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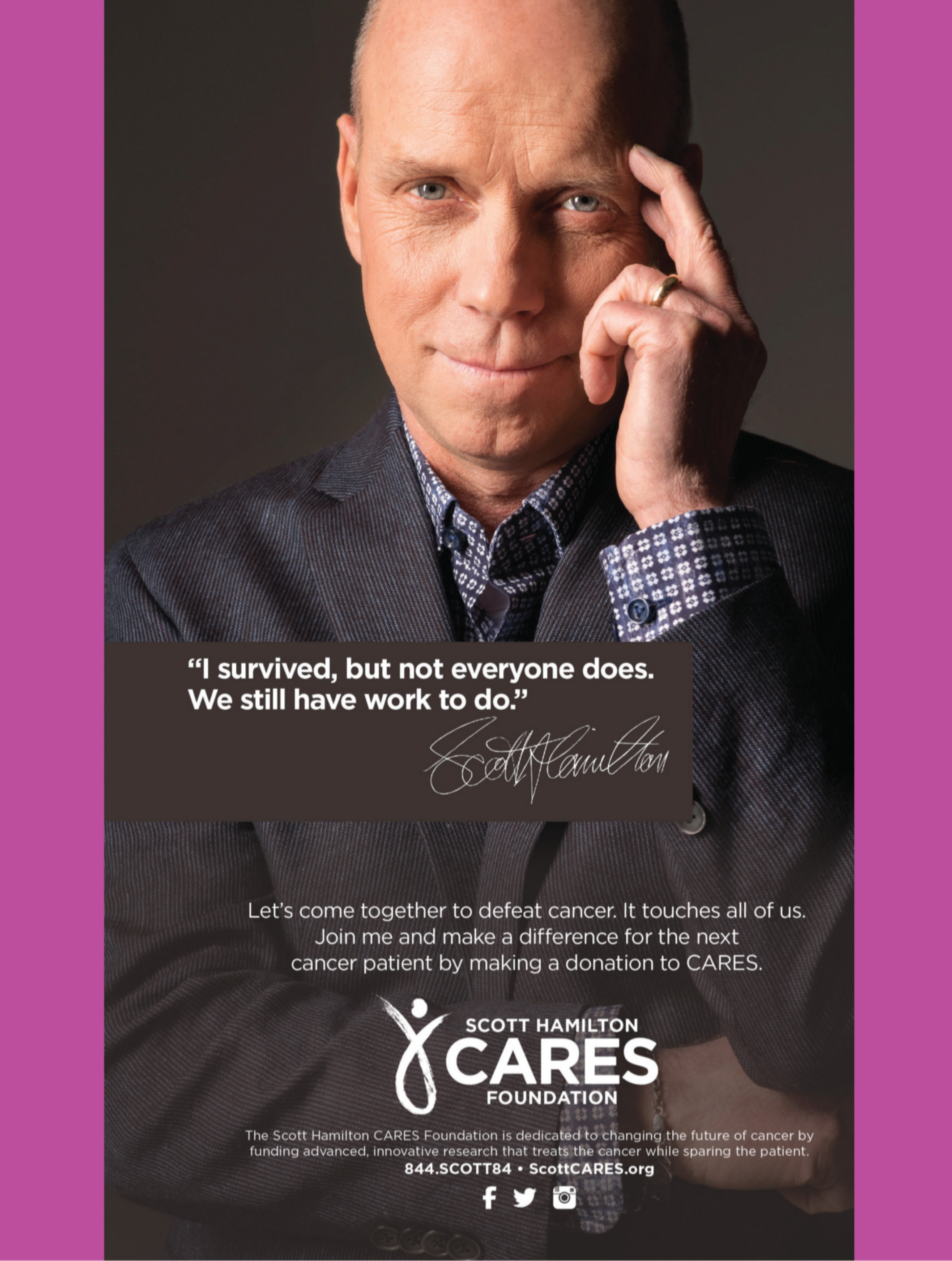
**NAM
NGUYEN**
FINDS HIS
COMPETITIVE
GROOVE

JUNIOR STARS
STEAL THE SHOW
IN TORINO

SILVER LINING
HAN YAN HAPPY
TO BE BACK

ROLLER COASTER SEASON
for **ELIZAVETA
TUKTAMYSHEVA**



A close-up portrait of Scott Hamilton, a man with light hair and blue eyes, wearing a dark blue pinstriped suit jacket over a blue and white patterned shirt. He is resting his chin on his right hand, which has a gold ring on the ring finger. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

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Changing of the Guard

from the *Editor*

With the first half of the season now in the books, skaters are looking ahead to the World Championships in March.

As we saw on the 2019 Grand Prix circuit and at the Final, a new era in skating has dawned, most notably in the singles disciplines.

While many are talking about the trio of Russian teenagers that dominated this season, few are talking about the mastery of Nathan Chen.

His runaway victory over Yuzuru Hanyu at the Grand Prix Final was both surprising and enlightening.

But both men are pushing the technical envelope with five quads in their long programs, and have moved so far ahead of everyone else in the world that it will be almost impossible for any of them to match or challenge Chen and Hanyu in the foreseeable future.

The story is much the same with the

ladies. It was no surprise that the Russian teens claimed the podium at the Final. All three have technical arsenals that many senior men cannot lay claim to.

Though this change of guard is not appealing to some, figure skating has taken a quantum leap over the past 18 months, and this is just the beginning.

The current crop of senior champions cannot rest on their laurels — they will have to continue to evolve and improve. The juniors that competed at the Final in Italy showed they will be formidable opponents once they hit the senior ranks in the two seasons leading up to the 2022 Olympic Winter Games.

Gone are the days when the favorites won even though perhaps they were not always at their best. A skater now has to earn a victory. It is an exciting time for our sport.

Susan D. Russell
Publisher

YUZURU HANYU: QUINTS & QUADS ON HIS AGENDA



International FIGURE SKATING

PUBLISHER Susan D. Russell srussell@ifsmagazine.com

NORTH AMERICAN EDITOR Robert Brodie
EUROPEAN EDITOR Tatjana Flade

DESIGNED BY Lairea Media

EDITORIAL Elina Paasonen, Elvin Walker, Akiko Tamura

PHOTOGRAPHY Vicki S. Luy, Elina Paasonen, Robin Ritoss, Flavio Valle

ADVERTISING/SALES srussell@ifsmagazine.com

CORPORATE OFFICE

International Figure Skating/Lairea Media
270 Queens Quay West, Suite 1301, Toronto, ON M5J 2N4

Please include your name, mailing and e-mail addresses and a telephone number with all correspondence to *International Figure Skating*.

