

Does It Pay To Gamble? It Did For Sonja Henie

Norwegian Champion Skater Wins Coveted Film Place With Appealing Femininity, Unparalleled Graceful Rhythm, Willingness To Take Chance To Achieve Desire

Sonja Henie, world famous skater from Norway, now turns her talents to the screen. Next to skating, Sonja likes swimming, as this attractive pose indicates. She is the holder of ten world's championships and three Olympic titles.



Sonja Henie and Don Ameche, leading man in "One In A Million," Miss Henie's first motion picture.

By Linda Lane

"**A** PPEALING femininity plays an extremely important part in winning championships," declared Sonja Henie, youthful blond beauty who has won three Olympic Games and ten world ice-skating championships in her 23 years.

And now this winsome Norwegian miss has brought her pert, appealing personality with her to Hollywood, where she is making her starring screen debut in "One In A Million," ice-skating musical at 20th Century-Fox.

Her personality, beauty and unparalleled graceful rhythm on the ice caused Darryl F. Zanuck to give the picture the biggest casting of any musical in recent Hollywood history.

The imposing cast selected to support Sonja includes Adolphe Menjou, Jean Hersholt, Ned Sparks, Don Ameche, the three comical Ritz Brothers, Arline Judge, Borrah Minevitch and his big company of harmonica players, Dixie Dunbar, Leah Ray, Shirley Deane, Montagu Love and a band of 12 beautiful girls.

"I wanted to be a champion ice-skater when I was a little girl," this newest screen "find" confessed. "I practiced skating with the best in my native Oslo and learned to do all the figures perfectly.

"But I knew I had to learn much more. I had to please. I wanted to be so much and I would practice every day by trying to make myself agreeable. I don't know whether this helped or not, but I know I got a great deal of pleasure out of trying to please people. It was selfishness in a way, I guess."

Her amazing record in the world of sport is answer to how successful her philosophy has been. She has won more amateur championships in ice-skating than any other person, male or female, has ever won in any sport in all history.

SONJA had all of Hollywood's famous producers clamoring at her door with their best manners polished up for the occasion after introducing herself in the manner that has literally won for her the plaudits of the world.

She gave an exhibition. Having just won her third Olympic Games figure-skating championship and the world's title for the tenth time, the beautiful Norwegian swept into the screen capital looking for new laurels—from the Thespian world this time.

She rented the Polar Ice Palace in the heart of the motion picture city, announced through the press her intentions, and from the time a single spotlight outlined her small, white figure on the frozen rink as she floated out on the ice, she had the audience in the palm of her well-shaped hand.

And that audience, composed of the film world great as well as news-boys and just mister average citizen, paid enthusiastic homage to Sonja by shouting for encore after encore.

The day after her exhibition, which she gave with the avowed intention of trying for a motion picture contract, she had won the coveted audience with Zanuck.

Both knew how to talk business, what they wanted and it did not take long for them to come to an agreement. Accompanied by her mother, Mrs. Selma Henie, Sonja, who admits now that she was almost frightened to death—even more frightened than when, as a very little girl, she timidly pushed herself out on the ice for the first time in her life—went into Zanuck's office for the conference.



The world's champion figure skater is pictured in her skating costume. She does several graceful dances on ice in her new musical.

A VERY short time after she had entered the office, an excited and thrilled Sonja came out bearing a newly signed long-term contract, calling for two big pictures a year. No salary was announced officially, but it has been variously reported she would get from \$125,000 to \$300,000 a film.

Zanuck ordered a story written especially for this new artist, whom he placed in the same star category with Simone Simon, the French actress who has made such a sensation by her outstanding performance in "Girls' Dormitory" and "Ladies In Love."

Mark Kelly, former sports writer, and Leonard Praskins, well-known scenario writer, were assigned to write a story specially for Sonja. Lew Pollack and Sidney D. Mitchell, noted song writers, were selected to compose a number of melodies for the picture.

But the introduction of this lovely lady, who skated her way into the hearts of the screen world in one brief two-hour exhibition—was years in the making—years of hard, daily work.

From the first day of her life, Sonja's experiences have been spectacular. Even her birth was heralded by most unusual weather.

Spring had descended upon Oslo, after a hard,

gripping winter. The mild warm spring winds had melted the snow that had covered the rocky, mountainous country. The ice that had locked the beautiful Christiania Fjord also had melted and again Oslo had an unimpeded watercourse to the ocean.

Green sprigs of grass, called forth by the warm gentle winds and the spring sun, discovered too late they had made a serious mistake when a cold, biting wind whistled down from the land of the midnight sun, destroying all new vegetation in its path.

In the midst of the storm, a daughter was born to Selma Nilsen Henie, the wife of Wilhelm Henie, prominent and wealthy fur merchant of the capital of Norway. She was named Sonja Henie (pronounced as in penny), at the suggestion of an artist friend, Carl Johansen, who was given to euphonious words.

At first it may appear strange that Sonja ever wanted to become an actress, but she turned to the screen deliberately and after careful thought—you see she already had won all the medals the world of sport had to offer her.

