

— The amount you've done for figure skating is tremendous, but I want to start by talking about your work in carrying on the brilliant work of Gus Lussi. You've produced the technical videos series, *Systematic Figure Skating: The Spin and Jump Techniques of Gustave Lussi* and have devoted countless hours in teaching his jump and spin method to so many skaters. What makes Mr. Lussi one of skating's most important figures and why is his technique something more coaches need to explore?

Gustave Lussi invented and introduced many of the jumps and spins we perform today, including triple jumps, and combination spins. In fact, we saw almost no edge changes in competitive spins (for example, backward to forward) until after Mr. Lussi's second spin video came out in 1992 wherein we introduced the technique in detail for the camel and back camel only as it increased the beauty of those two spins. He inveighed against other edge changes, however, in spinning so as not to interrupt the flow.

Mr. Lussi was extremely exacting in the innovations he made; after introducing the first triple jump in 1952 with Dick Button, he refined his students' double jumps into delayed-rotation doubles. Then, in the 1970's when his students were doing spectacular, delayed double jumps through double Axel and the first standard triples through triple Axel, Mr. Lussi introduced the delayed-rotation action into his triple jump technique, working on opening up the triple loop, for example, with John Misha Petkevich.

Mr. Lussi did not like quads because he felt it was just adding another rotation to a jump, and by so doing, tending to focus an entire program on one jump or rotation jumps. Mr. Lussi wanted to see a program filled with spectacular delayed-rotation jumps and fast spins. What he wanted to see and what coaches need to explore and carry on was his work with building delayed-rotation single, double, and triple jumps as standard.

Mr. Lussi had his students experimenting and competing with each other in group jump (and spin) lessons, exhorting them to perform jumps with the most distance, height, and beauty. They discovered early on that to achieve those qualities in any jump, the skater must take-off on the shortest and straightest "edge", quickly expanding into a fully outstretched position in the air — the delayed-rotation action — which creates the distance and height of the jump,

and then retracts the body rapidly into Mr. Lussi's rotation position, the faster rotation allowing for another "delay" or suspension, three-quarters of a rotation before landing, thus creating a pre-landing position *in the air*, with consequent maximum outflow in the landing. He called it a "foot-reserve" landing (see Volume III of *Systematic Figure Skating* — www.LussiTechnicalVideo.com).

By the 1980's Mr. Lussi was only teaching in the summers; therefore, his work standardizing the delayed-rotation action in triples and quads was curtailed due to his limited teaching. By 2000, regular triple jumps were standard and many skaters, after the 2002 Olympics, when IJS was introduced, focussed on quads.

After Jason Brown's great performance at the 2014 US Nationals, Terri Tarquini interviewed Jason's coach, Kori Ade, for *PS Magazine*. She posed this scenario to Ms. Ade: "Jason doesn't have a quad, but he proved that an overall awesome skate can trump the quad. Evan Lysacek won an Olympic gold medal without a quad. Can it be done again?" Kori Ade replied: "Oh, it can be done." For this reason, current coaches would be wise to explore Mr. Lussi's delayed-rotation technique for all jumps.

Delayed-rotation triples, when done correctly, do not take more power or strength than regular triples; in fact, young pros that I have taught reported that the delayed triples feel easier to perform because of the increased distance and height achieved in the take-off, and the fact that the fully outstretched position which puts them into rotation over the one axis immediately, also actually increases the speed of the rotation, as in a spin.

Personally, I had the same experience with doubles — what felt like an effort with regular doubles, seemed effortless with the delay. Mr. Lussi knew that skaters such as myself who were, essentially, fearful 90 pound weaklings could do the big, delayed jumps. He was able to explain to me, and all of his students, where every single part of the body including the eyes were supposed to be, every step of the way in every jump, and well before and after every jump, because delayed jumps are achievable through exact timing and detailed accuracy of position. So, it would be wise for all coaches to know how to do and teach these spectacular Lussi jumps to equal quads.

- You also trained with brilliant coaches Carlo Fassi and Natalia Dubova. As coaches and people, what stands out in your mind about them both that made them the successes they were/are?

Carlo was, in fact, one of Mr. Lussi's students. He understood compulsory school figures the way Mr. Lussi understood everything to do with free skating. Interestingly, Mr. Lussi's and Carlo's figure techniques were similar, particularly in the loops. As it happens, the techniques of Carlo, Mr. Lussi, and Natalia Dubova all fit together technically; they are completely compatible, providing the necessary components of a complete skater. For example, Mr. Lussi taught John Curry and Dorothy Hamill their jumps and spins; Carlo and Christa Fassi polished their figures, gave them beautiful programs, and trained them. If they had then gone to Dubova, they could have added greater speed and control to their skating.

