

Kerrigan's Q-factor is A-OK

The assault on Nancy Kerrigan last week had a bizarre silver lining: If you didn't know the champion figure-skater before, you certainly know her now.

"This has totally taken her Q [popularity] rating through the roof," said Brandon Steiner, president of Steiner Sports Marketing in New York. "It certainly enhances her, especially if she wins the gold."

The attractive skater was clubbed on the leg at a practice session during the National Championships in Detroit in a crazy conspiracy that may somehow be linked to her main rival Tonya Harding.

The incident could have eliminated her from the Winter Olympics next month in Norway. But she was chosen for the U.S. Olympic team anyway, although she needs medical clearance before she can compete.

Though Kerrigan certainly would have preferred another method of celebrity, the Page One news has actually served to spotlight her beauty and determination. And in the world of marketing, that combination spells endorsements.

All agree, should Kerrigan bring home the gold, she will be a star Olympian with endorsement opportunities that could surpass those of Dorothy Hamill and Peggy Fleming.

Before the incident, Kerrigan already was a Cinderella story. The daughter of a welder and legally blind mother, she won the bronze at the 1992 Olympics and was named one of America's most beautiful people by People Magazine.

She faltered at last year's World Championships, and was attempting a comeback when she was injured.

Now Kerrigan is a viable celebrity endorser whether or not she brings home the Olympic gold, said Rick Hill, top marketing executive at Barq's Root Beer, a company known for its opportunistic promotions such as a "Soviet Union going out of business sale."

Steiner noted, harsh as it sounds, that the opportunities would not exist if she had gone to the Olympics and lost without incident. He said Americans don't accept failure unless there's extenuating circumstances.

"She is now a worldwide celebrity. Everyone loves her no matter what she does on the ice," Hill said.

But Alan Friedman, editor of Team Marketing Report, a Chicago-based sports marketing newsletter, said Kerrigan can only benefit from the new-found fame if she wins at the Olympics.

He pointed out that speed skater Dan Jansen lost endorsement deals in 1992 — including a chance at being on Kellogg's Corn Flakes boxes — after his performance faltered when his sister died during the games.



EXPLAINING UNEXPLAINABLE: Nancy Kerrigan goes over incident with reporters just one day after she was attacked earlier this month in Detroit.

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"I'm sure everyone felt sorry for him, but they expected him to win the gold," said Friedman. "In the hard cruel world of marketing, you've got to go with the winners."

Friedman said one big winner will be CBS Sports. The women's figure skating competition is typically the most-watched Olympic event in the U.S., and now the ratings will be even higher.

One thing is certain: You'll be seeing more of Kerrigan leading up to the Olympics. Kerrigan endorses Reebok, Campbell Soup, Seiko watches and Evian water. But most of her work has been promotional and except for a cameo appearance in a Reebok TV spot, she hadn't starred in a TV commercial.

Two weeks ago, however, Campbell Soup broke a spot featuring Kerrigan in its "Never Underesti-

mate The Power of Soup" campaign. In the spot, created by BBDO, New York, she talks about soup as part of her training regimen and humorously notes how she's thinking of taking up hockey.

A smart marketer might air the spot more often than planned, but Campbell spokesman Kevin Lowery said the soup company has made no changes in its original plans.

Reebok intends to break a 30-second TV spot profiling Kerrigan that will air during Olympics coverage as part of its campaign celebrating women athletes.

Also in the campaign are spots featuring Sandra Farmer Patrick, the 400-meter hurdler and Julie Fowdy, a world champion on the U.S. women's soccer team.

Reebok spokesman Dave Fogelson said filming has been moved up to next weekend, from this weekend, because of her injury, but no other changes have been made.

"Based on the conversations we've had ... she is not going to let anyone get in her way at all. And that's the type of person we want to be associated with," said Fogelson.

But there's another great irony here: Given the latest news that Kerrigan was allegedly the victim of a plot somehow involving a rival, there is probably no better justice.