

(Part One of Contemporary Overseas-Filipino History)

Remember when Philippine sporting officials tried to field a team of Filipino ice skaters and ice skiers in the Winter Olympics in the 1980s? At first the Winter Olympics officials laughed so hard. But they were forced to accept a Filipino ice-skiing team, which failed miserably at the winter games. Ice skaters from a tropical country? The Filipino athletes were shades of the now-infamous Jamaican toboggan team fielded in the Winter Olympics. At least the Jamaican team became the subject of an American beer commercial.

(Editor's Notes: This article was originally published in the Yimby.com in April 2001. It resulted from the discussions then in the Mayon eGroup, an online discussion group of Overseas Bicolanos. Its moderator, Angie Shreckengaust, started the discussion about this topic. The Mayon eGroup's Romy Molina, then the president of the Bikol Society of Austria

, and Tom Martires, provided additional data. Then this writer came up with a consolidated report.)

Well, well, the world will laugh no more at the Filipino (actually, Filipino-American and Overseas-Filipino) prowess in ice skating and figure skating. Who knows, someday there may be Filipino champions in downhill (skiing) contests and even in toboggan races?

Angie Shreckengaust reported a young Filipino-American winner of the junior nationals of the United States Figure Skating Championships. Then Romy Molina reported that there is a Filipino-Austrian star in figure skating in Europe. Then upon further research Angie reported too of a Filipino-American member of a

United States

Olympic ice-dance team in 1998. She reported also of a Filipino-American world champion in figure skating, who Tom Martires confirmed to be a scion of a family from the Bicol Region in the Philippines

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Joan Cristobal

Angie Shreckengaust reported an article in the Silicon Valley Magazine about the "Ten People to Watch in Silicon Valley." The article featured a young Filipino-American girl in the field of sports.

Here are some excerpts from the Silicon Valley Magazine about this young Filipino-American star on the ice rink:

QUOTE.

It really didn't hit her until a couple nights later. Joan Cristobal was in bed, staring at the ceiling in a failed attempt to fall asleep when she suddenly sat up. A sensation of blood rushing through her body engulfed Cristobal as she allowed herself to ponder this realization: I just won junior nationals!

In mid-January, just days before her 16th birthday, Cristobal stunned the field by winning the division at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Boston . . . Cristobal, who possesses a smooth fluidity on the ice that can't be taught, had placed a respectable fifth in the novice category a year earlier.

But beneath a facade of graceful calm, Cristobal was racked with self-doubt and fear that was caused . . . by an unrealistic quest for perfection.

"Hiding my nervousness has always been the hardest part for me," says Cristobal, whose parents emigrated from the Philip pines .

"Finally my coach (Kevin Peeks) sat me down and told me, 'You're great, so stop worrying about how you look out there' . . ."

That explains how Cristobal, who started skating at age seven, officially has added her name to the list of America's young skaters who are vying to become the next Michelle Kwan, America's reigning queen of the ice.

"Joan's reached an elite level, and it couldn't happen to a nicer girl," Peeks adds. "She's very sweet" . . .

Figure skating is a sport where young women-girls, really-can burst onto the scene quickly. But they also can disappear just as fast. Cristobal, who has a long-range goal of competing in the 2006 Olympics in Turin, Italy, makes it clear she intends to be on the sport's cutting edge for years to come. UNQUOTE.

To get an update about Joan Cristobal, please visit <http://www.inno>

vativestars.com/joan/index2.htm

Jubilee Jenna Mandl

Romy Molina in turn sent his posting about the Austrian national champion for figure skating who is half-Filipino. She is Jubilee Jenna Mandl.

Jubilee Jenna Mandl was the 1998 and 1999 figure-skating champion in Austria. She won her two titles at ages 13 and 14, making her the youngest-ever national champion in the history of Austrian figure skating. She won also the European Criterium five times in a row.

To read about the latest information on Ms. Mandl, please go to <http://www.isufs.org/bios/isufs00003538.htm>

Elizabeth Punsalan-Swallow

Angie Shreckengaust then told of Elizabeth Punsalan-Swallow.

QUOTE.

As one half of the U.S. Olympic ice dance team in 1998, Elizabeth Punsalan knows what it's like to be running hot and cold. Although they didn't win a medal that year, she and partner-husband Jerod Swallow electrified the crowd with their tricky maneuvers and graceful choreography on the ice.

The product of a Filipino father and an Irish American mother, Punsalan grew up the youngest of five children in Sheffield Lake, Ohio. All of them were introduced to ice skating, but it was Punsalan who carried it to the next level. At 14, she caught the eye of Detroit, Michigan, coach Sandra Hess, who turned her on to pair skating. In 1988, Punsalan won the Junior National Championships with then-partner Shawn Rettstatt. At 18, she began skating with Swallow, whom she had already known for four years. A year later, they started dating and in 1993, they were married.

In 1994, the pair earned a place on the U.S. Winter Olympics team. But two weeks before they were set to leave for the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, tragedy struck. Her brother Ricardo, who had a history of substance abuse and mental illness, stabbed their father to death in his sleep. Punsalan ended up going to Norway, as she believed her father would have wanted. But the pair took a spill in their free dance and finished in 15th place. Punsalan took their dismal showing in wry stride. "Years from now, we'll tell our kids we made it to the Olympics," she says, "We had a great time and we skated like crap."

No matter what they do next, Punsalan and her husband will have blazed a trail for the next generation of ice-dance skaters, having fought passionately for recognition of ice dance in the United States . UNQUOTE.

To read the latest on Ms. Elizabeth, please visit <http://www.caretoicedance.com/punswa.html>

Tai Babilonia

There's also Tai Babilonia, another Filipina who made it big although she's hardly written about nowadays, probably because

her fame came circa 1979. Angie Shreckengaust said that she became a champion in World Figure Skating.

Here's Tai Babilonia's official website: <http://tb-rg.freesevers.com/bio.htm>

Angie Shreckengaust said that Tai Babilonia is definitely of Filipino lineage. She remembered watching a television movie about Tai Babilonia's life a few years back.

Tom Martires, another Mayon eGroup member, confirmed that "Babilonia is not just a Filipina but a Bicolana." Her paternal grandparents are from Baao, Camarines Sur, which is also Tom's hometown. Tom said that he met her grandfather at a recent "Baao town fiesta" held in a California city.

So there readers, thanks to Angie Shreckengaust, Romy Molina and Tom Martires of the Mayon eGroup, Filipinos -- especially Filipino Americans and Overseas Filipinos -- can now legitimately say that they and their descendants can really skate on ice. Who says that the Philippines is a tropical country? Can the world expect soon a Filipino star in ice hockey? # # #

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