



## Galindo, Rudy (b. 1969)

by Linda Rapp

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With a stunning upset victory in 1996 Rudy Galindo became the first openly gay man and the first Mexican-American to win the United States figure skating championship.

Galindo came from a family of modest means. His father, Jess Galindo, was a long-distance truck driver, and his mother, Margaret Galindo, a homemaker. Rudy Galindo, the youngest of their three children, was born September 7, 1969.

Rudy Galindo and his older sister Laura both fell in love with skating as young children. Jess and Margaret Galindo gave up their dream of moving out of their trailer and into a house so that their children could have skating lessons and equipment.

Both children devoted themselves to training and soon were skating competitively. Rudy Galindo was particularly successful. He placed third at the U.S. National Junior Championships in 1985 and 1986. At the World Junior Championships he won the bronze medal in 1985 and the silver in 1986.

When Galindo moved into the senior ranks, he fared less well as a singles skater. He had, however, also begun skating pairs with Kristi Yamaguchi. The two won the U.S. National Championships in 1989 and 1990.

The young pair's fifth-place performance at the 1990 World Championships led to speculation that they might be among the medal-contenders at the 1992 Olympics. However, Yamaguchi, who was enjoying considerable success in ladies' singles, decided to concentrate her efforts on that discipline.

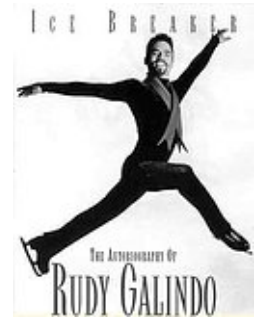
Depressed over the break-up of the promising partnership, Galindo turned to drugs and alcohol. He continued skating as a single, but with disappointing results.

Galindo's brother George contracted AIDS in 1992. Rudy Galindo became the primary care-giver until his brother's death in 1994. Only a few months later, Galindo's coach Rick Inglesi also succumbed to AIDS (as had his pairs coach, Jim Hulick). The previous year Galindo had lost his father, who had always been close to and supportive of him, to a sudden heart attack.

Discouraged by his eighth-place finish in the 1995 U.S. Nationals and short of money, Galindo abandoned skating for eight months.

Galindo lacked funds for travel, but since the 1996 U.S. Nationals were to be held in his hometown of San Jose, he resumed training, this time with his sister, Laura Galindo-Black, as his coach.

With a string of lackluster performances before his absence from skating, Galindo was regarded as such an unlikely competitor for the title that the United States Figure Skating Association did not even include him in its publicity guides.



The cover of Rudy Galindo's autobiography. Image provided by Outright Speakers and Talent Bureau. Courtesy Outright Speakers and Talent Bureau.

After an artistic short program skated to Pachelbel's *Canon*, Galindo stood third, a result booed by the crowd, who felt that he had been undermarked.

Galindo's style had been criticized as too balletic and not sufficiently "masculine," but his long program, choreographed by jazz dancer Sharlene Franke to Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, featured eight triple jumps, including two triple-triples. Galindo's flawless execution of a program that was both masterful in its artistry and athletically demanding drew a wild standing ovation and earned him the national title. His artistic marks included two perfect scores of 6.0.

Galindo thus became the first openly gay American figure skating champion. In the exhibition after the competition he wore a simple black costume with a large AIDS ribbon as he skated a moving routine to Schubert's *Ave Maria* as a tribute to his late brother and coaches.

After winning a bronze medal at the 1996 World Championships, Galindo turned pro, joining the Champions on Ice tour.

In the spring of 2000 he had to withdraw from a performance due to shortness of breath. A subsequent medical examination revealed that he was HIV-positive. Galindo suspects that he contracted the virus during his period of depression, when he practiced unsafe sex.

Galindo made the news of his diagnosis public and quickly resumed skating. He is still active on the tour, where he is popular with fellow performers and audiences alike. His signature piece, "Village People Medley," is a particular fan favorite.

In the summer of 2002, Galindo was diagnosed with avascular necrosis in his hips, a condition that results in the death of bone. Although he skated with the debilitating disease for over a year, in 2003 he underwent two operations to replace his hips. By April 3, 2004, he was ready to return to the Champions on Ice tour, where, skating on two new hips, he exemplified the determination and courage that has characterized his entire career.

Galindo has worked to increase AIDS awareness, especially in minority communities. He served on the National Minority AIDS Council, and in 2001 received the Ryan White Award for contributions to AIDS awareness, prevention, and education.

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### **About the Author**

**Linda Rapp** teaches French and Spanish at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. She freelances as a writer, tutor, and translator. She is Assistant to the General Editor of [www.glbtc.com](http://www.glbtc.com).