

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating: **Smart Ones Skate America Day Two**

Smart Ones Skate America continued Friday in Reading, Pennsylvania (USA) with the Original Dance, Ladies' Short and Men's Free Programs.

Ice Dancing, Original Dance

The Ice Dancing event continued with the Original Dance. The Original Dance of the 2003/2004 season is the "Swing Combination". The skaters can choose two or three rhythms from the following: Rock'n'Roll, Jive, Jitterbug, Swing, Blues and/or Boogie Woogie.

There was a lot of movement in the standings. Tanith Belbin/Benjamin Agosto of the USA grabbed the lead while overnight leaders Elena Grushina/Ruslan Goncharov slipped to third. However, France's Isabelle Delobel/Olivier Schoenfelder, who stood in third place following the Compulsory Dance, won the Original Dance and moved up to second overall.

Belbin/Agosto skated first of the leading couples. The young American team produced an entertaining dance Jitterbug, Blues and Swing that contained difficult dance combination spin and many steps. Their side by side footwork was highlighted by twizzles in both directions. The team scored 20.30 points for their elements and 40.97 points for their program components. "We had to make our elements as difficult as possible", Agosto said, referring to the impact of the New Judging System. "I think it's upping the level of everybody's skating". Delobel/Schoenfelder received the highest element score of the Original Dance (21.10 points) for their intricate footwork and interesting lifts in their Boogie Woogie and Blues program which was well interpreted. "We really enjoyed to skate the Swing Combo", Delobel explained. "We like this dance a lot, maybe that's why we did it so well."

Grushina/Goncharov expressed their rhythms Swing and Blues very well, but Grushina slipped on a twizzle during the side by side footwork line. "I don't know why it happened", Grushina said. Another nice performance came from Frederica Faiella/Massimo Scali of Italy who are standing in fourth place.

Ladies, Short Program

To the delight of the crowd, Sasha Cohen of the USA won the Ladies' Short Program clearly ahead of Japan's Shizuka Arakawa and her teammate Jennifer Kirk. Cohen skated last. She opened her dynamic program set to "Malaguena" with a triple Lutz-double toeloop combination that was shaky, but she recovered immediately and hit a triple flip out of footwork. The 18-year-old completed as well a double Axel and impressed the audience with her excellent spins and spirals. The reigning Grand Prix Champion received an element score

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of 32.50 and program component scores of 33.96. "It wasn't a competition, it was a real performance" a happy Sasha Cohen told the press. "I was really aggressive out there."

Performing to "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg", Arakawa landed a solid triple Lutz-double toeloop combination but stepped out of her triple flip. The Japanese skater came back strongly with a double Axel and drew extra applause for her final combination spin. Arakawa's total segment score added up to 59.02 (28.90 element score and 30.12 program component score). "The mistake (on the flip) was unfortunate, but the flow of the program was not bad", Arakawa commented. "I like to go back and polish it (the program) up more."

2001 Four Continents Champion Jennifer Kirk put in a strong program to "Chicago" as well that featured a triple Lutz-double toeloop combination and a triple flip, a double Axel and a combination spin with many changes of positions. "I'm thrilled with my performance", Kirk said. "It was the first time that I was doing this program and I was a little nervous. It's almost a show program, and I enjoyed it a lot." Amber Corwin completed a successful Ladies event for the USA by finishing fourth.

Men, Free Program

In an exciting Men's event, Michael Weiss (USA) won the first Skate America title of his career. Takeshi Honda of Japan won the Free Skating and moved up from fourth to claim the silver medal while China's Min Zhang took the bronze.

Weiss skated next to last to a medley of American military music. He started with a triple-triple toeloop combination followed by a two-footed quadruple toeloop. The 27-year-old landed a triple Axel-triple toeloop combination and four more triple jumps, but he popped a second Axel. The two-time World bronze medalist scored 55.69 points for his elements and 77.40 points for his program components. "The strategy is always to go out and do everything", Weiss answered when asked if his comfortable lead after the Short Program affected his strategy. "But the thinking was a bit different", he continued. "When I popped the quad (toeloop), I still stuck a triple toe to it. A triple-triple toeloop combination is rewarded by the new system. I probably wouldn't have done that under the old system. It wasn't my best (performance) at all, but a program that I skated well."

Honda came back from a disappointing performance in the Short Program. The reigning World bronze medalist pulled off a quadruple toeloop and four triple jumps in his routine to Richard Addinsell's "Warsaw Concerto". Honda stumbled on his second quadruple toeloop attempt and doubled the loop, but he showed good speed and flow. Honda's element score reached 58.72 points and his program component score was 77.90. "I was upset about yesterday, but it was just a bad day", the 2003 Four Continents Champion said. "I messed up the short program, but now I'm relaxed", he smiled. Honda is looking forward to Skate Canada next week in Mississauga. "It's only 45 minutes from my house", the skater, who has been training in Canada for many years, said.

Zhang nailed a triple Axel-triple toeloop combination and a quadruple Salchow in the first seconds of his Free Program to "Danse Macabre", but he tripled his planned quadruple toeloop. Four more triple jumps followed, but the footwork of the Chinese skater could have

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been more difficult. With a total segment score of 123.22 points, Zhang was ranked fifth in the Free Skating but held on to third place overall.

Scott Smith (USA) had the third-best Free Program and pulled up from 7th to 5th place. Germany's Andrejs Vlasenko, who stood in third after the Short Program slipped to fourth after a few mistakes, but the audience enjoyed the interesting choreography of his program to "The Circus Princess" by Emmerich Kalman.

Skate America is the first of six events of the Grand Prix of Figure Skating series. The skaters are awarded prize money and points, and the top six skaters or couples with the most points overall will proceed to the Grand Prix Final in Colorado Springs, USA, December 12 to 14. Full results and standings will be published after each event at www.isu.org.

Smart Ones Skate America continues tomorrow (Saturday) with the Free Dance, the Ladies' and Pairs Free Skating.

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