Skaters and coaches who missed the opportunity to study figures would be wise to study Dubova's ice dance exercises (see *Stroking Exercises on Ice: The Dance Training Methods of Natalia Dubova* — www.IceCommand.com) to understand how to produce world-class stroking, including smooth transitions, turns, and strong edges. Such technique is invaluable for free skating training.

— What can you share about your skating career before you turned professional and helped create the Ice Theatre Of New York?

The most important thing that I did was to stop competing at age 13 and begin actually to study the methods of the world famous coaches I was fortunate with which to work. From my very first lesson with Mr. Lussi at age eleven, I wrote down everything he taught me; Carlo, the same. I just kept attempting to follow their exacting instructions until, eventually, I succeeded in performing the elements and completely understood, technically, the physics and physiology of it all.

I also began spending a lot of time listening to music and choreographing non-traditional, "new wave" programs to perform in shows. To this day, when I put on music in the rink that I like to sing, or that evokes some emotion — that music just goes through my body, inspires me to move, and fills me with such life that it is very difficult for me to hear music without moving to it or envisioning a body skating to it.

Just before I turned sixteen, I became a pro and started teaching; my first student was fourteen years old, working on a double Axel. Having that kind of responsibility forced me to grow up quickly, turning my focus to

helping my students advance. Then, through off-ice exercise and dance training in New York City, especially ballet, I enlarged my knowledge of body mechanics, so that, with my interest in education, documentation of technique, dance, and non-traditional skating programs, I was inevitably led in 1984 to the Greenwich Village landmark, the Minetta Tavern, where Mark Bogaerts, Marjorie Kouns, Moira North, and I started what became the Ice Theatre of New York.

- How do you feel about what the Ice Theatre Of New York has accomplished over the years? Is it true to your vision? Has it met or exceeded your expectations?

Most of my contribution to Ice Theatre was in the start-up and our first few years. The creation of Ice Theatre was fun — midnight rehearsals, productions of our own devising — the city was ours, including on plastic at Studio 54 (ha!) — but exhausting on top of my already 7 day/week, 14 hour day teaching schedule. With ITNY we had plans for extensive ensemble pieces, tours, plus, on my end, producing educational materials such as the Lussi videos. After the first couple of years performing with the company and starting work on the videos, I actually quit teaching full-time, left New York City, and went to school in Massachusetts at Smith College.

Eventually I produced the videos; and I think Ice Theatre, led from that time by Moira North, certainly met performance expectations and many of their educational visions. And, I know they have more ideas to realize.

- As you've illustrated in your wonderfully written "Proposal For Change", there is a bigger picture to the problems in figure skating today. Why is it so important that people continue to examine and try to solve these issues?

In America we have freedom of speech; but, as coaches, we are expected, as members of certain figure skating organizations, not to question the leaders of these organizations or the status quo. However, all members should feel welcome to discuss, openly, potential changes, and all members must be allowed to express their opinions, and even put into motion their own ideas, respectfully, without fear of retribution. How can productive change come about if coaches are afraid to say they teach Lussi technique or think delayed-rotation is the way to go. I've seen coaches quit before they will be forced to teach rotation jumps or have to choreograph IJS paint by the numbers programs and, unfortunately, we've lost many talented US coaches.

I was encouraged to write my "Proposal For Change" by a brilliant, highly successful, non-skating businessman with whom I watched the 2014 Olympic Ladies figure skating event. We were with other businessmen who cited many of

the problems in skating that participants have been guardedly mentioning since skating started to lose its popularity from about 2002 on. I discussed my ideas with them and many others as potential cures for these ills. Every interested individual must examine the realities of where figure skating is today and take action on a grand scale or others with money are going to drive change.

- What advice would you offer someone who's a fan or supporter of the sport but isn't actually involved in governance of their skating federation that was unhappy with the current state of figure skating and wanted to constructively do something about it?

Two things come to mind. First: Years ago in an interview for the PBS documentary, *Gustave Lussi: The Man Who Changed Skating*, Olympic competitor, gracious lady, and Lussi student, Eileen Seigh, exclaimed, "Gus had them rewriting the rulebook!"

I knew what she was talking about; in one of my lessons Mr. Lussi told me this story: "I took Dick Button to the Worlds in '46, '47, after the war. At that time the figures were open at the center. Dick skated the back figure and I had him close the center. The official came to me and said, 'That's illegal. He can't skate the figure that way.' I told him, 'This boy's champion of the United States and that's the way we're going to do it!' From then on the figures were skated with the closed centers."

Another Lussi lesson: "Do you know how the delayed Axel was invented? I had a skater by the name of Barbara Jones -- she had a terrific split jump. One day I told her to take an Axel with the leg out that way, right straight out in front. She did it, and that's how the delayed Axel was born. Later, I was called down to the committee room and told: 'You can't teach a jump like that to a lady! It's unladylike, likely to hurt her.' I told them: 'I don't give a damn what you want. You're going to take what I give you.'"

