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## The Inside Edge: Sisterhood of the traveling earring

Andrews gets earring from Babilonia, who originally gave it to Yamaguchi

Posted 1/23/14 by Sarah S. Brannen and Drew Meekins, special to icenetwork



*Starr Andrews dons the earring that Olympic champ Kristi Yamaguchi once wore. -Sarah S. Brannen*

### An earring's journey

When we talked to Starr Andrews after the juvenile ladies event, we noticed a pretty earring in her left ear, a small gold hoop with a crystal heart dangling from it. We didn't realize we had seen it before: Kristi Yamaguchi wore it as she won her Olympic gold medal in Albertville.

It turns out that Tai Babilonia gave the earring to Yamaguchi back in 1992, and she wore it for the entire Olympic competition and for years afterward.

"I really wanted to give her something special, something really cool," Babilonia told us. "And I saw her wearing it on the cover of Sports Illustrated."

"I got it from Tai during a trying time when I competed," Yamaguchi said. "I wore it for good luck, and it symbolized strength and hope for me."

Yamaguchi eventually gave the earring to Katia Gordeeva after the death of Gordeeva's husband, Sergei Grinkov, and eventually Gordeeva gave it back to Babilonia.

"When Katia lost Sergei, I wanted her to know she had my support, and I gave it to her for strength and hope," Yamaguchi said. "I love how it found its way back to Tai and continues to bring meaning to other skaters. I had no idea."

"Katia gave it back to me, on an airplane," Babilonia went on. "We had done an exhibition together, and we were on the same flight home, and she said, 'I think you might want this back.' It caught me off guard because I didn't know she had it."

Fast forward to last year: Like millions of people, Babilonia saw Andrews in the "Whip My Hair" video that became a viral sensation. She called Andrews' mother.

"I said, 'I want to learn more about Starr because she has something special,'" Babilonia said. "We met, and we hit it off. I'm a fan, first and foremost, and we've become really great friends."

Babilonia hopes Andrews will wear the earring throughout her career, and then -- who knows -- maybe someday it will get passed on to a skater who hasn't even been born yet.

### **Kwan-Oppegard on fashion**

We always like talking about fashion with perennial best-dressed coach Karen Kwan-Oppegard, so we asked her to join us as a guest blogger this week and talk over the just-completed U.S. championships and the upcoming Olympics from a fashion point of view. Kwan-Oppegard says coaches are very much a part of the costume process these days.

"Everyone's involved now; it's a huge deal," she said. "I've always been interested in fashion, ever since I was little. I almost moved to Paris to work with Dior. Frank [Carroll] never even looked at a costume sketch. He was like, 'Will it stay on? OK. It's not green, perfect.'"

First, we talked about on-ice looks we liked in Boston:

"The ladies are always easy to do," Kwan-Oppegard said. "I loved Christina Gao's white costume and Rachael Flatt's silver dress. Michelle had one like it years and years ago, with a little American flag."

We talked about Yu-Na Kim's controversial chartreuse dress; Kwan-Oppedgaard likes the color but isn't sure about the cut. We hadn't realized that she designed Kim's blue and black *Giselle* dress when Kim was training in California.

"Jan Longmire made it," Kwan-Oppedgaard said. "I sketch everything for everybody."

As far as men's costumes go, Kwan-Oppedgaard says she likes the guys to look strong.

"Everything they do is so physical on the ice," she said. "I like some glitter, and some lace in a Spanish program can be cool, but I have a hard time with feathers and things flying around. I think Jeremy [Abbott] looks so elegant. That bronze thing Adam [Rippon] was wearing was spectacular. I liked Max [Aaron]'s long outfit. For his body shape, I thought the gloves were a smart choice because it elongated his limbs. He has worked so much on his line, expanding his reach."

We talked about what we'd all like to see at the Olympics, if people decide to debut new costumes for the big show. We are curious to see what Ashley Wagner will wear for her new costume for her *Samson and Delilah* free skate.

"I would like Ashley to come out in something a little bit more dynamic and a little bit -- if you don't mind me saying -- sexy," Kwan-Oppedgaard said. "We all know she's kind of spicy, and there's something so admirable about that."

Drew's choice for a change is a new short program look for Maxim Trankov. His current one looks like it must be constricting. Sarah wants to see Mao Asada in costumes that complement her delicate line, rather than such strong, overpowering looks.

"She needs a streamlined, elegant look," Kwan-Oppedgaard agreed. "She needs Christina Gao's person (Yumi Nakamura) working on her."

Enough of skating costumes. ... What about off-ice fashion?

"You know who has been looking amazing?" Kwan-Oppedgaard said. "Angela Nikodinov. She has been looking fabulous. She's obsessed with Helmut Lang, which I am too. She bought this beautiful gray sweater with fur on the front and leather details. She loved it so much, she wore it for two days straight. I was like, 'Angela, I love what you do, but if Sarah and Drew see you, you'll be off the list so fast!'"

Kwan-Oppedgaard knows Vera Wang well, of course, and admires her simple look. Wang was in Boston for part of the Championships; we caught a glimpse of her at the hotel.

"I did see Vera on the last day," Kwan-Oppedard said. "She's always in plain black leggings, high platform heels, a comfortable sweater and a cool leather jacket. She had this huge hat on that could have been a sleeping bag. No trace of makeup; I don't know how she does it."

Lastly, we talked about what look a coach should go for in the kiss and cry.

"It depends on your personality, obviously," Kwan-Oppedard said. "You're there for the kids, and they appreciate who you are. Yuka [Sato] always looks so stunning and so put together. She's so calm and precise. If it's a fun short program, I can let loose a little bit. If it's a dark, serious program, you're wearing black! I can't remember what Frank wore, ever."

### **Skating injured**

If you saw Sean Rabbitt in Boston any time other than when he was on the ice, he had his arm in a sling. That was because he competed with a dislocated shoulder and two fractures in the glenoid cavity, the cup in the shoulder blade that holds the head of the humerus bone.

Rabbitt told us the injury happened when he fell on footwork Dec. 27. He couldn't skate for a week and wasn't able to train at all until a week before the men's short program, and even then he didn't have full range of motion in the arm.

"I considered withdrawing," he said. "There was no alternate, so it wasn't like I was taking someone's spot. If there was an alternate, I would have been happy to let them go."

Rabbitt said that practices were painful in Boston, but that the adrenaline of competition helped a lot.

"The only time it hurt was in my long program when I fell," he said. "Call me crazy, but my doctors offered to give me a cortisone shot, and I opted not to get it because I didn't want to damage it more. I was like, 'I'm going to cross that finish line.' Boston Strong!"

After a year of injuries -- he had a bad bout of osteitis pubis that took him out for half the season -- Rabbitt is looking forward to getting healthy and continuing his goal of making Team USA.

"I'd like to compete until 2018," he said. "I'll be 27 then. As long as you're enjoying it, that's all you can do."

### **Best quote**

We heard the best quote of the Championships, on the life of a skater, from Johnny Weir during the gala broadcast:

"You live every day on the edge of tears or laughter."

True that,

Sarah and Drew

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