SUBSCRIPTIONS (U.S./Canada) 844-357-2044
International: 973-627-5162

WEBSITE www.ifsmagazine.com



International Figure Skating is published bimonthly by Lairea Media, 270 Queens Quay West, Suite 1301, Toronto, ON M5J 2N4. Subscriptions: US\$29.99 Canada US\$34.99, International US\$49.99. Subscribers should allow 4 to 6 weeks for change of address to become effective. POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to International Figure Skating, PO Box 3000, Denville, NJ, 07834. Subscriptions ordered are non-refundable unless otherwise promoted. Return postage must accompany all manuscripts, drawings and photographs submitted if they are to be returned, and no responsibility can be assumed for unsolicited materials. All rights to letters sent to *International Figure Skating* will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and copyright purposes and as subject to unrestricted right to edit and to comment editorially. Requests for permission to reprint should be sent to the Publisher. The title *International Figure Skating* is registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Contents copyright © 2018 by Lairea Media. All rights reserved. Nothing may be reprinted in whole or in part without written permission from the Publisher. Printed in the U.S.A. CPC PUB #0913103.



Bradie Tennell of the U.S. and Japan's Rika Kihira were the only non-Russian ladies to earn a place at the 2019 Grand Prix Final.

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As a teenager, Nam Nguyen seemed destined to become one of the next big stars in figure skating. But after three frustrating seasons that almost drove him from the sport, the 21-year-old has finally found contentment and success on the ice once again.

NAM NGUYEN

Getting Back to Where He **ONCE BELONGED**

BY ROBERT BRODIE

The legendary song-writing duo of John Lennon and Paul McCartney most certainly did not have Nam Nguyen — or figure skating — in mind when they penned the words to “Get Back,” a 1969 hit song by The Beatles.

But the catchy chorus line from that tune — “*Get back. Get back to where you once belonged*” — ever familiar to even the most casual fan of the British supergroup, might just serve as an appropriate mantra for Nguyen’s skating career at this point in time — even though he admits the thought never crossed his mind when picking the trio of Beatles tunes for his long program this season.

“I saw someone post that on Instagram or Twitter, but I didn’t really think of that when I was choosing music. I only listen to the melody and the vibe that it gives off, not the lyrics,” Nguyen said when asked if there was something deliberate about his song selection, which also includes “Come Together” and the iconic “Let It Be.”

OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES

If it seems the vibe that Nguyen is giving off so far this season is that of the former prodigy who seemed destined to lead the next generation of Canadian men when he won the senior national title in 2015 at age 16 — the youngest ever to do so — he does not disagree with that line of thinking.

But this is not the same Nguyen today as back then — he is five years older and wiser, seven inches (17.78cm) taller (5-foot-10/177.8 cm) and has matured in many ways through some troubling times that went along with two very large growth spurts.

It seems that Nguyen may once again feel like the rising star that won Canadian titles at four different levels by the time he was age 12, and added the senior crown three years later. “In a sense, I do. But at the same time, I do not want to go back to that part (of my life) anymore. It was so different back then. I was shorter and everything was a lot easier for me.

“Now I want to build a new path for myself. I want to build a path that I can be proud of ... with my team, my coaches and the people I work with. Now is different from 2015. I do feel like I’m finding the rhythm I had back then, but I’m hoping to do a lot more. I know I’m capable of doing more than what I’m doing right now.”

The silver medal he won at Skate Canada in October — his first at a senior Grand Prix since 2014, and only his second ever — offered some early season validation for that mindset. While his sixth-place finish at Rostelecom Cup in Russia two weeks later ended Nguyen’s chance to reach the Grand Prix Final (he finished seventh in the Series and was the first alternate), it is not likely to mess with his positive mindset. That might be the biggest victory of all at this point in time.

It has been a long hard road to get where he is now — one that Nguyen and the skating community was hardly expecting after he won the World Junior title in 2014, the national crown a year later, followed by a fifth-place finish at the 2015 World Championships. Everything, it seemed, was trending upward for a skater then considered a rising star in the sport.

Then came the growth spurts, which had a large impact on his jumping technique, and Nguyen’s career began to spiral in the opposite direction.

He did not make the podium at 2016 nationals but went as an injury replacement to the World Championships in Boston, where he failed to advance past the short program.

Two months later, he was gone from his training base at the Toronto Cricket Club and had relocated to San Jose, California. All of it had Nguyen pondering whether he wanted to keep skating.

“After Worlds in Boston, when I didn’t make the long program, I did think about quitting,” Nguyen admitted. “And then I moved to California and that wasn’t too much fun either because I was living on my own, and it was extremely difficult for me. It was in that chunk of time that I really wanted to quit.”

By the end of 2016, he was back in Toronto, working under the tutelage of coaches Tracey Wainman and Gregor Filipowski at the York Region Skating Academy. Another coaching change followed in November 2017, when he relocated to the Richmond Training Centre north of Toronto, his current training base, where he is coached by Robert Burk.

The effects of the turmoil of two lost seasons, when Nguyen admits he lost his love for skating, bubbled to the surface at the 2018 Canadian Championships.

He produced his best free skate at nationals in three years and, when he arrived in front of the media, Nguyen was sobbing, his shoulders heaving with the release of so much pent-up emotion.



But his journey was finally heading down a positive road again, even if the bronze-medal finish there left him one spot shy of making the team for the 2018 Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang, South Korea.

"I had gone through a lot of changes in less than a year. Just going through all that was stressful enough," he said. "Any skater can tell you that switching clubs brings a lot of change in terms of training and how you communicate with a new coach.

"For me, that was really hard, and also with the Olympics in mind, it added more stress to it.

"But Robert did just such a tremendous job to keep me mentally sane going into nationals. It did hurt not being able to make it to the Olympics, but in my mind, Keegan (Messing, who placed second behind Patrick Chan) had already put his body of work out there during the Grand Prix season and it made more sense for him to go. "Keegan did a great job at the Olympics and I was so happy for him," said Nguyen.

