



# On turning pro

"It was time then for me to start building a future instead of just a career," said Fleurette Arseneault.

"I think age and timing . . . I have a family now," was Efforest "Buggy" Allmond's explanation.

"There was no place else to go. I wanted to quit while I was at the top," said Natalie Dunn Taylor.

"They said, 'Turn pro or find someplace else to skate,'" according to Eric Portus.

"I beat myself to death on freestyle for twenty years. The knees were starting to give out . . . You have to make a decision sometime," summed up Kelly Mahon.

In separate interviews, these skaters were recalling their reasons for leaving amateur competitive skating behind for the challenges of professional skating. For every skater there comes a time when the roads diverge and he or she must weigh the choices.

## Q. Why did you turn pro?

For World Dance champion Fleurette Arseneault, amateur skating was no longer practical. "When you have to work to pay for your own skating, you're working as many hours as you are skating," she explained. "You don't know if you're coming or going."

1980 World Singles gold medalist Kelly Mahon, who just turned pro in April of this year, said that by staying in too long, a skater risks losing his or her position. And even the most ardent skater can grow tired of the pressures and restrictions imposed by

competitions. "It got to the point where I enjoyed the practice more than the competitions," admitted Mahon.

Sometimes a skater turns pro to make the best of a bad situation, after losing his or her amateur status, for example. For Eric Portus, the desire to skate with his club led him to an unplanned entry into the world of professional skating as a speed coach. The rink management would allow him to skate with the club only as their pro. "I'm glad I'm doing it," he said. But he advises other skaters to "make sure they've done all the skating they want to do. There's no turning back."

## Q. What was the hardest thing for you?

"The hardest part (of becoming a professional) was to accept the fact that you couldn't compete any more," noted speed coach Buggy Allmond.

"My heart would just ache when I'd go to a competition," recalled Arseneault. "Now it's a little bit easier . . . I can enjoy it again."

"I missed the practice," said three time World Singles champion Natalie Dunn Taylor. "I missed going down and accomplishing something (physical) everyday. Teaching is mostly mental."

"When you're skating for yourself, you've got one person to please," explained Mahon. To teach, he said, takes thirty times more energy. "Some of the things you can say as an amateur you can't say as a professional. People start listening to what you say," he joked.

## Q. What about working with other pros?

"If you have a question, if you have a problem, you have to bring it out in the open. That's the only way to work," noted Arseneault.

Natalie Dunn Taylor, who teaches at a rink owned by her parents, said that at her rink, teaching tips as well as students are sometimes exchanged. "I know I don't know everything . . . I think I was really prepared well for it because my parents were both teachers." CONTINUED



Fleurette Arseneault after winning her final amateur competition—the 1979 Pan American Games.

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"The first year was like school all over again," commented Portus. To learn, he visited other rinks to watch coaches like Don Rogers and Grady Merrill.

*Q. Did you find it hard to start over again?*

"I remember my feeling after the first contest I went to. I had high hopes, like all teachers do," said Mahon. But only a handful of his skaters made finals. "You start to wonder, can I teach? It's real easy to expect more of yourself than what you can really put out," he said.

"You don't start out with champions," said Taylor.

"I expected them (the students) to think on the level I do," said Arseneault. "I had to think how I was when I was seven years old."

"You forget about a lot of the fundamentals," said Buggy Allmond. "As people start asking you questions, you start thinking of things you take for granted."

*Q. What is your advice to would be teachers?*

Portus recommends skaters taking up teaching should "make sure they're old enough and strong enough to handle all kinds of kids," he said. "Be able to listen to them. Discuss your ideas."

"Don't get discouraged," advised Arseneault. "Don't ever expect anything in return. You might have them one day . . . but beginning skaters are pretty shaky characters. I try not to get emotionally involved . . . It's just too much of a let down. I take each day at a time."

"If anyone's going to teach," said Buggy Allmond, "they should make up their minds they're going to teach like they'd want someone to teach their kids."

*Q. Is coaching going to be part of your future?*

There isn't enough money in being a speed coach to live on, so Eric Portus must divide his time between skating, school, and another job. "To me it's the most important part right now," he said. "I'll be coaching for as long as I can."

Allmond, part-time professional and full time family man, also wants to continue. "I plan on teaching as long as I'm happy teaching. As soon as I'm unhappy teaching, I'll quit."

"You never know what tomorrow's going to bring, but I plan to stay here," said Natalie Dunn Taylor. "I'd eventually like to own my own rink."

Said Mahon, "I'd like to teach 'til I do with this what I did with my amateur career . . . I think I've learned a lot more than I've taught."

Fleurette Arseneault: "Always," she stated. "I'll always be skating." ■