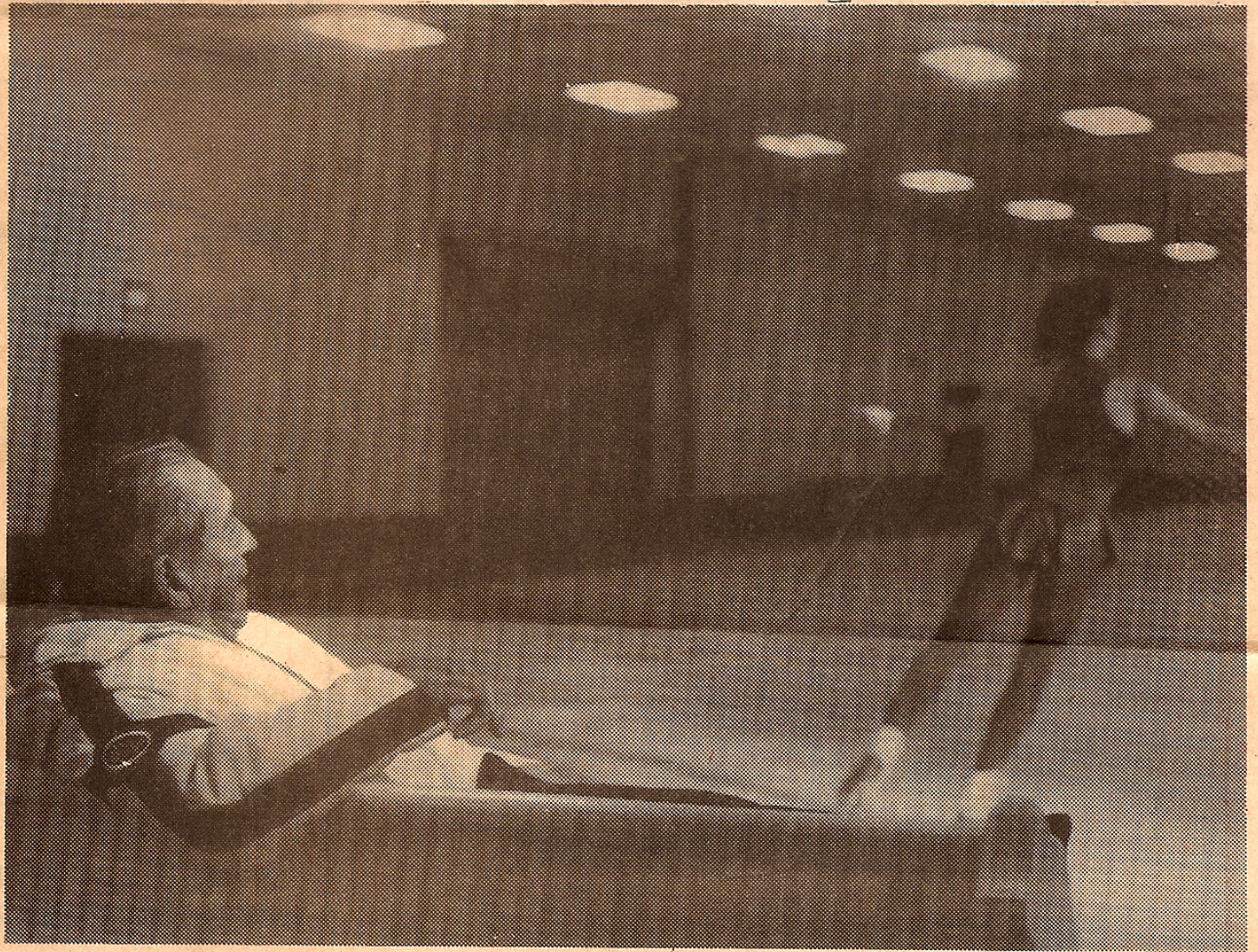


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The Lake Placid News



Gustave Lussi, left, with former student and two-time Olympic Champion Dick Button



Lussi instructs national competitor and part-time Lake Placid resident Tracy Damigella in the Olympic Arena skating rink that bears his name

He changed skating

Local PBS station debuts production of documentary on Gustave Lussi

By MARC NATHANSON

They gathered at the Holiday Inn Thursday evening to pay tribute to the man who had changed skating.