When Chan chose not to go to the post-Olympic Worlds in Italy, the spot went to Nguyen. Again, he did not qualify for the free skate and doubts began to creep back into his mind.

TAKING CONTROL

On the heels of that experience Nguyen made a decision that he believes put his

him on the right track. A year ago, he took charge of his own career, including paying the bills and all the responsibilities that go along with it. "That was really not fun. It was a crisis moment for me," Nguyen said of 2018 Worlds. "I could have quit and taken the easy way out, but I wouldn't have been able to let myself live with that forever.

"I needed to give myself one more chance, and that's when taking responsibility and ownership came into play for me. I haven't looked back since."

Burk has provided a lot of guidance in that area, and though it remains a heavy burden, it is one that Nguyen willingly accepts. It is the reason that he is more committed than ever to the sport, and feels he is reaping the rewards every time he steps onto the ice.

"Honestly, I ask myself every day when I wake up, 'Why am I still doing this?' It's the hardest thing ever, but I'm enjoying it and as long as you have that enjoyment, you can get through it," said Nguyen. "I'm skating at a place where everybody supports me, and I feel like I'm at home. My coach is pretty much like a second dad to me. He's helped me so much, not just on the ice but also off the ice, especially at the beginning of last season.

"Everything was so new and foreign to me, trying to take on this thing. But I'm really happy with where I am right now, and

I can't wait to continue building upon this."

Nguyen was the surprise winner of the 2019 Canadian men's title, and the result reinforced in his mind that the new career direction he had chosen was the right one.

"That (victory) really set me on the path to being more committed to where I was at the beginning of last season," said Nguyen, who would go on to finish 16th at the World Championships in Japan. "I told everybody that I'm taking care of myself in the sport now, and it gave me a sense of commitment, a lot more than I've dealt with in the last few years. And winning nationals, really opened up my eyes to what I want to do in the sport.

"I'm 21 years old and I'm not taking anything for granted nowadays. I'm more than happy to accept and take on every opportunity that comes my way. I will use that (Canadian title) as an experience and a building block for my career in the long run, that's for sure."

While Nguyen considers himself blessed to have the ongoing support of his parents, Sony and Thu, and a group of friends who have "been with me through thick and thin," it's Burk who gets the credit for rekindling his love for the sport.

"Everything goes to my coach because he's the one that really got me to enjoy skating again. He really changed my perspective on figure skating," Nguyen explained.

"Before, it was all business and just getting everything done. But with Robert, if you have a bad day, it's not really a big deal, you come back the next day and you'll be even better, and that's a mentality that's been sticking with me since Day 1 with him."

2020 VISION

When Nguyen brings that joy for skating to the ice, you get what happened at 2019 Skate Canada. After his short program performance — "Blues for Klook," choreographed by Mary Angela Larmer — Nguyen found himself in third place.

He drew last to skate in the free behind eventual gold medalist Yuzuru Hanyu, who brought the house down with what Nguyen later called "a godlike performance."

Then it was his turn, and Nguyen quickly turned his long program into a party, for both himself and the home crowd. While he was technically proficient with a pair of quads and triple Axels in his program, the biggest takeaway was the smile that he wore on his face for most of the four-minute performance.

“I know I am capable of doing more than what I am doing right now.”

“From the very get-go, from my starting position, I was already in the character of what I wanted to portray with this program,” he explained. “I was in the swagger mode that I had intentionally planned for this program. And from there, the audience got into it and really gave me the support that I needed.”

“Once you have that, once you have the audience in the palm of your hand, it’s just hard to go off. It’s hard to make a mistake. I was smiling from beginning to end and I was just having the time of my life.”

Getting the audience involved was what Nguyen had in mind when he chose the trio of Beatles tunes for the program. He had originally planned to skate to a Queen medley but backed off when he realized Italy’s Matteo Rizzo had used Queen music last season.

Toward the end of the routine there was some ad lib, with Nguyen pointing into the crowd on a couple of occasions. If you are thinking it’s the kind of thing that, say, Kurt Browning might do (remember “Casablanca” at the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics?) ... that would be because the four-time World champion choreographed the program along with Danielle Rose, who is part of Nguyen’s coaching team.

“That’s where ‘Get Back’ really tied it all together,” he said of the process of building the program. “That last part, the choreo step sequence ... I told Kurt and Danielle ‘I want it to be a party. I literally want people to be out of their seats.’”

When Nguyen later watched a video of his performance, he noticed a woman in the audience doing exactly that during the step sequence.

“Everyone was going along with it

and having a good time with it, but to see that one person pretty much jump out of their seat when I came down to that end of the ice and to really have fun with it ... it made me so happy and it really warmed my heart to see that.”

When he was finished, Nguyen collapsed in a heap on the ice — something he had vowed he would never do. “I understand why skaters do that, just out of pure joy or sheer exhaustion,” he said.

“I told myself I would never do that, but I put out what I think was the greatest skate of my life and the crowd’s energy was unreal. I’ve never, ever experienced anything like that. It just overcame me.

“Now I kind of understand why people do that, but I’ll never, ever do that again. I’m going to stick to the barrage of fist pumps and all that.”

If all goes as planned, Nguyen hopes to have two more chances to feed off the energy of the Canadian audiences — at nationals in January in his own backyard and the 2020 World Championships in Montréal.

Getting to the latter event will be tougher for Canadian men than it has been in years. Based on the combined placements of Nguyen (16th) and Messing (15th) at 2019 Worlds, the host country can send only one man to Montréal.

With rising star Stephen Gogolev not age eligible for 2020 Worlds, Nguyen

and Messing figure to be among the top contenders for that single spot. But if you think that has put any strain on the tight friendship the duo has built over the past two seasons, they have already discussed the possibility of being roommates at nationals.

“Whoever gets that spot, we’re always going to be there to celebrate with each other, no matter what. We made it this far in our careers and that in itself is something to celebrate,” said Nguyen.

“Worlds being on home soil really excites me. It’s home-town advantage and all that. Montréal people are wild and they’re fun ... I would love to have the honor and privilege of representing Canada in Montréal later this season, but I have to put in the work first and see where that takes me.”

Nguyen marvels at the progress the sport continues to make in terms of the technical difficulty in programs today, especially in the ladies’ discipline.

He is blown away by the hefty talent — and in particular, that of the trio of Russian teenagers (Alexandra Trusova, Alena Kostornaia and Anna Shcherbakova) who dominated the Grand Prix Series this season.

