

# Skater searches for elusive national titles

By C.J. Risaak  
staff writer

Roller skater Stacey Patton has had her share of hard knocks in the past year — some physical, others emotional.

The 16-year-old Bloomfield Hills resident returned Monday after competing in the U.S. Roller Skating Championships in Ft. Worth, Texas, Aug. 6-16. But in both the events she competed in — juniors dancing pairs and sophomore figures — she failed to do as well as she had hoped.

"I kind of messed up my first figures routine," said Patton, who will start her senior year at Bloomfield Hills Lahser next month. "The next two I did really well, but it wasn't enough."

She didn't qualify for the national figures finals after placing second in the state and third in the regionals. Patton fared better in dancing, combining with partner Ron Elaps of Lapeer to take fourth.

But even that event proved to be disappointing. Another first-place vote by one of the five judges would have vaulted them into first, and a third-

place vote instead of a fourth would have put them in second.

**STILL, THE EMOTIONAL** letdown after nationals didn't compare with the physical problems Patton endured last year. She remembered the exact date — May 14, 1980 — when she nearly lost more than just a shot at a national roller-skating title.

While skating down the road in front of her home with a dog tethered to a leash, she tumbled. She still can't recall exactly what happened or how she managed to walk to the house with an injury later diagnosed as a fractured skull.

"She was in intensive care for 36 hours," her mother, Laurene Patton, said. The injury forced Stacey to miss the state, regional and national competitions last year, but did not hamper her this year.

"She's a very, very lucky girl," her mother said.

Luck, Laurene Patton said, is an important element in winning a national title. She could be considered an expert on the subject, since she combined some luck with a lot of skill to win seven straight singles freestyle national championships from 1947 to 1953.

**LAURENE PATTON'S** last four titles, all in the seniors' division, still stand as a record today.

Roller skating is a Patton family passion. Bud Patton, Tracey's father, competed four times in the nationals between 1949 and 1952. Greig Patton, Tracey's older brother, won national freshman figure and dance championships in 1975.

The family business? What else but owning and operating the Rolladium Skating Arena in Waterford, a business built by Laurene Patton's father, Tony Anselmi, 30 years ago.

Stacey qualified for the junior world class competition in dance but compet-

ed in the sophomore division in figures this year. Next year, she will be in world class in dance, the sport's highest division, and junior world class in figures.

Like most world class athletes, Stacey spends countless hours practicing. On most days she has a three- to four-hour session, except when dance coach Jack Burton is in town.

Burton, a former national champion, files in from New York to tutor Stacey about once a month. His workouts, Stacey said, can last between eight and 10 hours a day.

**WHEN BURTON** isn't around, Laurene Patton coaches her daughter in dance. Bud Patton is full-time instructor for Stacey in figures.

The roller-skating season starts in September and lasts all year, with nationals in August and world competition in September. Stacey doesn't begin training heavily for the season until November and will normally compete in three or four invitationals a year.

Her ambition is to make it to the nationals and finish high enough to qualify for world competition. Although many of the roller-skating routines are similar to ice skating, roller skating is not an Olympic sport, so the world championships are the sport's biggest event.

Stacey has another important goal in life, the same that convinced her brother to drop out of roller skating.

"I really want to go to college," Stacey said. She has a 3.2 grade-point average at Lahser, is a cheerleader and a member of the student council.

Combining college with skating might not be possible, Stacey said, but there are circumstances in which she might do so.

"It all depends on how I do next year," she said. "Unless I do really well in dance, I'll probably quit after next year."



Despite her avowed ambition for a national roller-skating title, Stacey Patton has other goals, like getting a college education.



DICK KELLEY/staff photographer

Stacey Patton shows the form that has made her a world-class roller-skating athlete.

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