

Lussi: A Name Synonym

By MARY-LUCILE AGER

Lake Placid is privileged to have world-renowned skating professional Gus Lussi among its own. A member of the Skating Hall of Fame and coach of 18 world champions, he

recently presided at a skating seminar in Rochester, Minn., at the Rochester Center.

Lussi's ideas and inventive moves revolutionized the free skating of the 30's into the athletic, breathtaking

sport of today. His philosophy of figure skating was summed up best in an article by sports writer Bill McAuliffe of the Rochester Post-Bulletin. McAuliffe caught the true flavor of the man and his ideas. Excerpts from the article bear repeating, particularly in the subject's own home town:

Once in a while, he gets a letter addressed, "Gus Lussi, Lake Placid, North America." Such things are sent with the complete faith that they'll fall into the right hands. And to Lussi, figure skating is just that—a matter of faith, both kept and lost.

"To me, figure skating is like religion," Lussi, 80, a native Swiss with 58 years of coaching, who took the occasion of a PSGA teaching seminar to visit Rochester. "There's so many religions running around, no one knows whom to believe."

The sparkle in Lussi's green eyes when he talks about skating indicate a deep love for the sport. And at his age, it would seem that Lussi's authority in figure skating circles would be unquestioned. Among those he has coached and trained are Dick Button, the former world and Olympic champion; Ronnie Robertson; David and Hayes Alan Jenkins; Otto and Maria Jelinek, and 1976 Olympic champion Dorothy Hamill.

When the evolution of the sport has called for a double axel, a flying sit spin, a triple axel, and now even a quadruple axel, it has usually been



Gus Lussi As He Ponders His Retirement

ous With Figure Skating

Lussi's skaters who have been the first to perfect the maneuvers.

But he senses that somehow he's lost influence, and it hurts.

"They're trying to make ballet out of it," he said, not attempting to hide his bitterness. "What I'd like to do with every one is take them out to the ski jump and give them a shove."

Lussi knows something about that, too. As a young man he was a ski jumper, but a skull fracture turned his attention to skating. He applied to the ice his understanding of the dynamics of the human body in smooth motion.

"Skating shall be gliding on the ice and adjusting oneself to the skate," he explained. "It's the most beautiful thing we have in the world. Nothing can come up to it in ballet, because it's totally fluid."

But for all the grace that rests at the bottom of Lussi's definition of skating, there is also tremendous force.

"When skaters start practicing spinning, sometimes they scream and blood rushes out into their hands. They have to develop strong arms and muscles to control the rise of weight when they spin."

Not surprisingly, spinning is a consummate skill in Lussi's skating. He once set a record by spinning 84 times consecutively, and now has his left hip fused solid after years of spinning threatened to separate it for good. Ronnie Robertson, whom

he coached, could spin on a good day at a rate of eight evolutions per second, and never get dizzy. Robertson later was used as a sort of whirling guinea pig by NASA and helped Lussi prove that a body can, through practice, fight off dizziness from spinning.

"I tell skaters now, spinning is washing dishes and jumping is eating dinner. Who wants to wash dishes? Spinning takes energy. No one can fake a spin."

In Lussi's eyes, too many people in skating now are faking it. Some instructors, he says, don't understand the dynamics of the sport and consequently are turning skaters onto the ice who are confused. "Do you tell them?" he wondered. "Does it do any good? That's why I'm retiring. Skating has gone beyond the scope of reason. Too many religions. The sport has given me much, and I'm grateful. But it's so frustrating now. I will not compromise anything on the ice."

It's that attitude which has endeared Lussi to those he's taught, including pro Bob Shulman. "His system is unquestionably the best," Bob said. "He's the most demanding, exacting coach, and probably the world's greatest living coach. He's a teacher's teacher. But he meets a certain amount of frustration. He loves to be challenged, if you have a question. But he demands absolute allegiance."

It gets back, simply, to a matter of

faith. "A skate is a compass," Lussi said. "It tells you what direction you're going." And in Gus Lussi's world, that's all anyone has to know. McAuliffe concluded.

His teaching is still much sought after by champions of all levels. This past summer, among others, he worked with Canadian ladies champion Heather Kemkaran. During a judges' school warm-up, he amazed on-lookers as he helped U.S. World team member Scott Hamilton solve a problem with a jump he had been consistently falling on. Within five minutes, Scott was doing the jump perfectly.