Gus Lussi and Dick Button *made* changes, just the way Torvill and Dean *made* changes with "Bolero"; they had the courage to make change and they had a plan; they performed so well that they couldn't be touched; they had the popular vote of the people behind them as they had the courage to present it on center stage at the Olympics and Worlds. But they made the changes for the evolution of figure skating, to propel it forward, not to promote their own agenda.

Second: Mr. Lussi tells many stories of famous people whom he met over the years. One of my favorites has to do with spinning: "I met a man, a Colonel in the Army, on the way...on the train to Philadelphia, by the name of Colonel Sperry; he invented the gyroscope, the Sperry Gyroscope. He took it all over the United States, trying to sell it, and the Americans laughed at him. So he took it to France; they bought it and the Americans had to buy it back from them!"

Colonel Sperry may have been laughed at in the US but, at least he was allowed to build his device here. Mr. Lussi developed his ideas in the US and people laughed at him, too, but eventually his ideas were adopted into the rulebook because he had the vision, courage and a plan to make change. If you have an idea for change in skating and cannot get it done in the US, try Canada or France. If you don't know where to start, you may contact me.

- In over 35 years of on and off ice coaching, you've probably seen it all. What's the most inspiring moment you've had - and what was the most discouraging?

If I had to pick...actually three most inspiring times come to mind: 1) When I was instructing the demonstration skaters for the Lussi videos, professionals like Robin Wagner, coach of Olympic Champion, Sarah Hughes, and former Canadian National competitor, Rick Boudreau, it was incredibly inspiring to teach delayed-rotation triples and blur spins to professional skaters who were completely free of the amateur and competitive constraints and the burden of having to "land" jumps. Teaching them was completely different from teaching the same delayed-rotation jumps to Olympic and international competitors — the competitors were so mentally constricted due to intense concern about losing their (undependable) jumps that it inhibited their ability to make greater changes quickly. The pros who did not have to worry about competition were able to learn and make the adjustments for the huge delayed jumps in just a few days (thank goodness because that is all the time we had). This freedom granted the pros the mental flexibility to absorb the information and adopt the changes quickly. Fun.

2) A day in late fall, must have been between 2004 and 2008, I was playing with my young son and the phone rang. It was Dick Button's assistant calling to order the Lussi videos. Well, I knew that Dick had a set of the videos because, not only had I sent them to him, but he was the host of them, had contributed to their production, as well as having been a major fundraiser. I said to her: "Dick doesn't have to order the videos; I'll just send him another set." She replied that the first set seemed to have been lost in a move and "Mr. Button wants to view them (Lussi techniques) before Nationals this year. He said to pay for them." Wow.

3) I am so pleased every time I receive a letter, postcard, or email, from someone, be it judge, coach, parent, or skater who has purchased my videos/ DVDs, telling me how the instruction has changed their skating and their lives.

The most discouraging moment I've had as of late, realizing where skating is now after it used to be so popular. The only mildly encouraging thing is that now, finally, people are saying that things must change; they're tired of these little

twisted jumps and injuries. But we must have completely new ideas, a major overhaul, and a plan. I'm not pointing fingers or talking about replacing people; I'm talking about expanding in ways that no one in skating as yet has had the foresight, power, or courage to do.

- What's one thing about you most people don't know?

I have several other completely absorbing lives, academia and summer life besides my skating. I am an academic at heart and in practice. While I love skating, I was never a natural athlete, so I worked extremely hard to achieve what I call world-class skating and the ultimate compliment — a well-known Olympic coach once said to me: "I would much rather watch you stroke than watch any triple jumps." Yet, the very best time in my life was the four years I spent at Smith College and the semester abroad at Oxford University (all not skating). I love writing and am working on several non-skating projects in addition to my skating writing projects.

And, every summer of my life I would live with just solar power at our family island in Canada, running around in bare feet, zipping around in boats to other islands to visit friends, swim, ski, play tennis, directing canoe programs, paddling regattas, lake-wide scavenger hunts, and attending square dances and an island church with the families that have known my family for six generations on the lake.

- Will figure skating have another 'golden era'?

I have been thinking long and hard about this question and what would bring it about. I'm afraid it would take another several pages to explain, so I will simply say that another 'golden era' is possible with a complete revision of the status quo of IJS where there is no room for creativity when everyone has to do a turn cluster and a loop and a swizzle all in the same section and we all sit there and say: "Here's the footwork..." "Here's the choreographic sequence..." Well, wait, what was that other program section about, was there no choreography there? Just a "jump pass?" We also desperately need an expansion of different competitive events (see "Proposal for Change"), plus intelligent use of money and marketing so we're not laughed at by football audiences. Can we get rid of the public use of the derogatory term "Kiss and Cry?" We need to think of the message we are sending to the audience. Being reduced to sit in the "Kiss and Cry" section sounds like a season of The Bachelor, doesn't it? Is that what we are?