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Frozen In Time: The Enduring Legacy Of The 1961 U.S. Figure Skating Team



Synopsis

On February 15, 1961, all 18 members of the U.S. World Figure Skating Team were killed in a plane crash, along with 16 coaches, officials, and family members. *Frozen in Time* takes readers inside the lives of the young skaters who died in the crash, revealing their friendships, romances, rivalries, sacrifices, and triumphs. The dramatic focus lingers on two families of powerful women: the Owens and the Westerfelds. Maribel Owen, the most famous woman in figure skating at the time, relentlessly drives her two young daughters--pairs champion Mara and the spectacular Laurence, who graced the cover of *Sports Illustrated* on the day she died. Myra Westerfeld, meanwhile, loses her marriage while guiding her daughters Sherri and Steffi to the pinnacle of the sport. Along with the bittersweet personal stories, author Nikki Nichols recounts the U.S. skating program's lengthy struggle to rebuild after this devastating accident.

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Customer Reviews

As the U.S. Figure Skating team prepares take center ice at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, competitive figure skater and journalist Nichols takes a soft look at the sport's pivotal moment in this reverential tribute to the 18 skaters (plus friends, family and coaches) who died in 1961 when their plane crashed en route to the world championships in Prague, eliminating the U.S.'s hope for a successful 1964 Winter Olympics and setting into motion a rebuilding process that rushed young skaters into the top echelons of international competition. Nichols's account of the rivalry between Laurence Owen, the daughter of Olympic figure skater Maribel Vinson who appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* the very week of the crash, and Stephanie Westerfeld (both died in the crash) is

the extent of scandal readers can expect to encounter here. Nichols does little to disguise her admiration for the team and is primarily concerned with maintaining a legacy, perhaps explaining her naïf and timid writing. Skating enthusiasts will want to add this to the shelf. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A heartbreaking tribute to the athletes who were lost as well as an inspiring tale of resilience in the face of tragedy, FROZEN IN TIME documents the survival of American figure skating through its darkest hour. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I watched an episode of air crash disasters featuring the doomed Sabena flight. Wanting to learn more, I bought this book. Generally speaking, it was informative & quite astounding to see how much the sport has changed in terms of aesthetic—especially being an 80s/90s kid. Only 30 years had passed at that time! What I disliked was the speculation. On one hand, okay, the author is trying to bring the skaters & coaches to life, but it's so hollow, I found it to be a distraction. Focusing on facts, as opposed to trying to turn it in to some kind of novel, would have been a better way to go. This book could also use some editing, especially during the latter half. I came away learning a lot about figure skating, but feel no closer to knowing or understanding the 'characters,' which is a disappointment. Having been a competitive swimmer & equestrian, I didn't need to be reminded time after time of the hours one puts in to become a champion. Even assuming one knew nothing of the sort, assuming they're of even average intelligence, they'll catch on. Finally, the way the author chose to write of Sonja Henie came off as passive aggressive, at best. At worst, it almost seems like there's a strange personal vendetta. The author appears to go out of her way to make the woman sound as shallow & obnoxious as she possibly can. I had to go & look up further articles just to get around the bias. In the end, rather than creating a portrait of a woman who was, in many ways, a true pioneer in business, she brushes her off as a Hollywood celebutant... as in, if Paris Hilton could ice skate, that's about the profile created. I'll leave it up to you if you'd like to learn more about Sonja Henie & her career, but the number of mentions (& where they come in at times) is just rather odd. All in all, I'm glad I read it & learned about the history of the sport, but to be completely candid, if you want to really know about the people, I'm not sure this is the best resource. Much too speculative & questionable to have any idea about just how these people thought/behaved in real life. If anyone has a rec for something more focused on getting to know the skaters, please let me know.

For someone who only learned of this tragic event from a recent interest in figure skating, it was a very interesting and informative book. Excellent use of connecting key players with great detail that brings their humanness to the forefront and reminds you of such a sad loss of talent and life. The use of pictures and quotes really adds to the book. Such a sad thing. I had read about it in other books briefly and wanted more information which I did receive with this book.

"Frozen in Time" is a well researched and well written look at the entire U.S. Skating team that was killed in a 1961 plane crash in Brussels. Author Nikki Nichols focuses mostly on the Owen family (nine time National Champion Maribel Vinson Owen and her daughters, "Little Maribel" and newly crowned National Champion, 16 year old Laurence) and Stephanie Westerfield, Laurence's closest rival and her sister Sharon. The book also gives insight into what skating was like at that time, with detailed explanations of elements such as school figures which are no longer included in competitions and the different competitions themselves, including the North American Championships which no longer exists. Finally, the book also talks about the devastating affect the deaths had on family members left behind as well as how the deaths forever changed the United States figure skating program. Although I was just a baby when it happened, I'm a long time figure skating fan and I grew up hearing about the plane crash and wondered what had happened. This long overdue remembrance is a poignant read and by the end readers will feel as if they knew each skater. Nikki Nichols intersperses the history of skating with her narration, including the fact that 1961 was the first time Nationals was shown on television (although on tape, not live). Nichols also compares skating then to skating now and skating fans probably won't be too surprised to learn that even back in 1961 Maribel Owen was fighting corrupt judges. The book is full of pictures and many of them are haunting, such as the team posing for pictures on the steps of the doomed plane; a burnt skate; the charred copy of Sports Illustrated with Laurence Owen on the cover; and the ever present smile of Laurence. If the book falters anywhere, it's when Nichols tries to imagine what the atmosphere on the doomed plane was. Of course, no one can know what conversations took place on the flight and Nichols valiant attempt doesn't work and tends to be over dramatic. I also wish the section dealing with the rebuilding of the U.S. Skating team had been a bit longer. Still, these minor flaws shouldn't keep anyone from reading this excellent book.

One of the most tragic moments in sports history was the shocking death of the U.S. Figure Skating Team en route to the 1961 World Championships in Prague. The sadness of this devastating

incident has been retold in many books, as well as the aftermath that paved the way for the creation of the U.S. Figure Skating Memorial Fund. What's beautiful about this book is that it masterfully touches upon the lives of many of the members of that '61 team, goes behind the scenes and shows us their many triumphs and tragedies before the crash, while also glimpsing at those who just missed being on the fatal flight. You'll learn about skating's first family (the Owens), two devoted sisters (the Westerfelds) and the pressures that went with the first televised U.S. championships. The upper echelons of the figure skating world dwell in a very closed circle - private and proud, reserved and yet scarred by this incredibly horrible moment. The sensitivity of the writer will touch every skating fan in what may be one of the 10 best written sports books of the year.

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