“I’m just glad they’re not in the same discipline as me,” he said with a laugh. “At the press conference at Skate Canada, somebody asked me about that, and I said if we ever had to compete against those ladies, I would get out. It would be like, ‘I’m not competing anymore. I’m done with skating.’ Not only is it impressive what they do, it’s absolutely terrifying. They are talented to the point that I can’t even understand how talented they actually are.”

Though Nguyen sometimes wishes the sport’s growth would slow down a bit, he is very happy to still be in the game, given there was a time not so long ago that simply was not the case.

“I haven’t had the feeling of not enjoying skating in such a long, long time,” he said. “There is the odd moment when I think about the progress of the sport and it will be like, ‘what is going on? This is unbelievable.’”

“I absolutely love where it’s going, but it’s fast paced. The Russian girls are taking over the sport like crazy, but it adds a level of excitement for the audience, which is needed.

“Skating is starting to become more popular again, which I love to see. Hopefully it continues to build.” **IFS**



Yuzuru Hanyu congratulated Nam Nguyen on his silver-medal finish at 2019 Skate Canada.

ELIZAVETA TUKTAMYSHEVA

A Roller Coaster Season

BY TATJANA FLADE



When Elizaveta Tuktamysheva debuted on the senior Grand Prix circuit in the 2011-2012 season at age 14, she was the rising star of Russian figure skating. Her main rival at that time was Adelina Sotnikova and they, along with Alena Leonova, spearheaded the wave of young Russian ladies that now dominate the sport.

Sotnikova won the 2014 Olympic title, while Tuktamysheva did not qualify for those Games, having been overtaken by the next up and coming star, Julia Lipnitskaia.

While Sotnikova and Lipnitskaia have long since disappeared from the competitive scene, Tuktamysheva remains in the picture — despite having a career that has been somewhat of a roller-coaster ride.

Tuktamysheva moved on from the disappointment of missing the 2014 Olympics to win almost every competition she entered the following season — including the 2015 World and European titles. The first to start competing the triple Axel, which she had learned as a child, skating fans nicknamed her the “Empress.”

But Tuktamysheva would tumble from her throne just as fast as she had risen to it. She struggled with injuries and a certain loss of motivation and has failed to qualify for the European and World Championships since her global triumph five years ago.

The 2017-2018 Olympic season was especially tough. She placed seventh and ninth, respectively, at her two Grand Prix assignments, the lowest results in her career. A month later, Tuktamysheva’s Olympic dream was again dashed when she failed to earn a place on the Russian team for the 2018 Winter Games.

PHOTO: SUSAN D. RUSSELL

Last season she returned with a bang, winning Skate Canada in the fall of 2018, taking silver at NHK Trophy and capturing bronze at the Grand Prix Final. Tuktamysheva seemed to be on her way to earning a place on the Russian team that would compete at Europeans and Worlds. But as luck would have it, she caught a bad cold at the Final in Vancouver that turned into pneumonia.

Instead of competing at Russian nationals (normally a requirement to earn a place on Championships teams), Tuktamysheva ended up in hospital. In February, she lost a close decision to Evgenia Medvedeva at a national competition that the Russian federation used as a skate off for the third spot at 2019 Worlds. Medvedeva went to Saitama and Tuktamysheva was sent to the World Team Trophy, where she skated brilliantly.

She spent last summer at training camps in Europe and the U.S. with her long-time coach, Alexei Mishin. For the first time, she worked with Canada's Shae-Lynn Bourne, who choreographed a new short program to "Drumming Song" by Florence and the Machine. It was a different direction for Tuktamysheva. However, by the time the season started, that program was replaced with Astor Piazzolla's "Oblivion" at the suggestion of Mishin.

Tuktamysheva said she was inspired to work with Bourne and did not want to make the change. "I was in love with my new program, but apparently at the beginning I was not able to show it that well and how it should look like. Therefore, we decided to change to 'Oblivion.'"

However, she was insistent about skating to "Drumming Song" and following a successful test at a local event in St. Petersburg in October, the program was back.

This season has also been somewhat of a roller-coaster ride, but Tuktamysheva is not giving up. In the fall of 2019, she competed at two Challenger Series events, Lombardia Trophy and Finlandia Trophy, finishing second behind Anna Shcherbakova and Alena Kostornaia, respectively.

With Kostornaia also having a triple Axel and Shcherbakova a quad Lutz, Tuktamysheva now finds herself being overtaken by yet another generation of young Russian stars.

Despite the setbacks, she remained upbeat and positive about her performance in Finland. "It was a good competition, a

good check before the Grand Prix. I was pleased with my short program and, in the free, only my new jump combination (double Axel-Euler-triple Salchow) didn't work out. We put it in because we want to have the maximum content. I'm moving forward step by step."

A week later, Tuktamysheva took to the ice at Skate America, wearing a cool costume with trousers. She later said she wanted to portray "a woman who knows what she is worth." However, she looked tired and slow in the short program and mentioned she might have been affected by jet lag, but was not making excuses. For the first time, Tuktamysheva landed two triple Axels in the long program and was satisfied that she had an almost clean performance, despite finishing third.

"Maybe it was jet lag, but it just felt like I didn't get my legs under me," she explained. "I was tired, but what can you do? That's the job of an athlete. You need to be ready to skate in any situation and to deal with anything. There were a lot of thoughts after the short program, so I was happy I was able to pull myself together and skate a good long program with a good mood. Considering my mental condition before the free, that I was able to deal with it was a very positive sign."

However, Tuktamysheva had the impression that her program, set to "Caravan," "Utt Da Zay" and "Bei Mir Bist Du Schön," was not well received by the judges in Las Vegas.

At her second Grand Prix, Cup of China, she showed up with last year's popular routine to "You Don't Love Me" by Caro Emerald, "Petite Fleur" by The Hot Sardines and "Cat Groove" by Parovoz Stelar.

"I decided to go back to that program after the Grand Prix in America. I skated the new program clean, but there was not any satisfaction with the program or the performance," Tuktamysheva explained.

"I thought, I have a back-up version of this great program that I love — it is one of my favorites — so why not bring it back. I suggested it to my coach who agreed right away, and the first day home we reworked the choreography of the old program. Again, I got goose bumps and I got a kick out of it. I'm very happy that I was able to bring it back."

