

# INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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**Event 3 (of 6)**

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## **ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating: Cup of China, Day Two**

The Cup of China, the third of six qualifying events in the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating series, continued Friday in Beijing with the Original Dance, the Men's Short and Pairs Free Programs.

### **Ice Dancing, Original Dance**

The Original Dance of the 2003/2004 season is the Swing Combo. The couples can choose any two or three of the following rhythms: Jive, Rock'n'Roll, Blues, Swing, Jitterbug and/or Boogie Woogie.

Tatiana Navka/Roman Kostomarov (RUS) defended their overnight lead with an expressive dance set to a Blues and Rock'n'Roll. Their routine included a demanding side by side footwork line mostly on one foot and two rotational lifts. They captured the different mood of the rhythms very well. The Russian Champions scored 60.38 points for this performance (19.60 element score/40.78 program components score). "We were calmer and more confident than at Skate Canada last week", Kostomarov commented. "It was better than at Skate Canada, because we now did it for the second time in competition", his partner added. "When you skate a program for the first time, you don't really know what to expect."

France's Isabelle Delobel/Olivier Schoenfelder, who stood in third place following the Compulsory Dance turned in a very characteristic Boogie Woogie and Blues that featured an intricate diagonal footwork line and side by side footwork line. The French received 19.10 points for their elements and 38.47 for program components. With a total segment score of 57.57 points, the French finished second and moved up to second overall. "We got into the dance right away", Delobel said. "We enjoy these rhythms, they are fun."

Elena Grushina/Ruslan Goncharov of the Ukraine delivered a lively Swing ("Sing Sing Sing") and a smooth Blues to a version of "Summertime" that included an interesting lift with him going into a crouching position and lifting one foot. The husband and wife team earned 56.72 points (16.60 element score/40.12 program components score) to place third in this portion of the dance event and third overall.

### **Men, Short Program**

The Men's event started with a surprise when relatively unknown Song Gao of China took the lead ahead of World silver medalist Timothy Goebel (USA) and Chengjiang Li (CHN).

Gao put out a clean performance to "Angelique" that included a solid quadruple-triple toeloop combination, a triple Axel and a triple Axel. His program was awarded 41.20 points in the element score and 29.05 points for program components. Gao grabbed the lead with 70.25 points. However, the others are close behind. Goebel has 67.70 points. The two-time World silver medalist nailed a quadruple-triple toeloop combination, but then fell on his triple Axel. The American recovered to land a triple flip and showed nice footwork in his routine to Sergei Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet". Li produced a quadruple-triple toeloop combination, but he barely held on to the landing of his triple Axel. The 2001 Four Continents Champion interpreted his program to native American music named "Global Spirit" well, but he fell in his finishing pose and couldn't believe what had happened to him. With 67.30 points for the Short Program, Li is very close to the top two. European silver medalist Brian Joubert of France stepped out on the landing of his quadruple toeloop (in combination with double toeloop) and is currently standing in fourth place. He scored 65.67 points.

"I'm very surprised to be in first tonight", Gao said. The skater was a 2002 Four Continents bronze medalist but didn't compete in ISU Championships last season as he didn't qualify for the National team. "Today was just perfect."

"I was happy with the overall performance", Goebel commented. "I was just disappointed with the mistake on the triple Axel, but I'm very relieved to be in second going into the long program. I was very happy to come here and to skate so well tonight despite of the problems I had. I think it was really a big step for me to pull it together at the last minute. I've really struggled with equipment problems up until the last few weeks. That's why I pulled out of Skate America."

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Li said: "This performance was so so. It started well, but then in the second half, I made a lot of smaller mistakes, and of course the big mistake at the end."

## **Pairs, Free Program**

The first medals of the Cup of China were awarded in the Pairs event. The top three couples delivered strong performances and turned the Pairs Free Skating into a real highlight of the competition so far.

Qing Pang/Jian Tong of China skated first in the final flight. Skating to "Variations on a theme of Paganini" by Sergei Rakhmaninov, the reigning Four Continents silver medalists hit a triple toeloop-double Axel sequence, a triple twist, a high throw triple Salchow and loop as well as good lifts. They scored 61.30 points for their elements and 57.76 for their program components, which put them in the lead with a total segment score of 119.06. Up next were Maria Petrova/Alexei Tikhonov (RUS). The reigning World bronze medalists sparked in their routine to "The Circus Princess" by Emmerich Kalman. Their routine included a double Axel-triple toeloop sequence, a throw triple loop and Salchow as well as triple twist. Their only major mistake came when she singled the second side by side Axel and he put his hand down on it. The Russians received 107.66 points. Then Xue Shen/Hongbo Zhao (CHN) took the ice. The two-time World Champions looked confident and precise in their balletic routine to "The Nutcracker" by Peter Tchaikovski. They opened their performance with a side by side double Axel-triple toeloop sequence, a throw triple Salchow and another side by side triple toeloop. They also completed a throw triple loop and an interesting lift, and only their triple twist wasn't top quality as Zhao caught his partner late. The program looked much more polished than last week at Skate Canada, as the couple was very synchronized and related to each other very well. Shen/Zhao received the highest scores: 58.94 points for their elements and 66.88 for program components (125.82 total segment score). Shen/Zhao won with a total event score of 189.28 points, with Pang/Tong coming in second (179.70 points). Petrova/Tikhonov clinched the bronze medal (165.58 points). Dorota Zagorska/Mariusz Siudek (POL) had trouble with their side by side jumps and remained in fourth place.

"We're very happy with our performance tonight, especially under these circumstances", Zhao told the post-event press conference. "We just came back from Canada. We made some changes in our program, and we're very happy with them. It was a challenge. This morning in practice, we were nervous because of the changes, but everything worked out perfectly in the program." Following Skate Canada, Shen/Zhao had added a death spiral and changed a lift.

"We skated better than at Skate America, and we're very pleased", Tong commented. "We were just a bit tired at the end."

Petrova/Tikhonov were happy with their performance as well. "We're glad to be here and to compete against the Chinese couples. They are our friends. We came for the first time to China", Tikhonov explained.

Shen/Zhao took 12 points at the Cup of China and now have 21 points which should be enough to proceed to the Grand Prix Final in December. The Cup of China was a scoring event for Pang/Tong as well, who picked up 9 points and will score again at the Cup of Russia. Petrova/Tikhonov didn't skate for points in Beijing. Their next event will be the NHK Trophy in Japan.

The Cup of China continues tomorrow (Saturday) with the Ladies Free Skating, the Free Dance and the Men's Free Skating.

Full results and standings are directly available on the ISU Internet site on [www.isu.org](http://www.isu.org).

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