THE theatrical world regards her as the greatest single attraction since the late great Anna Pavlova, the dancer. Turning professional last February, she has earned a higher income than any other athlete in the world. At a recent exhibition in Madison Square Garden in New York she drew 90,000 persons to her four shows.

A catalogue of her winnings reads like a voluminous sports history. When she was 14 she won the Norwegian ice-skating championship. She also finished second to Hellina Jaloss of Hungary for the World's championship in 1926, the same year. Since then she has never been defeated.

Another element that has accounted for Sonja's miraculous success is her sporting blood. After winning the Olympics for the third time this year, she went to Paris to compete in her last amateur contest before turning professional.

After Sonja went through the school or set figures, demanded by the judges, Jack Dunn, famous ice-skater and good friend of the young Norwegian, laughingly offered to bet a pound Sonja wouldn't dare include the dangerous cross-foot spin in her free figure skating—a number she had not done or practiced in three or four years.

Sonja's eyes flashed as she accepted the challenge—a challenge that might mean the crumbling of all her hopes, for she needed the championship to shatter all sport records—too, a defeat would mean her first.

A mere pound sterling against all her life's work!

Wearing a smile of defiance, Sonja flashed on the rink when her turn came. She did several difficult figures of her own creation, each a little more hazardous than the last. Then she circled, performing all the preliminaries of the dangerous cross-foot spin. Seasoned spectators knew what she planned then. A quiet gripped the crowd.

Without wavering, Sonja sped through the hazardous figure, gracefully bowed to the judges and left the rink amid thunderous cheers. There was no question in anyone's mind who won.



Miss Henie and Director Sidney Lanfield pose between scenes on her starring ice-skating musical extravaganza.

Critics hailed Sonja's skating as more spectacular and outstanding than her championship performance several days before at the Olympic Games.

BUT few knew Sonja had risked everything against a pound wager and won! So it is no wonder that this beautiful 25-year-old girl has turned to a new world, seeking new honors.

"Ever since I was a little girl," she said, "I have wanted to be on the stage. First, I wanted to be a ballet dancer and I studied dancing until I was 20 years old. Ice-skating is not alone a sport, it is an art, too."

To be a dramatic actress now, she confessed, is her fondest hope. She has studied the drama, as well as dancing, but she has never appeared as an actress on the stage or before the cameras.

Quite a contrast to the average mental picture one has of the "cool, reserved Norwegian," Sonja sparkles with laughter. She has a very impulsive way of talking, accompanying her

words with expressive gestures. Her eyes twinkle. Her face is very expressive.

She speaks English very distinctly, but her words have the rich flavor of a foreign accent. She also speaks fluently French, German and her own Norwegian.

Every night Sonja gets her ten hours of sleep to keep in top condition, and she never eats just before a performance because the food would upset her enough to cause her skating to be slightly imperfect—she must be completely alert and in control of every muscle and nerve in her perfectly formed body. The danger in skating, of course, is from falls. No skater is immune from these, even Sonja, who once suffered a sprained ankle. Many skaters have broken bones and suffered even worse hurts.

It probably would make much better reading if one could write a lengthy, intricate description of Sonja's diet, since she is in such excellent health. The simple truth, however, is that the ice queen follows no diet. She eats what she pleases, but she eats regularly. She is particularly fond of ice cream, often eating as many as three different kinds at one meal.

While she was skating she never gave up her dancing. When she was 18 she went to London to study ballet dancing under the famous Russian, Madame Karsavina. It was from her she learned the famous Dying Swan dance, which she translated to the ice in such a spectacular fashion in London that she won a command performance before King George and Queen Mary. The Prince of Wales, now King, also attended.

SHE has appeared before royalty in every important country of Europe. King Haakon VII and Queen Maude of Norway have entertained her on numerous occasions. Whenever Sonja makes an appearance, they always send her a congratulatory telegram or cable and a large bunch of red carnations as a striking contrast to her all-white costume.

"Many dancers are actresses," she declared. "They prepare for their acting career by dancing. I have done the same. I do not wish to ever give up skating. It means too much to me, and I believe it is as beautiful and entertaining to people as dancing. But now I want new experiences, to carry my career another step forward by acting before the camera."

A trifle superstitious, Sonja acquired the old American custom of carrying a rabbit's foot for luck when she first visited the United States during the Olympic Games in 1932. She has carried the luck charm ever since, insisting on having it with her when she made her first motion picture scene for "One In A Million." She said it kept her from fleeing from the stage, as she wanted to do when she first faced the camera.

With entrance into Hollywood, Sonja has experienced romance for the first time. And those who profess to know about such matters declare it's serious.

She met Tyrone Power, who has the romantic lead in the million dollar historical costume spectacle, "Lords of London," when she visited the film set. They liked one another from the start. Every day they are together, always dining together on the studio lot and seeing one another practically every evening.

Never before had Sonja found time for romance, but now that she's busier than ever before in her life, she seems to find time for Tyrone.