

Skater's Mother Killed in Car Accident

By NANCY ARMOUR, AP National Writer

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PORTLAND, Ore. - The mother of Angela Nikodinov, a two-time bronze medalist in the U.S. Figure Skating Championships, was killed in a car accident Wednesday morning as the family traveled to the competition.

Delores Nikodinov, 48, of San Pedro, Calif., was pronounced dead at the scene. Angela Nikodinov and her father, Nick, were treated at Legacy Emanuel Hospital and were released. Nikodinov's coach, Igor Pashkevich, is in fair condition at the hospital and was to be kept overnight.

"Her parents are her life. She's incredibly close to them," said David Baden, Nikodinov's agent. "Angela and her mother had the most infectious laugh. The same laugh. That that voice is silent is so shocking.

"No one deserves this."

U.S. Figure Skating announced late Wednesday that Nikodinov had withdrawn from the competition. The women's short program is Thursday night.

"We are extremely saddened by this tragedy and all our support is with Angela and her family at this time," U.S. Figure Skating said in a release. "Our hearts go out to her and her father. The figure skating community is a close one, and we all grieve with the Nikodinov family."

The news wasn't announced until Wednesday night, after most of the senior skaters had finished their practices, and it was met with shock as it filtered around.

"That is just devastating," said pairs skater John Baldwin, who had gotten to know the Nikodinovs over the years. "Her mother is always in such good spirits. She always came to the rink with Angela, she was always real proud of her. She was enjoying her daughter's success. That that's cut short, it's not right."

Added his partner, Rena Inoue, "She was a sweet, soft lady."

According to Portland police, Nikodinov and her family were in a shuttle from the airport a little after 9 a.m. when the lime green minivan collided with a Volkswagen Jetta as the van merged onto Interstate 205. The shuttle hit a cement barrier,

police said, and the right front tire blew out.

The van flipped onto its side and skidded along the pavement for a short distance before coming to a stop, said Sgt. Brian Schmautz, a spokesman for the Portland police. Delores Nikodinov was sitting next to a window that exploded, and Schmautz said she died of head trauma.

"It's our understanding it was more of a fluke, just simply because of the victim's position in the vehicle," Schmautz said. "Had the van not rolled or had she been in a slightly different place, the accident may not have killed her."

The driver of the car was identified as Melisa Kirkpatrick of Vancouver, Wash. She was not hurt. The driver of the van, Sergey Anikin, was taken to the hospital as a precaution.

Schmautz said some in the van were wearing seatbelts, but did not know who. Oregon law requires passengers to wear seat belts, but there is an exception for shuttle vans like the one the Nikodinovs were in.

Schmautz said there was no indication that either driver was impaired, and an investigation is continuing.

The accident is the latest in a long list of heartbreaks for the hardluck Nikodinov.

She was devastated when her coach, Elena Tcherkasskaia, died suddenly of pancreatic cancer in November 2001. Tcherkasskaia had found a way to unlock the enigmatic skater's incredible potential, and the two were so close they were more like mother and daughter than skater and coach. Under Tcherkasskaia, Nikodinov finished third in the 2001 U.S. championships and was fifth in the world championships.

Nikodinov also was third at nationals in 1999.

Skating in the Olympic trials just a few weeks after Tcherkasskaia's death, Nikodinov finished fourth, just barely missing a spot on the Salt Lake City team.

The next few years were a blur of injuries. She dislocated her left shoulder in February 2002 and again that September. While she was off the ice recuperating from the second injury, she developed a virus that sapped her strength. She came to the 2003 nationals anyway, but withdrew after the short program.

Later in 2003, she had to be evacuated when the wildfires in southern California came near her training base in Lake Arrowhead, Calif.

This was supposed to be a comeback year. She won Skate America and was eighth at Cup of China. She also finished sixth in an invitational last month.

"She went into the season with such high hopes," Baden said. "Whenever she gets up there with life or with her skating, how many times has she been through something?"

--Sports Writer Anne M. Peterson contributed to this report.



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Angela Nikodinov of the United States, performs her short program at the ISU Grand Prix 'Sparkassen Cup on Ice' in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, in this Nov. 9, 2001 photo. Nikodinov's mother was killed in a car accident Wednesday morning, Jan. 12, 2005, on her way to the competition from the airport in Portland, Ore., U.S. Figure Skating said in a release. Delores Nikodinov was killed instantly. Angela and her father, Nick, who were in the car were treated at Legacy Emanuel Hospital and were released. Nikodinov's coach, Igor Pashkevich, is in fair condition at the hospital and was to be kept overnight. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner)



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U.S. Figure Skating executive director Val Belmonte pauses before reading a statement regarding an accident that skater Angela Nikodinov, her family and coach were involved in on their way from Portland International Airport to the U.S. Figure Skating Championships earlier in the morning in Portland, Ore., Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2005. Delores Nikodinov, Angela's mother, was killed in the crash. Angela and her father, Nick Nikodinov, were treated and released and her coach, Igor Pashkevich, is listed in fair condition in the hospital. (AP Photo/Don Ryan)