

Olympian Manley visits city

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Olympic medallist Liz Manley had a career filled with ups and downs.

From the quintessential high of winning a silver medal at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, the Ottawa native practiced tooth and nail for nearly 20 years to achieve that goal, a goal that appeared at many times to be out of reach.

"I am the poster child that it can happen," said Manley, still a mirror image of her same perky self. "I was the underdog, I wasn't supposed to win a medal.

"I remember my mom saying that everything happens for a reason, and the moment I won that medal in Calgary, I realized she was right."

Manley, the national spokesperson for Herbal Magic, was at the Cornwall centre on Friday to throw support not only behind the franchise that helped her shed unwanted pounds, but to also help out the 3+1 Project 2010 multisports complex.

"I've been doing a lot of centre visits so we decided to tie it in with the project," she explained. "For me, it's such an important cause for our youth.

"It helps to give them an opportunity to have a good facility to train."

She first stepped on to the ice herself at age two-and-a-half. The intense process of progressing through the ranks of figure skating as she trained at the Gloucester Skating Club, a place where she still teaches today.

Her mother was a stalwart supporter throughout her daughter's career, a bond made even tighter when her parents divorced. A couple of years ago her mom was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and the skater spent nearly a year in Kingston with her, before she succumbed to the illness last year.

"It was my mom and me for my whole career," said Manley. "When she was diagnosed I was in Kingston with her literally the whole year.

"I put myself on hold and put on, like, 30 pounds. I kind of gave up when she died, had no confidence."

Instead of dealing with the grief, she then threw herself into teaching and coaching. Combined with the weight gain, her blood pressure skyrocketed. She was sent by her physician to a cardiologist for further testing.

"He couldn't believe how high it was," she said. "He put me on medication for it and when I got home, I just began to cry.

"My mother wouldn't have wanted this to happen."

Weight had always been a constant source of consternation for the petite skater. She describes herself as an "emotional eater who had "tried everything" when it came to different diets. When Herbal Magic approached her this past spring offering her help, she was reluctant but decided to give it a shot.

"My first reaction was, 'What's going to make you so different?'" said Manley. "By September I'd lost 42 inches and had gone from a size 12 to a size 2.

"I had an appointment with my cardiologist in August, and he couldn't believe it. I was off medication."

These days Manley is preparing to commentate at the Vancouver Winter Olympics in February. Previously, she'd been to the ones held in Turin, Italy and Salt Lake City. Even though she hasn't competed in a long time, the emotions that go hand-in-hand with training for the event hasn't left her.

"It's nice to go to the Olympics without the pressure of training intensely or the fear of injury, but you still miss it," she said. "Once an Olympian, always an Olympian."

You never know either, she added, that the new multisports complex might be the home of a future Olympic athlete.

"There are so many days when you think, 'Is this all worth it?' when you're training. It's a commitment, but if you really want it, it's there," Manley said.



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