

World skating competition gets more blahs than 'ahs'

By Cray Pixley
Sports Writer

Anyone who caught the World Figure Skating Championships this weekend were treated to a weary-lackluster rerun of the Winter Olympics.

There were the stale comparisons between Brian Boitano and Brian Orser.

There was the hype of a re-match between Katarina Witt and Debbie Thomas but this confrontation was a ghost of a battle.

The women seemed to have left part of their drive and vitality in Calgary.

Thomas, who finished a disappointing third in the Olympics, had a "golden opportunity" to redeem herself in front of Witt and the world.

Thomas skated well in the short program but faltered once again in the long program leaving Witt another world title.



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Sports viewpoint

The tragedy of Thomas' average performance was that on that night in Budapest, Hungary Witt was a very beatable competitor.

Witt had hoped for a climactic end to her skating career but it didn't happen.

Her performance in the long program was technically weaker compared to several other skaters such as Canada's Liz Manley and Japan's Midori Ito.

Witt had few triple jumps, a staple of a world champion, and large portions of her program were filled with double jumps.

Even her artistic quality was subdued, and her marks were not that high — plenty of room for a Thomas triumph.

Thomas did not triumph, in fact, she skated almost a copy of her Calgary performance which was not good enough.

The medal winners in Budapest were the same as the Olympic's. Thomas had to settle for her second bronze medal.

Witt won but she wasn't championship material that night.

Thomas is ready to put skating behind her, and who can blame her? She didn't take home the gold and there was no story-book ending.

There was little excitement in the women's competition at World's,

only a sense of fatigue.

The men's competition was actually the same except with a different man who should land the successful quadruple jump competition, but he was denied.

Boitano had long been the man who should land the quadruple as a sign-off for his competitive career.

If Boitano had been the successful land the quadruple, he would have had a stellar end to his career.

There was no quad for Boitano because a Canadian stole the medal — and not that Canadian.

The history-making Canadian skater name is little-known skater name — Browning.

Browning had tried a quadruple at the Olympics but had failed.

He didn't fail this time. Browning landed the quadruple in Calgary made the record books in place.

Not to say Boitano was a loser because he took the gold medal from Orser once again.

The World Championships are past, and a phase of skating is complete.

Orser, Boitano, Witt and Thomas are gone.

But new talent is visible in the form of Browning, Ito and others.

3 former JUCO stars will play in Final Four

MIDLAND (AP) — Three former Midland College teammates who played in the junior college version of the Final Four will now compete in the real thing.

Oklahoma's backcourt duo, Ricky Grace and Mookie Blaylock, and Kansas guard Lincoln Minor all transferred from Midland College, one of the nation's top JUCO programs.

The program that also produced the Atlanta Hawks' Spud Webb is a happy hunting ground for Division I scouts.

Midland Coach Reggie Franklin, who coached Grace, Blaylock and Minor as an assistant to former head coach Jerry Stone, said he urges his players to transfer to schools where they can make an immediate contribution.

"When you come from a junior college, you don't have time to sit on the bench. You need to go right in and start," said Franklin.

"They (Blaylock and Grace) just got on a great team with Oklahoma and have been able to contribute more than has Lincoln," who is often the first player off the Kansas bench.

In his second year playing for Sooner Coach Billy Tubbs, Grace is averaging 14.8 points per game and pulling down 3.6 rebounds.

The 6-foot-2 guard, who attended Dallas' Wilmer-Hutchins High School, sees more than 34 minutes of playing time per game and has 265 assists for the season.

Grace dished off a school-record 363 assists in his final year at Midland, breaking Webb's record.

Blaylock averages 16.7 points and 4.1 rebounds and also plays more than 34 minutes a game.

This season the 6-foot-1 Blaylock set an OU record with 141 steals, equalling his record-setting mark at Midland. He is just two shy of the NCAA season steals record, and his 13 steals against Centenary set an NCAA for most in a game.

Franklin said he knew Blaylock would be a top collegian the first time he saw him play at Garland High School.

"I guess you could say he's been a thief all his life," he said. "Now he's just getting more publicity for it."

Minor, averaging 4.9 points and 1.5 rebounds, has started 12 games for the Jayhawks. The 6-foot-3 product of Houston's Westfield High School averages 15.6 minutes of playing time.

Grace played on the 1984-85 Chaparral squad that finished fourth in the National Junior College Athletic Association tournament.

Minor and Blaylock led last season's team, which ended its 32-4 season with a 69-68 loss to Southern Idaho in the NJCAA final.

In 1985-86, the year the three played together, the Chaps had 33 victories without a loss until falling to eventual NJCAA champion San Jacinto College in the tournament's first round.

Wildcats purring from the attention coach anxious to go to Kansas City

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — The University of Arizona's first-ever trip to the Final Four is getting plenty of attention in Tucson.

So much in fact that Wildcats Coach Lute Olson says he will be glad when his second-ranked Wildcats leave Thursday for Kansas City, Mo., the site of the NCAA Tournament windup.

"Everybody is talking about the team," he said. "You pick up the paper, you turn on the TV, you see the Wildcats. It's definitely a focal point."

Arizona, 35-2, faces 34-3 Oklahoma in Saturday's semifinals. The Wildcats have been installed as 7-5 favorites to go on and win Monday night's title game.

