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Gustave Lussi, 95, a Coach of Skating Champions

By AL HARVIN

Gustave Lussi, who taught and coached 16 world champions and seven Olympic gold medalists in figure skating, died in his sleep on Thursday night at his home in Lake Placid, N.Y. He was 95 and was still teaching until a few days ago, a grandson, Arthur Lussi, said.

Among those coached by Lussi were the American gold medalists Dick Button, Hayes Alan Jenkins, David Jenkins, Dorothy Hamill and Scott Hamilton, as well as John Curry of England, gold medalist in 1980 at Lake Placid.

A ski jumper who came to the United States from his native Switzerland at the age of 17 in 1915, Lussi lived in Brooklyn until he was 22 years old. He often related how he started out as a dishwasher at the St. Regis Hotel in Manhattan, then came back to produce and direct the ice show for the hotel some 20 years later and gain international fame. He became an American citizen in 1927.

"He taught me from the first day I learned to skate on my 13th birthday until I stopped skating professionally, at the age of 22," Button said by telephone on Friday. "He was more like a teacher than a coach. I still saw him often. He was like a father to me."

In 1948, Button became the first American male to win a gold medal in figure skating at a Winter Olympics. Barbara Ann Scott of Canada, another

of Lussi's students, also won gold that year, and Button won another gold in 1952. Paul Wylie, winner of the silver medal at the 1992 Winter Games, was the most recent of Lussi's students to earn an Olympic medal.

Lussi's trademark was the tremendous athleticism of his skaters. He abhorred what he called the "slow, boring" compulsory figures that used to be a part of the event.

His grandson said that NASA once sent a team to study how Lussi got his skaters to spin so fast and not get nauseous, in the hopes of applying the same method with astronauts in the space program.

Lussi is survived by his wife of 61 years, the former Thelma MacDowell; two sons, Serge and Craig, and five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.



Associated Press, 1948

Gustave Lussi

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