

The Living Room Times

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HUMAN OLYMPIC UPDATE

Flawless!

Nancy Kerrigan in first place after virtually perfect performance in technical competition

Lillehammer, Norway- HAMAR, Norway (AP) -- Nancy Kerrigan came out of her final whirl tonight with a dazzling smile of triumph. Sitting in the shadows in a VIP booth high above the ice, a grim Tonya Harding could only clap along with everyone else.

Harding had just seen nearly any chance of a medal disappear.

Skating in a crisp, black-and-white outfit to music written by one of her choreographers, Kerrigan turned in an elegant, nearly perfect performance to take first place in the technical portion of the figure skating competition.

The judges scored her from 5.6 to 5.9 out of 6.0 for the required elements and for presentation.

Oksana Baiul of Ukraine was second, and France's Surya Bonaly was third.

For all the excitement surrounding Harding, her

performance early in the evening matched her music, "Much Ado About Nothing." She skated with little inspiration, stumbling on her crucial first jump and wobbling on another.

By the end of the night, Harding was in 10th place.

"You can't be perfect every time," Harding said. "I was happy with it."

The judges seemed fair to her, despite all the worries they might mark her down because of her alleged role in the attack on Kerrigan. Harding's scores put her in second position behind 1984 and 1988 gold medalist Katarina Witt, with Kerrigan and 18 others yet to skate.

But one by one, the top skaters moved ahead of Harding.

She had no chance for gold even before Kerrigan skated, and when Kerrigan was done, Harding's shot at any medal had just about vanished.

Sitting behind glass in the VIP box, Harding clapped without enthusiasm.

The short program, 2 minutes and 40 seconds, can't guarantee a medal, but it can knock a skater out of contention. That's what happened to Brian Boitano in the men's short program, which is worth one-third of the total score.

The long program on Friday night is Harding's strength, a chance for her to launch into her trademark triple axel -- the one jump no other woman will try.

But she'd have to land that a couple of times -- and everyone ahead of her would have to fall down -- to have a chance for a medal.

"I'm looking forward to Friday," Harding said. Asked when she'll feel satisfied, she replied: "When I have a gold medal around my neck, that's when I'll feel like I've achieved what I came here for."

She had no complaints about her scoring, saying, "All I want is to be treated fairly."

More than 100 million Americans and a billion more viewers around the world were expected to watch the most provocative drama in Olympic history.

Harding pressed her hands together in prayer before skating and wore the same flashy, red-sequined halter-top costume she had on at the U.S. championships in Detroit the day after Kerrigan was clubbed on the knee.

Loud cheers greeted her when she was announced, and not a single boo or catcall was heard. Instead, there were signs of support: "USA Loves Tonya & Nancy," "Go for the gold, Tonya," and high in the stands: "Frank Loves You, Tonya."

"The crowd was wonderful and the ice felt great," Harding said. "There was a lot of support out there. I didn't see the signs but I saw lots of flags."

At the end, about 20 bouquets were tossed onto the ice for Harding.

Harding smiled in relief when she left the ice. Except

for a few sneezes, she sat passively while awaiting her scores on the "Kiss and Cry" couch: 4.8 to 5.3 required elements, 5.3 to 5.6 for presentation.

Asked how she felt about finally performing in these Games, Harding said: "I think it'll hit me after the whole thing's over. I think about this as just another competition. I mean, I know it's not, but I try to focus on it like that.

"That's what helps you make it through. And then when this is all over, then I'll say, like, 'Wow, I'm really here.'"

During a week of workouts, Harding never completed her routine without stopping after a mistake.

Tonight, she had to skate cleanly as well as overcome two hurdles: the possible prejudice of some judges against her because of the attack on Kerrigan, and a general bias toward skaters who emphasize elegance over sheer jumping ability.



International skating officials met with the Olympic judges Tuesday, reminding them to focus only on the skating.

Kerrigan arrived at the arena more than an hour after Harding went on. She didn't want to bump into Harding tonight. In fact, she hoped that by the time she got there, Harding would be gone from the premises.

But Harding didn't oblige, staying around to watch other performers to the end.

Inside the rink, 6,000 lucky fans had tickets to this most curious chapter in Olympic history. Security was tighter than for any other event at these Games, with a force of about 200. Police guarded the "Kiss and Cry" area and locker room doors.

The competition ends on Friday night, but the drama continues with a grand jury investigation of Harding in Portland, Ore., and a disciplinary hearing by U.S. figure skating officials in March.

	
Nancy Kerrigan skates, 2-23-94	Tonya Harding skates, 2-23-94

Above: Double-click to hear the call from CBS Radio of today's figure skating