Tuktamysheva and her coaching team then changed the short program, replacing the triple flip-triple toe combination with a triple toe-triple toe. However, that change

did not go well. "I think I'll go back to the flip-toe. In Finland, I got an edge call and we thought if I do the toe-toe I would get the same score," she said. "But I wanted to do the maximum content and worked a lot on the flip-toe and Lutz-toe and not much on the toe-toe during the summer. This quick change showed in the stressful situation of the competition because in training I did the toe-toe consistently."

Her team also made slight changes to the long program music because Tuktamysheva wanted it to be "a bit more energetic. We changed the jump combination as well and brought back the double Axel-triple toe-double toe because I hadn't practiced the other one (double Axel-Euler-triple Salchow) that much, and we decided if we feel we need to change it, we should change it."

At Cup of China, an unexpected fall on the triple Axel in the short program left her sitting in fourth. Tuktamysheva finished second in the free skate (with two clean triple Axels) but was unable to surpass Shcherbakova and Japan's Satoko Miyahara. She again finished third.

"Overall I could have skated better, especially in the short program. That would have given me many more points and the chance to make the Grand Prix Final," Tuktamysheva recalled. "Therefore, I have mixed emotions. I did well in the free program and I'm happy about that. However, in the end I'm not happy with third place. But it is my own fault."

Fortunately, the 23-year-old said, it is not in her character to dwell on these disappointments. "I finished the competition in China on a high note with a good long program and positive emotions.

"Maybe I was too eager. I wanted to skate very well so badly, but unnecessary thoughts distracted my stupid head and that sometimes gets to me. I knew that I was in good shape and I really wanted to do it, but in the end I got a bad result."

"You always need to go in with a clear, calm head. The pleasure from the free program outweighs my anger about the short, so I'll continue to work."

Tuktamysheva could perhaps find some solace about not earning a ticket to Torino, following her runaway victory at the final Challenger Series event, Golden Spin of Zagreb, which took place the same week as the Grand Prix Final.

The season is only half done. The roller-coaster ride continues. **IFS**

MERYL DAVIS

SHINES BRIGHT IN SECOND ACT

BY ELVIN WALKER

Closing the competitive door after capturing the 2014 Olympic ice dance title with Charlie White opened so many others for Meryl Davis. The 33-year-old has discovered new ways to soar in life, both within the sport and beyond, and is embracing each and every opportunity.

When Meryl Davis stepped away from the skating spotlight, she had a bucket list of ideas she wanted to explore. But as she wound her way through that list, she discovered nothing there that she could see herself doing for the rest of her life.

Even though she was open to any and all opportunities that might come her way, Davis admitted she found the shift away from the competitive world to be somewhat challenging initially.

Shortly after the 2014 Olympic triumph, Davis and White went head-to-head on the reality television show “Dancing with the Stars.” Davis skated away with the mirror ball trophy and the hearts of a global audience. It marked the beginning of a new chapter in her life.

Throughout her competitive career, she had pursued an education and last December Davis graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelor’s degree in anthropology.

“Charlie and I always prided ourselves on having a life outside of skating —pursuing our education and stuff like that, but I still found it very difficult moving away from competition,” she recalled. “Not because I

wanted to be competing, but because I just didn’t know what I wanted to do. I spent quite a few years allowing myself to explore and try new things — to sort of figure out what spoke to me, without overthinking it. I just now understand the direction that I want to take my professional life in, but it took a while.

“It’s been a really interesting transition. It’s not always been easy, but it’s something that is really good, to let yourself go through to figure out what’s next. It’s like skating: You move, you take a step and you sort of figure out what’s going on, find your balance, adjust and keep going. I think that life is like that. Finishing my degree was something that was always very important to me, and I am so glad to have seen that through.”

It has been six years since Davis and White last competed, and she is now eager to share what she has learned through her own journey with other athletes who are struggling with the transition from sport to real life.

“One of the things I would encourage any athlete to remember is that it’s OK to not be good at something right away. I think that’s a very foreign concept for an Olympian,” Davis explained. “We identify as elite athletes, and we place so much of our value and our worth on our need to

perform at a high level. And so, as you move on and start to explore other areas of life and professional opportunities, this fear of being inadequate, this fear of not being good at something right away, can really hold you back. Learning to embrace the newness of it all is huge.”

Davis also stresses the importance of being surrounded by a team of people who can be relied upon to provide guidance when navigating the world outside the competitive arena. “Having a support system is another thing that I would encourage athletes to seek out because through sport we have our coaches, our physical therapists, costume designers and a federation that is there for us,” she said.

“Of course, there are resources for us as we move on, but we’re really paving our own path in a different way than any of us have ever done in our lives. When you start skating at 5 years old, you approach things differently — there is sort of only one direction to go in — so having a support team around you as you are making that transition into your new life is hugely important.”

In 2018, Davis landed a position as an interview host for the Olympic Channel. It is a role that fits her like a glove. “I ended up doing some special features,





“Charlie and I were always so focused on what was happening on the ice, we always felt that whatever we were doing off the ice was either secondary or even sometimes a distraction,” she explained. “Looking back now on interviews when we were competing we were always honest, but we were hesitant to explore our own opinions and ideas outside the world of sport for a variety of reasons.

“First, we were so into the world of sport — that bubble was very real for us. When it comes to commenting on politics or on our personal lives and beliefs as people off the ice, that is something not a lot of athletes want to dive in to.

“As an athlete, one of the main goals is to avoid distraction and focus on the task at hand, and that comes across when people are doing interviews. That’s OK. There are ebbs and flows with one’s comfort level with the media, and that comes with knowing yourself.

“Athletes know themselves so well on the field of play, and sometimes that self-identity is so wrapped up in that, it is hard to connect with who you are off the field of play.”

Although they formally retired from competitive skating in 2017, Davis and White still perform in shows around the world.

However, the logistics are somewhat more challenging these days, given that Davis currently resides in Los Angeles while White still lives in his native Michigan. Davis, who maintains a house in her home state, returns to train with White when they are preparing for a show.

“It’s a combination of just setting aside the time to get the training in and just being lucky that we have such a long history

which I wasn’t seeking out necessarily, but as I went through that competitive season I realized how much I enjoy doing sit-down interviews with skaters,” she said. “Perhaps addressing less the skating itself and more their lives, their personalities and what motivates them as athletes and as people is actually really fun for me.

