

An english skater's reflections in Switzerland

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **SBB Revue = Revue CFF = Swiss federal railways**

Band (Jahr): **5 (1931)**

Heft 11

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-780710>

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AN ENGLISH SKATER'S REFLECTIONS IN SWITZERLAND

It is no exaggeration, but sober truth, to say that Switzerland stands supreme among all the countries of the world in the skater's affections.

I write as one who has travelled far in three continents and skated in various lands. What first brought me to Switzerland was a post-tropical search for health, made on my Oxford doctor's advice, and no words of mine can sufficiently express my gratitude to this domain of pure air, radiant sun, virgin snow, and perfect ice.

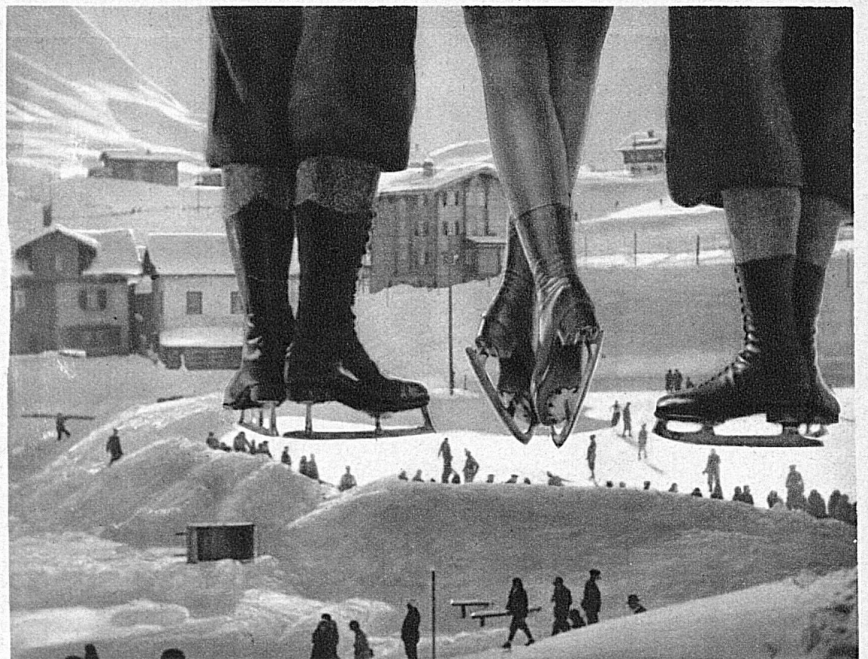
For the last of these good gifts we skaters are indebted to man as well as to Nature. The smooth, level surface that we cut up day after day — some of us with utter ruthlessness, some of us with careful scrutiny of turns and traces — is made for our use night after night by human skill as well as by the magic touch of Frost. Thirty years' experience lies behind those splendid rinks that Mr. Jacomini fashions at St. Moritz, and at Grindelwald the tradition of rink-making is so zealously fostered that winter by winter more than a hundred men go out from that one village alone to make rinks far and wide.

Next to these delightful conditions — and, indeed, equal to them in importance for anybody who regards skating as a serious art, not merely a pleasant means of spending leisure hours — comes expert teaching. Now and then a genius arises who reaches, self-taught, the highest levels of achievement. Mr. Ulrich Salchow, ten times Champion Figure Skater of the World, never had a lesson, nor had Mr. Gillis Grafström, the greatest amateur of our day, World Champion repeatedly and three times Olympic Champion too. But most mortals, destined or not for such Olympian heights, need the best instruction that they can get. Here, again, Switzerland's position is unrivalled. For just as nearly all the leading skaters of the world are usually to be seen here in the course of the winter, so most of the great teachers of skating are drawn hither in the pursuit of their calling.

