

Harding claims she was abducted

■ **SKATER:** The police are taking the matter seriously, even though the report of abduction is unusual

The Associated Press

PORTLAND — Tonya Harding says she foiled an abduction attempt early Wednesday by ramming her truck into a tree and running away from a bushy-haired man who tried to commandeer her vehicle.

The figure skater told police that the man abducted her outside her home and forced her to drive to a rural area. She said she dodged him in a chase through the woods, then jumped back in her truck and took off.

Aside from a slap mark on her face, Harding was unharmed.

Clackamas County sheriff's deputies, who have responded to Harding's calls for help before, said they were taking the matter seriously.

"We'll treat it at face value and investigate it just as we would investigate anybody, but at the same time, this type of report is unusual," said sheriff's spokesman Damon Coates.

"I have no reason to think it's false at this point, but it would be a poor investigation not to look at that."

The abduction report came the same day the U.S. Figure Skating Championships began in Nashville, Tenn., and 10 days before Harding's skating comeback — a three-minute exhibition program in Reno, Nev.

Harding has been banned for life from amateur competition for her role in the 1994 attack on her Olympic rival, Nancy Kerrigan, at the U.S. Championships. Harding pleaded guilty to conspiring to cover up the attack, in which Ker-

rigan was whacked on the knee.

A judge placed Harding on three years' probation, fined her \$110,000 and ordered her to serve 500 hours of community service.

Harding could not comment on Wednesday's incident because of exclusive media contracts related to her Feb. 22 performance at Reno's Flamingo Hilton, said her agent, David Hans Schmidt.

"There's no abduction preclusion in the contracts. I might have to put that in from now on; God only knows," Schmidt said.

Harding provided this account to police:

She had spent the evening at the Lost and Found Saloon, where Harding performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation last October on an elderly woman who collapsed while playing video poker.

After arriving home in suburban Oak Grove, Harding walked out to her truck for some cigarettes and saw a man tinkering under the hood of another vehicle outside the house.

The man told her, "You're going to take me where I need to go," and forced her to go inside to get her keys. He waited for her in the doorway.

Then she drove for about 30 minutes south to the Mulino area with a metal object pressed to her face and her eyes looking forward, as she was instructed. At one point, he slapped her face when she offered to stop and let him out.

Then the man told her to stop on a dirt road.

Instead, she bumped the tree, grabbed the keys and ran. As the man ran behind her, she hid in some brush before darting back to her truck.

Once back within cell-phone

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—Damon Coates
Clackamas Sheriff Spokesman

range, she called her boyfriend, who called police at 1:51 a.m.

Deputies had Harding retrace the route and found a fresh dent on a tree about the height of her truck's bumper. There was no sign of the man.

Over the years, police have responded to numerous calls from Harding.

While fighting to maintain her spot on the 1994 U.S. Olympic team, Harding told Beaverton police that she was assaulted one night while walking through a park.

In May 1995, Harding reported she was tailing a car driven by a man she said had been stalking her.

No one was arrested in either incident.

Schmidt agreed that his client has attracted some unsavory characters.

"It goes with the turf," Schmidt said. "It all surrounds everything that happened in 1994 and the follow. Security is something we're going to sit down and refocus. There [are] a lot of weird people in this world, and one of them accosted her last night."

Although Harding's face was mildly swollen from her attacker's slap, Schmidt said "nothing is going to prohibit her from her return debut at the Flamingo Hilton."

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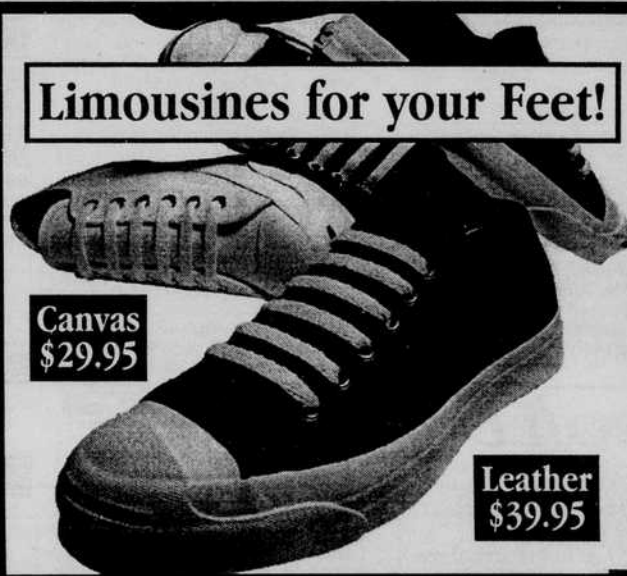
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Brown has been replaced by Rick Gamez, an eight-year head coaching veteran, most recently at New Mexico State, who has compiled a 305-145 overall record.

Stahl, the Ducks' career leader in runs scored, doubles, triples, home runs and walks, and led the team in all offensive categories last season, is replaced in the field by freshman Jill Robinson. But it will take an entire team effort to replace Stahl's offensive numbers.

Returning notables from last year's team include second baseman Angie LeRoy, left fielder Missy Koke, pitchers Petrina Martinez and Jennie Cook and center fielder Melisa Lemke, who sat out last season with a knee injury.

Also returning this year is Heather Holte from a

two-year hiatus from the team. Holte left the team in 1995 because of philosophical differences with the coaching staff and instead played for the Oregon women's golf team. She returns this year to become the Ducks' starting catcher.

This week's tournament will feature two teams that are ranked in the preseason top 20 poll: Cal State Fullerton (12), which the Ducks will play second on Friday, and Florida State (16), which the Ducks will play first on Saturday.

Oregon opens today against Texas, will play Purdue in Friday's first game and Ohio State in Saturday's second game, ending the tournament Sunday against UC Santa Barbara.

Oregon split the six games it played in Tempe last year and is 8-8 overall at the ASU Coca-Cola Classic.



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