“It’s something that I think that I might want to pursue more of — really diving in

and telling people’s stories.”

In the short time since Davis took on this job, she has learned many things, one of which is that it is not always easy to get an athlete to open up during an interview. Davis understands it is part of her job to approach a story from different angles, but as an athlete who has been in the spotlight, she is aware of why some might be a little conservative in their responses.

together,” she said. “We are incredibly fortunate to have been skating together for the past 22 years.

“We’ve been struck over the last several years by just how in sync we always are — whether we are seeing each other frequently or less so.

“We just feel really lucky that those more than 20 years really help us sort of know what to expect from the other person and know where the other person is on the ice.”

Davis said that no matter what she and White are doing, they always maintain contact and check in with each other. Though they have talked loosely about retiring, their love of skating has not diminished and both feel fortunate that it is still such a big part of their lives, both on and off the ice.

“Skating makes us happy and we will keep doing it as long as we still enjoy it — and we still do. At some point we will stop, but I don’t know when that will be. Charlie and I love skating together and we love performing, but we are both also pursuing different interests and different paths off the ice.”

Over the summer, Davis wed her longtime beau, Fedor Andreev, the 1999 Canadian junior champion and the son of her former coach, Marina Zoueva.

The newlyweds held two ceremonies — the first in Provence, France, in June, and a second in her parents’ backyard in Michigan in late August.

“Fedor and I had always talked about doing a destination wedding, in Europe specifically. Adventure and travel is such a big part of our lives and we really wanted to share that with our loved ones for our wedding,” Davis explained. “A lot of our loved ones had not been out of the country before, so to be able to go on an adventure and share this really special experience with them abroad was something we were really excited to do.

“A lot of Fedor’s family is still in Russia, so it worked out that it was closer for them as well. I think the inspiration really speaks to who we are — we love adventure, seeing new places and finding beauty in those places. In southern Europe, I am always particularly drawn to the culture and the ability to sort of hit pause on daily tasks, sit down at a table, have a meal and just enjoy time with your family. That is what we wanted.”


As one of her grandmothers was unable to make the trip to France, Davis and Andreev decided to hold a second ceremony for her at home. “We couldn’t legally get married in France anyway — I think you have to be a resident there for a certain time to get married, so that all worked out,” Davis explained.

“The wedding in France was very emotional and it felt as if it was the culmination of the years of our relationship and our love. There were a lot of happy tears. It’s hard to put into words. It was more emotional in terms of our relationship.

“Our wedding in Michigan with my family and my dad’s mom was very emotional in terms of connecting with her. I’ve always been close with her, and so to have her be part of that life moment with us was really special. It was a very different feeling.”

Davis said she and Andreev are enjoying their life in California, though it took some time to adjust to their new surroundings. “I’ve always loved L.A., and I’ve always loved spending time there, but it took about a year or more for me to love living there. We love hiking and we take our dog to the beach every weekend.

“There is so much that we are trying to embrace — the entrepreneurial spirit and the creative spirit that are so prevalent in Los Angeles.” **IFS**



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EXPERIENCE THE THRILL AND EXCITEMENT
OF LIVE COMPETITION!



DANCING UP *A STORM*

BY ROBERT BRODIE

Inspired by the greatest legends in ice dance, Great Britain's Lilah Fear and Lewis Gibson are aiming to make their own unique mark in the world of figure skating.



Ask Lilah Fear and Lewis Gibson about their current direction in ice dance and they will take you back to a legendary former nightclub in New York City with an infamous past.

Their free dance last season, which paid homage to Studio 54 and the disco era of the late 1970s, taught the British duo a thing or two about audience participation and their ability to make it all happen. It marked a turning point in how they are now approaching their still-burgeoning ice dance career.

As much as they are all about improving their skills and their standing among the world's top teams, Fear and Gibson have embraced the idea of being crowd pleasers as well, and it is now a big part of who they are and what they want to present on the ice.

"Doing disco turned out to be a lucky choice and from there, it completely redirected us to where we see ourselves going, what we feel is our style and what makes us unique," said Fear, a 20-year-old from London. "We like to dance, and we really thrive on the crowd's enjoyment as well. It's something we've identified that we really want.

"We're not saying we need all this attention. It just makes us feel like a part of something bigger to touch people. I know that sounds kind of cheesy, but when you see people enjoying what we do and you have little kids coming up to you afterward, it really means a lot."

Fear and Gibson, who are coached by Romain Haguenauer at the Montréal International Skating School, now admit that straying away from more traditional styles of music for a free dance — and instead swaying along with disco queen Donna Summer — came with some trepidation.

"The thing with last year's disco program is that it was a bit of a risk," said Gibson, 25, who hails from Prestwick, Scotland. "We had never done anything like that before, with that sort of speed and movement or even performance level.

"But, we went for it and it paid off big time. A big part of last season was the enjoyment level of skating that we had and it was something that we really wanted to bring to this season — the entertainment factor and the vibe we feel from the audience when we perform to that style of music."



It's been really great that basically every event we've gone to, we've had a better score each time.

—Lewis Gibson



With that direction now firmly set in their minds, they are looking for even more this season. Though the music styles have changed — The Blues Brothers for the rhythm dance, the legendary Madonna for the free — the beat goes on in their hearts and in their performance

level. Fear and Gibson won their first-ever Grand Prix medal, a bronze, at 2019 Skate Canada, and followed that up with a fourth-place finish at NHK Trophy (they ranked third in the free dance).

While they produced personal best scores across the board at Skate Canada, it was the chance to stand on the podium at a Grand Prix event that was cause for true celebration. It marked the first time the Union Jack had risen over a Grand Prix podium for a British ice dance team since 2014, when Penny Coomes and Nicholas Buckland claimed bronze at Rostelecom Cup in Moscow.

Fear and Gibson squeezed into the bronze-medal position by a scant 0.58 of a point over the American team of Kaitlin Hawayek and Jean-Luc Baker, who train alongside them in Montréal. It was high drama to be sure.

"Shock. I burst into tears because I wasn't expecting it in the slightest," Fear recalled. "When you're that surprised, it's hard to really control your emotions. I managed to get it together and then it was just exciting, and it was an honor to stand on the podium and to see our flag ... it was amazing."

