

France & Mills

Josie - Feb. 29, 1960

Josie France and Paul Mills know what it feels like to be on top of the world. In March, 1977 the Preston Figure Skating Club pair won the world junior pairs championship at Megeve, France.

The world title capped off a meteoric rise to the top for France, who began her figure skating career in earnest just five years earlier, at the relatively old age of nine. Her coach at the time was Barb Leitch.

Almost from the beginning France was paired with Sheffield native Paul Mills, a young skater who was a couple years older. She had joined the Preston club after being exposed to skating by her brothers.

Mills and France hit their stride almost immediately; they were third at the sectionals, divisionals and nationals by 1974 in novice pairs, and the following year they placed second in the same category at the nationals.

In 1976 they made no mistake, winning the novice Canadian title. The following year they moved up to the junior division, finishing second in both the sectionals and divisionals.

France, who liked watching skating on television, had one day commented to her mother that perhaps she could win a world title.

Many people can say that, but few ever make it happen. France, who also enjoyed skating singles, was fourth overall — third in figures, and fourth in free skate — in the novice singles competition at the nationals that year.

As good as she was in singles in 1977, she and Mills shone when they skated together. Now coached by Kerry Leitch, they put it all together for the Canadian championships, capturing the gold medal and earning the right to represent Canada at the world championships in France.

Not surprisingly, after winning the world title, Mills and France were named Tim Turow Cambridge athlete of the year winners.

The pair had been a magical combination on the ice with their distinctive artistry, their almost intuitive feel for the music, and the fact that both were exceptionally strong free skaters and excellent jumpers.

But for France, reaching the pinnacle would be her last hurrah.

She retired soon afterward.

“I had had a few bad falls and once the fear factor comes in, the trust goes,” said France.

Mills, though, continued to skate, returning to the world championships with partner Leanne Jackson of Brantford.

Mills left the area but France, now with the surname of Jamieson, stayed in town. Today she credits her parents and her family for helping her reach her goal. “My mom worked part time to keep me on skates and my dad was always there to support me, as were my brothers and sisters, all of whom made sacrifices and made a big difference.”

As for their world title, France calls it the culmination of their goals. “To achieve it was a dream come true.”



Inducted 1997