



THOSE DEPARTED . . .

Sonja Henie

On 12th October, Sonja HENIE died in the aeroplane which was taking her to Oslo. She was 57. The youngest participant in the Winter Games of Chamonix, she won the Olympic Crown in 1928 and kept it in 1932 and 1936.

Together with her husband Nils ONSTAD, she had compiled a collection of modern paintings which included works by Braque, Klee, Matisse, Miro, Picasso, Rouault. This collection, valued at 150,000 dollars, was given by the couple as a gift to the Oslo Museum.

The writer Jean FAYARD brought back memories of the Sonja of Andersen in "Le Figaro" (France). Let us quote what he says :

Yes, this story ends like a Hans Anderson fairy-tale. A pretty, blonde Norwegian girl, nicknamed by the world "the little ice-fairy", because she skated like a dream, made a fortune in America where at the end of her career she lived in peace. One day, suffering from an incurable illness, she was taken with this idea of returning to her native country and boarded a plane for Oslo. Her last, wish was not granted - she died in the sky.

This stroke of ill-luck was faithful to her legend. Immediately two or three generations brought to mind the slender white figure - she was always dressed in white - who revealed to them a new art, perhaps the eighth, that of dancing on ice. Doubtless graceful skaters had been seen before. People waltzed with casual grace round the Champs-Élysée's roundabout, at the time when little

girls were dreaming about Gigi. But Sonja HENIE invented something else, the real elements of dancing and skating, of the art and the sport, of beauty and prowess. It was no longer simply a question of grace or audacity. It meant doing difficult things gracefully, more and more difficult, ceaselessly battling against human capability. But giving the spectator the reassuring impression that they were easier and easier . . .

. . . In any case, fair Sonja HENIE disclosed to us a new sensation; she created a tradition which was to enchant generations.

As happens in all sports and techniques, this one has known continued advancement and the recent champions, the Carole HEISSES, Skouje DIJKSTRAS and Peggy FLEMINGS have raised the feats to a prodigious level.

But every time a skater amazes me more, I will think of the little fairy from the North who started it all.

* Harry MALLIN, Great Britain, one of the great figures in the history of British boxing, passed away on 10th November 1969 at the age of 88. After being Olympic Champion in the middle-weight category in 1920 and 1924, he then became a referee and coach. Five times holder of the title in this same category in the championships of the A.B.A., he thus established a record equaled only once by his brother, Fred MALLIN whom he coached. After 37 years of service in the police force he played an important part in the administration of amateur boxing.

* Julius SAARISTO, Finland, Olympic Javelin Champion - with two hands - an event which no longer exists - in the Stockholm Games of 1912, died at the age of 78 after a long illness.

* Jack TORRANCE, United States, holder of the world shot-putting record for 14 years (his best put was 17.40 metres) passed away on Saturday 12 November at Baton Rouge (Louisiana) after a heart attack. Since 1934 he was the best in the world. Even if now MATSON has established a new record far superior to the one set by Jack TORRANCE, with a put of 21.78 m. the memory of TORRANCE is still very much alive in the evolution of athletics.