It was another positive sign, Gibson said, about the progress they are making this season. "It's been really great that basically every event we've gone to, we've had a better score each time. And of course, that builds a lot of confidence because that's not always the case. The season's focus has been on trying to improve our skating skills and on being a stronger team together."

They also see it as further validation for the music choices they have made in the wake of last season's disco revelation. It was Gibson who proposed the idea of using the bodacious 1980s sounds of The Blues Brothers, with their rhythm dance featuring a trio of songs — "Soul Man,"



“Everybody Needs Somebody To Love” and “Shake A Tail Feather.”

“I was researching music and I came across this song. And I thought, ‘I recognize this from somewhere,’” Gibson explained. “And when we learned that the rhythm dance music this year was from musicals, I thought, this is just fantastic.”

Fear had not seen the movie and did not know the Blues Brothers, but she knew all the songs. “We knew that could get the crowd on its feet, hopefully, and people would be tapping their toes. That’s something with disco that really helped last year, that people knew the songs.”

As for the free dance, which features Madonna’s “Vogue,” “Hung Up” and “Like A Prayer” ... Fear points to her mother, Kirsten, an avid skater herself, for providing the inspiration. “When she was growing up, Madonna’s music was something that was so prominent. She’s such an icon.

“My mom brought that idea to us and after some thought, we were like ‘actually, that could work. Why not give it a go?’ You never know. It’s always a risk with these types of things, but we just hoped to bring the vision to life and that people would react the way we wanted them to.”

SURPRISE PAIRING

Every team has its own unique ‘how did they get together’ story, and Fear and Gibson are no different. It is reasonable to wonder how a guy from Scotland who

started out playing soccer and a young lady who was born to Canadian parents while living in New York, managed to become ice dance partners.

Gibson, like many Scottish youngsters, was first enamored with what the world outside of North America refers to as football (soccer). Until, at age 11, he watched “Dancing On Ice,” a British television series that pairs figure skaters with celebrities. The hosts for the show, 1984 Olympic champions Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean, are to this day absolute royalty in British ice dance. “I learned how to skate after watching that. That was my inspiration,” Gibson said.

A singles skater for five years, he won a few medals along the way. But there was one huge goal that Gibson had in mind and, as the men’s discipline rapidly evolved and the quad revolution took off, he knew he would not be able to keep up.

“For me, it was about the goal of competing at the Olympics — that’s something that I always had,” he said. “In singles skating, the quads were really becoming a thing a few years ago and now it is the thing. I didn’t see myself getting them, so I decided to try ice dance.

“I had been encouraged by the British federation many times to try it — they felt I had a strong feel for music and dance and kept pushing me in that direction.”

While Gibson was working his way toward becoming an ice dancer, Fear had

been immersed in it for much of her life. She and her family moved to London when she was 2 years old and she began learning to skate at age 5. Eventually, she joined the solo dance program run by the British federation that helps skaters who aspire to be ice dancers.

Fear partnered with Jacob Payne for the 2013-2014 season, winning the British novice title. A year later, they were bronze medalists at the junior level. But by 2016, the partnership had run its course — which happened to coincide with Gibson’s decision to try his hand at ice dance.

“I had seen Lewis before. The funny thing is, we had both trained at the Cricket Club in Toronto. Not together, but we had been there at the same time for a few summers,” Fear recalled.

When Gibson “put it out there” that he was looking for an ice dance partner, a tryout was arranged with Fear and a new partnership was born. “The timing was crazy,” she said.

The two brought different strengths to the table — Gibson was a natural dancer, while Fear carried the necessary musicality derived from her years in ice dance. The work ethic and drive they both share helped them build off each other’s best assets. While it may not have worked smoothly right away, they saw the potential fairly quickly.

“Working together at the beginning is always a little awkward because you don’t know the person very well, unless you’re best friends,” said Fear. “For me, it was more when I saw the videos of our practice sessions. Even though it wasn’t great, I could see our bodies matched very well and our lines were actually pretty similar. That’s something that was a good indicator at the beginning.”

For the first two years of their partnership, they were coached by Karen Quinn at the Alexandra Palace Ice Rink in London, and Haguenaer in Montréal. But once Fear finished high school, they made the move to Canada permanently.

“I’ve known Romain since I was maybe 10 years old. He choreographed for my solo dance career and when he was still living

in France, we would meet and he would do my choreography,” Fear explained. “When I started with Lewis, we came here at one point just to get some guidance and we really felt it was the right place to be.”

Added Gibson: “We’re very thankful he was willing to work with us from the beginning. I had been a singles skater and I had no clue about ice dancing. We have some video footage of that and it’s ...

“Shocking,” Fear interjected with a laugh.

FRENCH MAGIC

The move to Montréal put them on the same ice as Haguénauer’s prize students, Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron, the four-time World champions from France. Also there and in pursuit of their second Olympic title were Canada’s Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir, who were Fear’s idols growing up.

“At the beginning, when we first arrived, we were very much deer in the headlights. We were star struck,” Fear recalled. “We were on the ice with Tessa and Scott the very first day we were there. But once we got settled and got to know these people — it’s just the most wonderful environment to train in because we’re all pushing each other. There’s competitive energy, but not in a negative way. We’re all trying to do our best and we’re all improving as a result of that.”

While they are nowhere near the class of Papadakis and Cizeron, Fear and Gibson feed off the opportunity to train alongside the French team. “What is really great is that you’re receiving corrections from the same coach,” said Gibson. “You see people work on certain things, and then you go out in a really competitive environment and all of sudden, it’s like, ‘Oh great, I’m a little bit further along.’ You get to compare yourself to them on a daily basis and it’s really helped us move forward a little faster.”

“Just to see how they work together, how they train, their work ethic ... it’s amazing to be exposed to that so directly, to people you look up to, and to literally be sharing the ice with them,” Fear added. “That’s something so unique that we’re really lucky to have.”

The British team cannot help but feel the influence of the legendary Torvill and Dean — and it goes beyond the fact they unwittingly lured Gibson onto the ice in the first place.

“Even if people in Britain don’t know what ice dance is, you just say Torvill and Dean and they get it,” said Fear. “They have

been a huge influence on us and for so many skaters from Great Britain ... they’re just iconic. We got to work with them one morning a couple of years ago at our rink in London. It was very interesting to see how they work together, and how creative they are.”

Gibson also has an affinity for his fellow Scots, Sinead Kerr and John Kerr, the seven-time British champions from 2004-2010 and two time Olympians who won a pair of bronze medals at the European Championships.