His pupils were there, of course, from a wide-eyed school girl to a former World Champion. His family was there, and so were several friends. This was, after all, the man who'd changed skating.

The occasion was the first public screening of a half-hour documentary produced by WCFE-Channel 57 in Plattsburgh. Producer Joanne Taylor joked that the crew had become so enamored of its subject, they wanted to call the film "I Love Lussi."

Instead, they called it "Gustave Lussi: The Man Who Changed Skating."

In many ways, the story of Gustave Lussi is the story of figure skating. His arrival in the United States from Switzerland at the turn of the century, his development of revolutionary skating techniques, his family-like rapport with his students, and his part in the making of the most important figure skaters of our time have become the stuff of figure skating legends in Lake Placid and around the world. His instructional ability has helped hundreds, and his warm ways have inspired even more.

One of those inspired by Lussi's instruction was a skater from New York named Cecily Morrow, who studied under him for several years in the early 1970s before turning to coaching herself. An aspiring writer, Morrow five years ago began work on a technical manual that she hoped would explain many of Lussi's techniques as well as capture the spirit of the man who had created them.

One year later, Morrow had become sufficiently smitten with the concept to contact Taylor about the possibility of collaborating on a documentary about Lussi.

"She said she was very busy at that time, and that I should call back in about a year," recalls Morrow, who was on hand for the screening Thursday night. "As it turned out, I called back in two. I wanted to give her some extra time to take care of everything she had to."

"Gus Lussi told us that you're a person long after you're a figure skater. And Gus Lussi helped me become a better person."

—Former Junior Nat'l Champion Eileen Seigh

Morrow pitched her idea to WCFE, and the local PBS station liked what it heard. The local angle, the world-wide appeal and the historical context were enough to convince WCFE to apply for a grant from the New York State Public Television Fund, and work on the film began soon after.

With Morrow consulting and Taylor producing, "The Man Who Changed Figure Skating" took one year to finish. The final product blends rare historical footage with present-day interviews to provide a skater's-eye view of the world of Gustave Lussi.

Dick Button, Otto and Marie Jelinek, Don Jackson and Ronnie Robertson are among the champions and former Lussi pupils whose words and images comprise the film's narrative. Some of the interviews, like Button's, were shot at Lussi's Florida home, while many, like coach

Carlo Fassi's, were filmed at skating rinks around the country.

"All the things I'm famous for, like the delayed axel and the Hamill camel, came from Gus Lussi," says 1976 Olympic Gold Medalist Dorothy Hamill in an interview shot this past year. Interspersed with Hamill's comments is old Super-8 footage of Hamill skating as a child, tape of her winning performance at the Innsbruck Olympics and a shot of the autographed photo of Hamill that hangs outside the Olympic Arena's Lussi Rink. The images blur the passage of time, from footage of Button's fifth World Championship victory in Paris to present-day film of Lussi instructing national competitor and part-time Lake Placid resident Tracy Damigella in the Olympic Arena.

"Gus Lussi taught us a lot of things off the ice, as well" says former Junior National Champion Eileen Seigh, as black and white pictures of Lussi fishing with several of his students flicker across the screen. "He told us that you're a person long after you're a figure skater," recounts the former National Junior Champion. "And Gus Lussi helped me become a better person."

"If I can't be a champion myself, I'll make them," says Lussi. And "The Man Who Changed Skating" proves it.

Because the film contains clips from the archives of ABC-TV and other media outlets, WCFE has not been able to secure the releases that would allow the show to be aired nationally. According to WCFE's John Flanzer, the station is hoping to secure additional funding so the necessary releases can be acquired.

"Gustave Lussi: The Man Who Changed Skating" is tentatively scheduled to make its national debut on WCFE-Channel 57 on Nov. 1 at 9 p.m. Following its first airing, the film will be shown on the eight other New York state PBS stations.

Aired nation-wide in April/May 1990. Selected for international distribution 1991 - subsequently