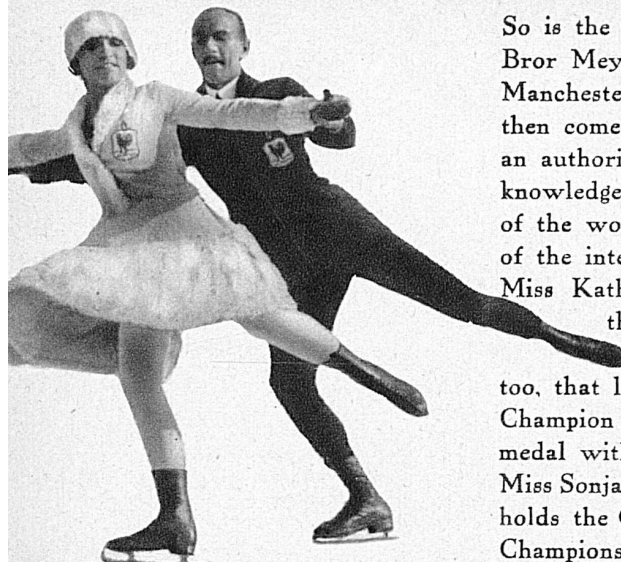
The Swedish school is dominant, and that is a fortunate circumstance, because the Swedish school stands for the classical tradition in its purest form. Mr. Salchow is a Swede. Mr. Grafström is a Swede.



Festival on the new Skating Rink at St. Moritz

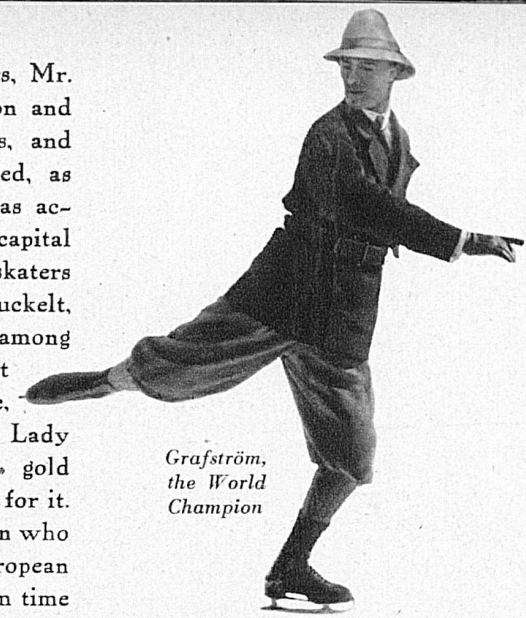


Three Pairs of skates standing at ease



The French Couple Joly-Brunet, Figure Skaters, Olympian Champions

So is the foremost of professional instructors, Mr. Bror Meyer, who usually skates in London and Manchester before the Swiss season begins, and then comes to St. Moritz. St. Moritz, indeed, as an authoritative writer in «The Times» has acknowledged, may claim to be the skating capital of the world. Our most prominent English skaters of the international style — Miss Ethel Muckelt, Miss Kathleen Shaw, and Mr. J. F. Page among them — almost invariably spend part of the winter there. It was there, too, that last winter Miss Maribel Vinson, Lady Champion of the U. S. A., took the «Swiss» gold medal with the highest marks ever awarded for it. Miss Sonja Henie, the gifted young Norwegian who holds the Olympic, the World, and the European Championships for Ladies, is seen there from time



Grafström, the World Champion

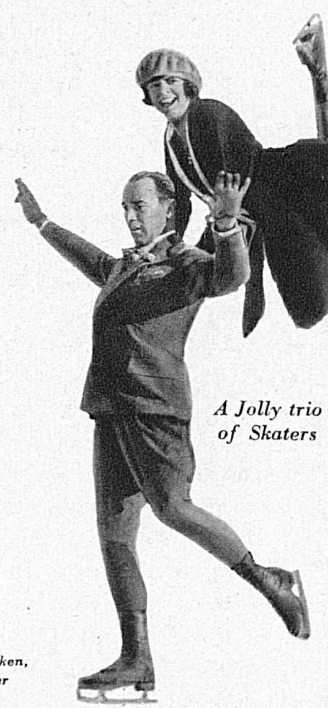


to time. So are some of the most accomplished of the Viennese skaters, such as Miss Fritz Burger and Miss Hilde Holovski, besides the champion skaters of Belgium, France, Germany and Hungary. Mr. Grafström himself skates there a good deal, and at Davos, though on occasion he has felt it necessary to practise his exquisite art at a lower altitude and has therefore gone to Villars. This winter the Olympic contests are to be held in America, but it is still hoped that many of these brilliant performers may be seen in Switzerland before they cross the Atlantic.

