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**LEISURE**

## A friend in town

*Skater Yamaguchi gets extra benefit as tour stops in Raleigh*

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RALEIGH

**K**risti Yamaguchi is in the Triangle this week for the Target Stars on Ice show Wednesday at the Entertainment and Sports Arena. But the stop on the 61-city tour offers a perk she doesn't usually get: time with her husband, Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Bret Hedican. Hedican, now in his 11th NHL season, has called the Triangle home since mid-January, when he was traded from the Florida Panthers to the Canes. Between his busy game schedule and Yamaguchi's touring, the couple have had precious time together. Until this week.

"I've only been to Raleigh a few times for the shows,"



Kristi Yamaguchi is married to Bret Hedican, who plays for the Carolina Hurricanes.

**DETAILS**

**WHAT:** Target Stars on Ice.  
**WHEN:** Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.  
**WHERE:** Raleigh Entertainment and Sports Arena.  
**COST:** \$32-\$55.  
**INFO:** www.ticketmaster.com or 834-4000.

Yamaguchi explained in an interview earlier this month, "and we typically fly in and out of cities on the same day ... Bret has a break in his game schedule while the tour is in Raleigh. We're both looking forward to a few days off there, so Bret can show me around."

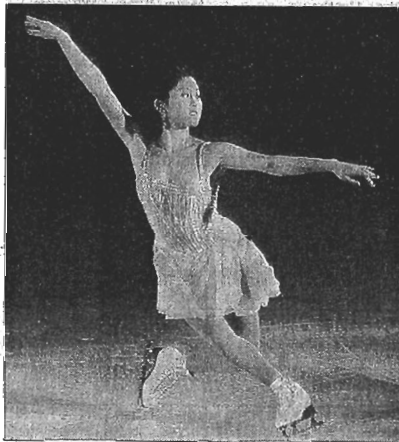
This is Yamaguchi's 10th year with the Target Stars on Ice, which also features Olympic champions Tara Lipinski, Katarina Witt and Ilia Kulik. It has also been 10 years since Yamaguchi's Olympic victory in Albertville, France.

It has been an incredible decade for the skater. Her gold medal opened all kinds of professional doors, from product endorsements (she has been the spokeswoman for Smart Ones, Allstate, Hallmark, Bank of America and General Motors) to ongoing involvement in the Olympics. She served as honorary goodwill ambassador for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, where she also skated with Witt in the closing ceremonies with the rock group Kiss.

"The guys were really fun and friendly," she said. "They're such legends in the rock 'n' roll industry that it was really neat to share the stage with them."

Less fun, she said, was the judging controversy in the pairs' competition.

"It's tough to think that it did happen, but I'm glad that



Gold medalist Kristi Yamaguchi is among the cast of Target Stars on Ice.

## YAMAGUCHI

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they [the Olympic Committee and the International Skating Union] resolved it quickly, and people were able to move on from it," Yamaguchi said. "Hopefully, this will clean up the judging in the sport, and we can be confident that the skaters will go out there and have a fair chance."

Another bright spot from Salt Lake was a chance to see her husband, who went out to see her. "That's the only time we've been able to see each other since New Year's," she said.

But after this year, that will change. Yamaguchi, who is 30, said this will be her last Target Stars on Ice tour, at least for a while.

"I'm planning to take a break [from touring] next year," she explained. "I'm not saying I'll never come back in five years or whatever, but 10 years on the road is long enough."

"I just want to concentrate on getting off the road and seeing Bret a lot more," Yamaguchi added.

The couple first met as Olympians in Albertville, and married in 2000. Hedican becomes a free agent in July, but these days, they're not looking that far ahead.

"We'll probably head back to San Francisco after his season ends. ... We haven't decided yet," Yamaguchi said. "We usually split our summers, spending half the time in the [San Francisco] Bay area and half in [Oakdale] Minnesota, where Bret is from. Hopefully, they'll go into the playoffs and their season will run late."

Between Hedican's games and Yamaguchi's shows, they're often in different states — and even countries — keeping in touch via cell phone and the Internet.

So what are her plans? She says she wants to start a family soon. As to her career, the sky's the limit, she said.

"There are certain business ventures that I'm looking into, but nothing is concrete yet," she said. "I'll probably continue to produce TV specials, and I've been really interested in setting up skating clinics with kids around the country."

But she doesn't see herself as a coach. "I don't think full-time coaching is something I'd be good at," she laughed.

In addition to her off-ice endeavors, Yamaguchi plans to continue skating and competing in pro events as long as she's physically able.

"I still really enjoy the skating," she said. "But I'll be skating in smaller tours here and there that won't take me away for six months at a time."

As for Wednesday's show, Yamaguchi will return to her skating roots, pairing off with '92 Olympic pairs silver medalist Denis Petrov. Their number, choreographed to "One Day I'll Fly Away" from the soundtrack to the movie "Moulin Rouge," proved challenging for Yamaguchi.

"It was quite a challenge after 12-15 years of skating singles to learn everything again," she said.