"We've been saying all along our goal is to get to the Final Four," said senior center Tom Tolbert. "But obviously, if you say that, you want to win the whole thing. We know there

are two more games to play."

"Everybody is excited and everything," said All-America junior forward Sean Elliott. "But we still realize there are two games left and we still have our mind set on the national championship."

The team returned from the regionals in Seattle to a campus reception Sunday night at McKale Center with 9,000 screaming fans.

"The fans are going crazy right now. We can't go anywhere without people saying something about the (North Carolina) game or asking about the Final Four," said Elliott.

Or about Final Four tickets, which some people are asking up to \$4,000 each for in classified newspapers ads.

The hoopla should quiet down some — or will by Olson's design — once his team reaches Kansas City.

Olson took his Iowa team to the Final Four in 1980 at Indianapolis.

His Hawkeyes lost 80-72 in the finals to Louisville, which won the UCLA in the finals for the title.

"I felt that after that (1980) we didn't control the players as much as we should have. I had a few more things to happen. Iowa needed the exposure. The program wasn't where it is today."

"With this team, we don't do anything more than the NCAA wants us to do. Once we get there Thursday, we'll control it. We'll tell them when to go to eat, when to go to the bus, when to go to bed."

That's the way it's been when we're on the road and the big thing. I don't want to be any different than I've been all year long in terms of preparation."

K-State's Kruger bows out of UT job hunt

AUSTIN (AP) — University of Texas Athletic Director DeLoss Dodds said Wednesday that Lon Kruger of Kansas State University has asked UT to remove his name from the list of possible candidates for the head basketball coaching job.

Several newspapers reported that Kruger had been or would be offered the job.

Dodds, in a statement, said Wednesday that Kruger had visited the UT campus on Tuesday.

"We had a discussion. There was no job offer, and he has asked us to remove his name from any consideration," Dodds said.

Reports linking Kruger with

Texas surfaced after he led the Wildcats to the NCAA Midwest Regional final before losing to Kansas on Sunday.

Dodds said Kruger had been in Austin only one other time before Tuesday and wanted to see the Erwin Center, where the Longhorns play, and other facilities.

Asked if he had been offered the job, Kruger told the *Austin American-Statesman*, "I'll visit with you later," then boarded an airplane at 10:20 p.m. Tuesday for the trip back to Manhattan, Kan.

Kansas State Athletic Director Larry Travis said he was aware that Kruger was going to talk to Texas

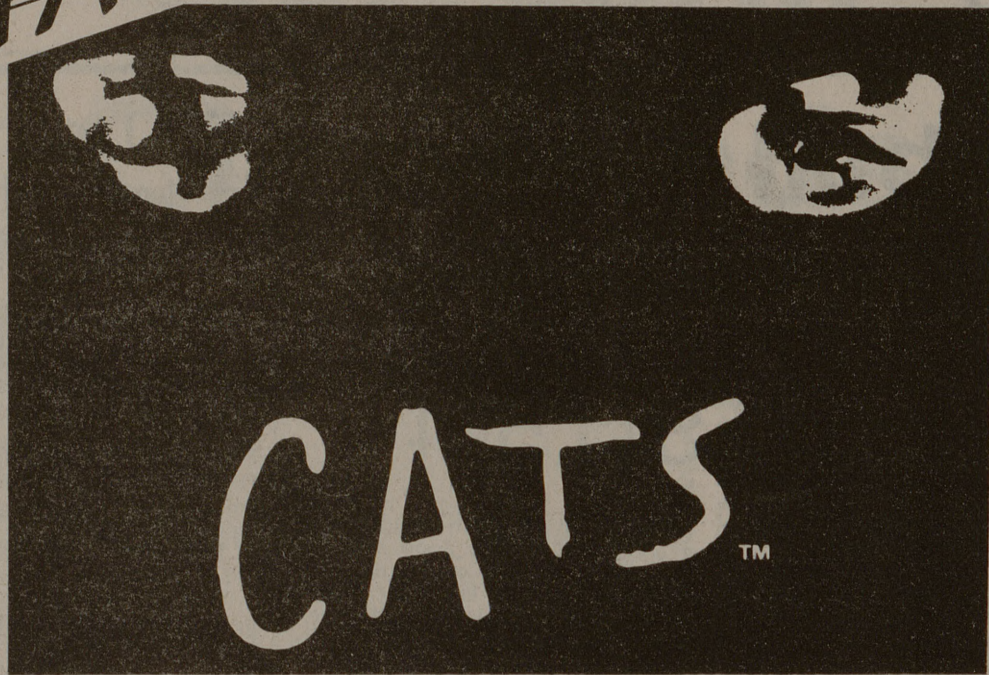
because Dodds asked permission. "I don't resent anything," said. "That's part of the job. We're going to do everything to keep him here."

Former Texas Coach Bob Lich, who was fired March 1987, about \$74,000 in base salary and total package of \$100,000.

Kruger, who makes \$50,000 a year, has discussed a contract extension and possible raise with Travis.

The *Daily Texan*, student newspaper at UT, quoted Kruger's salary was "not an issue." Kruger starred at point guard for Kansas State in the 1970s.

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