The growth of indoor rinks at home — there must now be about a score in England and Scotland — has both met a demand and helped to create one. In the nature of things, indoor skating can never be more than a second best, but the rinks at home bring ice-skating within the constant reach of great numbers of people who would otherwise snatch only such rare opportunities as the vagaries of an ordinary English winter afford.



A masterly pose on the point of the skate



A Jolly trio of Skaters

Phot. Niedecken, Meerkämper



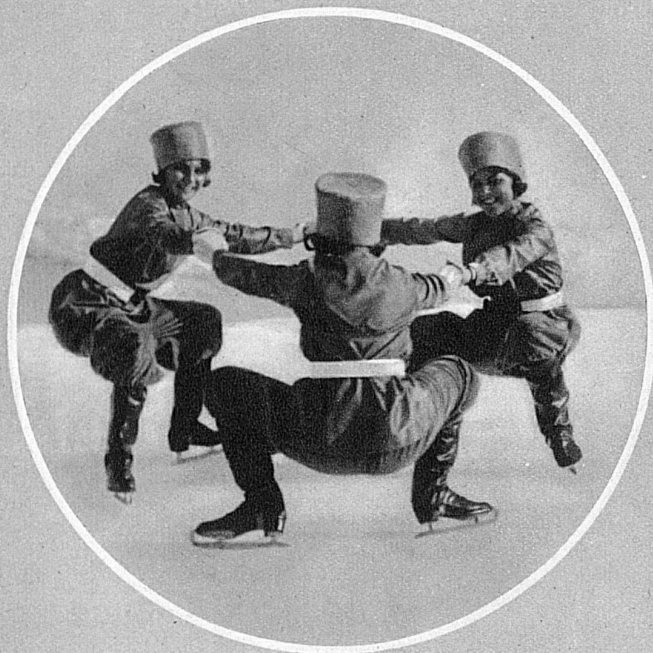
Sonja Henje,
the World
Champion

Happily, full rinks at home do not imply empty rinks in Switzerland, even in the exceptionally difficult circumstances of the present winter, but rather such a development of interest in skating that Switzerland itself should sooner or later benefit from them. Indeed, the Swiss season is now appreciably lengthened by the opening of the fine rink at Zürich, where excellent ice is artificially produced in the open air. It should be acknowledged also that the classical tradition is worthily upheld by Swiss instructors, and notably by Mr. Alfred Mégros, who was formerly Champion of Switzerland and has since taught at several Swiss centres, including Montana and Caux, as well as in London.

What we English skaters need to do, now that we have so many more opportunities of practice,



The Hungarian Lady Skater
Kolowsky



is to strive after a higher general level of performance. It takes long and patient effort to make a skater. One may learn enough in a few days to get round the rink with intense enjoyment, and presently one may be waltzing whenever the band strikes up. For many folk who come to Switzerland the waltz is the pinnacle of ambition. Yet the real skater is primarily concerned with his school-figures, and it is of the first importance that even the simplest of them should be thoroughly mastered — and sedulously practised long after that mastery is won. Our early faults of style pursue us all through our skating life. They are best avoided by taking first-rate professional instruction from the very start.

But what the beginner should learn before ever he puts on his skates at all, are two little, though highly important, rules of skating etiquette. First, that we never wantonly cut across another skater's figure. Secondly, that we never smoke on the ice, for tobacco ash ruins it.

C. J.



Phot. Fuchs,
Steiner



The Belgian
Champion
Mme de Ligne