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News



Barbara Ann Scott, 19, displays her Olympic Gold medal for figure skating awarded at the 1948 Winter Games in St. Moritz, Switzerland, left. Tom and Barbara Scott King, right, will journey to Ottawa, Canada next month where she will carry the Olympic torch for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games. *Heather A. Perry/News-Leader*

Olympic gold -- Canadians still carry torch for local woman

By Heather A. Perry, *News-Leader*

You would never guess it to meet her, but 61 years after she skated to gold in the 1948 Winter Olympics, Barbara Ann Scott King still has the hearts of millions of Canadians and that same number of figure skating fans firmly in her grasp, as evidenced by her being asked to take part in the Olympic Torch run for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

"It makes me feel very humble," said King of her Dec. 13 torch run. "I mean, the fact that at 81 they still remember me. It's overwhelming."

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King and her husband, Tom, have made Amelia Island their home for 13 years, moving here from Chicago. Next month they will return to the ice champion's hometown of Ottawa so she can speed-walk the nearly half-mile, 300-meter portion of the Olympic torch's journey to Vancouver for the Winter Games.

Dubbed "Canada's Sweetheart," the petite skater first took to the ice at age seven at the Minto Skating Club.

"We called it 'dear old tin Minto,'" said King. "Because the building was so old that sometimes when it snowed, the snow would come through the walls and it was even colder inside than it was outside."

Practicing eight hours a day, King started racking up skating credits at age 11 when she claimed the National Junior title.

At age 13, she became the first female to land a double Lutz in competition.

Over the years, King added to her list of honors.

"You talk about Tiger Woods winning four majors in a year, Barbara Ann won five: Canadian, North American, European, World and Olympics," said Tom King of his wife.

King downplays all these records, saying simply, "I was in the right place at the right time."

She was definitely in the right place at the right time in St. Moritz, Switzerland, in 1948 when she became the first and only female Canadian singles competitor to win a gold medal in figure skating at the Fifth Olympic Winter Games.

Never one to let silly superstitions or naysayers affect her performance, King shrugged off the supposed jinx of a pre-Olympic *Time* magazine cover and the fact that her coach had drawn her number 13 in the competition lineup.

Even the pitted ice that had been ripped up by a prior hockey game didn't phase King as she skated her way to a gold medal and into the record books.

Many awards and honors followed that Olympic medal and King cherishes each and every one, displaying them with a mixture of humility and pride in her Amelia Island home.

There's even a Barbara Ann Scott doll in her collection, which includes memorabilia and photos with figure skating stars from teammate and fellow Olympian Dick Button to a more recent gold medal gathering including many champions such as Katarina Witt, Brian Boitano and Scott Hamilton.

It was after turning professional, skating with the Hollywood Ice Review in Chicago, that she met publicist Tom King, whom she married in 1955.

Although she gave up skating at that point, she continued to fuel her competitive spirit by showing horses, winning over 400 first-place ribbons.

Meanwhile, Tom King followed a musical course and recently released his 10th CD with his classical jazz band, The Royal Chicagoans, "One More Time Vol. X," featuring timeless hits like "I'm Glad There's You," "What is This Thing Called Love" and "Melancholy Baby." All proceeds from the CDs go to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and The Myelin Project.

He, too, cherishes his collection of memorabilia, including photos of Bob Hope and other top entertainers.

The two recently celebrated their 54th wedding anniversary and say they absolutely adore their island home.

"This is heaven on Earth," said Tom King. "This is our home forever."

Now honing her athletic prowess for her Olympic run, King has been doing speed walking "for about half a mile" in preparation.

"When they ask you do to this, they give you the option of walking, running, speed walking or even riding in a wheelchair."

"My 81-year old body keeps asking, 'What are you doing to me?'"

"She doesn't look 81," quipped Tom.

The still lovely ice queen replied with a beaming smile, "We have a mutual admiration society."

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