



## WAITING FOR LIGHTNING TO STRIKE

**Olympic judge Liz Littler MBE instantly knows when she sees an extraordinary talent.**

**»That's when the small hairs are rising at the back of my neck«, she tells in a rare interview**

BY CHARLOTTE AAGAARD

International Grand Prix Contests, National, European and World Championships, yes, even the Olympic Games, Liz Littler MBE has been to each and every one of them to judge the finest skaters in the UK, Europe and the rest of the World. And this weekend, Hvidovre Skating Club (HSK) has the pleasure of hosting this very experienced and renowned ISU judge here at Friheden Ice Rink.

For more than three decades the 56-old

former British figure skater has watched and judged young talented skaters at ice rinks all over the world. If anyone knows when a skater is truly extraordinary and exceptional it is Liz Littler.

### THIS LITTLE SHIVER

»When I see a very promising skater perform the small hairs on the back of my neck rises,« she says. »Maybe it's not even a winner, who performs, but I get those little shivers, when I sense that here is a skater, who has an extraordinary talent and potential.«

And usually Liz Littler's assessment is right, she humbly admits.

»A few years ago, I saw a very young boy perform at a low level club competition, when this happened. This little shiver,« she recalls. »I sensed that this young boy had great potential. And I was right. Today he is a young man and one of the finest male skaters in the world.« Exactly as Liz Littler thought he would be.

For many of the young skaters present here

**Liz Littler had to stop her skating career at the age of 16 after a series of tiny fractures in both legs. Since then she has build an international career as one of the most experienced and respected skating judges in the world. Here she is at the Winter Olympics in Sochi, 2014**

today, the dream is to reach national or even international fame. But it takes something very special to reach the absolute top of world skating, Liz Littler says. It is not easy to pinpoint exactly, what it takes, but it is definitely not enough to be a technical genius, she says.

»It's not enough to be able to make a flawless triple axel. You must also possess a certain magic, a charisma and above all be very enthusiastic about your training, if you want to succeed,« Liz Littler says.

### **A ROUNDED APPROACH**

But there is one piece of advice, that the experienced skater and judge would very much like to convey to the competitors as well as their parents, coaches and clubs.

»To be truly exceptional in this sport you must be so much more than just a skater« she says. »It is so important for parents, coaches and skating clubs to remember that a young skater is a whole person and should develop as such,« Liz Littler says. She therefore advocates what she calls »a rounded approach« to the individual skater, which includes getting another education besides skating.

»All too often, parents and skaters neglect schooling and education in order to pursue a skating career and if the skater then fails or has to stop because of health problems, he or she is left with no alternative approach to life,« she says.

Speaking from personal experience, Liz Littler reminds skaters, that even a brilliant career can be over from one day to the next.

»I had to stop skating at the age of 16,

because of multiple tiny fractures in both legs. This can happen to anyone and that's why it is so important to have other plans and another life beside skating,« she says.

### **A LOVE FOR LIFE**

For Liz Littler the choice of a different career was easy though. Beside a job at Barclays Bank she started working as a judge, first at local skating competitions, but she soon progressed to be a national skating judge in the UK. Since 1990 she has been judging at international competitions as well as teaching other judges and coaches.

In 2001, she passed the exam to be an ISU judge and has among many international competitions been a judge at the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi.

»It's a wonderful job to be a skating judge, it's been a very good way for me to stay in touch with the sport I love,« she says. And stayed in touch she has. Liz Littler has among many other positions been Director for Judges and Officials at the British National Skating Association NISA and a teacher for many a skating judge in the UK. She was also Event Director for the European Championships in Sheffield in 2012.

Asked what it takes for a skater to become a good judge, she explains, that a good skating judge must be able to keep calm, concentrate and think logically. And then she or he must remember to look for all the successful parts of the skater's program in stead of just focusing on mistakes.

»And finally, you must be very self confident. You must be able to make swift decisions and not let yourself be influenced by the opinion of other people. You have to be very self reliant,« Liz Littler says. If you consider a judging career, don't expect to be wealthy, she warns.

»It is not a job, that goes well with normal family life or a nine-to-five job. Often you have to be away from home during holidays and weekends and in general, there is no money to be made. A skating judge receives no salary, just expenses paid. Even at Grand Prix level you get just enough »for a meal and the odd coffee,« she says with a smile.