“I was very lucky to be able to train with them some days in Edinburgh, when they would come back between competitions,” said Gibson.

“

Even if people in
Britain don’t know
what ice dance is,
you just say Torvill
and Dean and
they get it.

—Lilah Fear

”

“Looking back now, they were a very creative team. They always had cool ideas for programs and costumes. That’s something we have a similarity to, that creativeness.”

Fear and Gibson now have their own “cool programs” to show off, and they are enthused about the idea of doing it right in their own backyard at the 2020 World Championships in Montréal in March. Their parents will be on hand to watch, along with Fear’s younger sister, Sasha — a junior ice dancer who trains part of the year at their rink in Montréal with partner George Waddell — and other members of her extended family who live in Canada.

“It’s super exciting. For us, it’s going to be the closest thing possible to being at home,” said Gibson.

It will also be a chance for the duo to

show off their adopted city, which they have come to love. Fear, who also studies psychology part-time at McGill University, lives between the school and their training venue. Gibson is just a 15-minute walk away from the Gadbois Centre. In their eyes, Montréal is the ideal place to grow as skaters and as people.

“I like the size of the city. It’s small (compared to London), so it’s really great to get around,” said Gibson. “There are so many different gyms and places where you’re able to work out.”

Outside of training, Fear said Montréal “is brilliant. There’s so much culture here, amazing restaurants. You can go for walks in the park. We never get bored.”

ON THE RISE

Last season, Fear and Gibson hit new heights at the European and World Championships, finishing sixth and 13th, respectively. They carried that momentum into the Grand Prix Series and while their early season results suggest more big things may be in store for them later this season, the British duo is doing their best not to get too far ahead of themselves.

“We never really set outcome based goals. It’s better to stay present and do as much as you can in the moment and see where it takes you,” said Fear.

“For us, it’s just been surprise after surprise, and it’s kind of fun like that. The only thing that it changed is our confidence. Not in a bad way, but we need to hold ourselves to a higher standard now and maybe have more expectations in terms of what we can achieve. That’s just motivated us more to keep going in the direction we’ve been going.”

If all goes as they hope, that direction will take them all the way to the 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Beijing. Fear and Gibson got a taste of the Olympics in 2018 when they were taken to the Winter Games in PyeongChang as part of the Team GB Ambition program for potential future Olympians.

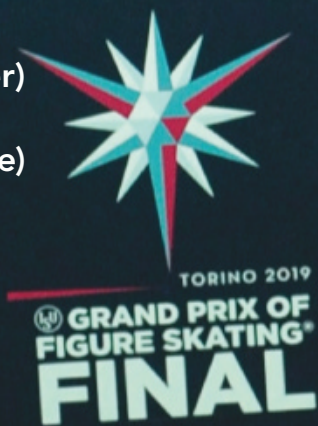
Though there for less than a week, it fueled their desire to get to Beijing. “It’s something you can’t even imagine. We weren’t even competing, but just the energy ... you could feel it,” Fear recalled.

“It was so exciting,” added Gibson. “We got to watch the short dance and the men’s short program. Just to be exposed to that, it really made us hungry to get there ourselves.” **ITS**

JUNIOR STARS STEAL



Andrei Mozalev (Russia - silver)
Shun Sato (Japan - gold)
Danill Samsonov (Russia - bronze)



The 2019 Junior Grand Prix Final showcased a wealth of talent with new champions crowned in all four disciplines, and all but one of the podium steps claimed by those who made their debuts in Torino..

In a scenario similar to that of a year ago in Vancouver, the man who qualified sixth and last for the Junior Grand Prix Final ended up stealing the show. With a win and a third-place finish on the Junior Grand Prix circuit, Japan's Shun Sato headed into the Final in sixth place in the Series standings.

Despite executing a clean short program in Torino, Sato sat in third with a score of 77.25 — 5.20 points out of first place. Though he was satisfied with his performance, his goal was to win a medal. "But first, I need to do my best and stay calm and concentrated," the 15-year-old Sendai native said.

Skating second to last in the free, Sato followed his own advice, nailing all the elements in his Nino Rota "Romeo and Juliet" program, which included three quads (Lutz, a toe-triple toe combination and a solo toe), two triple Axels and a trio of other triples. As the final note of his music faded, the audience rose to its feet in a standing ovation. Sato earned a personal best score of 177.86 for the segment and his combined total of 255.11 — the highest score awarded in the junior ranks this season — was 35.42 points better than the top score he received

THE TORINO SHOW

REPORT AND PHOTOS BY SUSAN D. RUSSELL

on the Junior Grand Prix circuit. In the end, it was a runaway victory for Sato who claimed the title by a margin of 13.63 points.

"I am surprised that I could win here and receive such a high score," he said. "To be among Yuzuru Hanyu and Shoma Uno as winners of the Junior Grand Prix Final is an honor."

Russia's Andrei Mozalev, 16, headed into the competition ranked first following his two wins on the Junior Grand Prix circuit. First after the short with 82.45 points, his long program to the "Step Up" soundtrack and "In This Shirt" had a couple of challenges. Though he landed two quad toe loops, a triple Axel-triple toe combination and four more triple jumps, he fell on a second triple Axel attempt and lost levels on a spin and the step sequence.

Mozalev earned 159.03 points for his long program performance, but slipped to second with a combined score of 241.48. "I feel very comfortable and it is great to be here at the Final. There were some errors, but I have drawn conclusions and will work on them. I'm happy with the silver. I'm already very satisfied with getting here at all. It has given me a huge experience," said the native of St. Petersburg.

Daniil Samsonov may be small in stature, but he packs a powerful punch on the ice. Hailing from Moscow, the 14-year-old trains with Eteri Tutberidze on the same sessions as many of the Russian ladies who competed at the Final.

His campaign did not get off to a great start in Torino, with a fall on the opening triple Axel in the short program, but he recovered immediately and went on to execute a triple loop, a triple Lutz-triple toe combination and Level 4 spins and footwork. A score of 77.75 had him in second place.

Determined not to repeat the mistake he made in the short, Samsonov opened his long program with a clean triple Axel followed by a quad Lutz. He stumbled out of a second triple Axel, but went on to land five more clean triple jumping passes. Though he ranked fourth in the free skate with 152.44 points, he finished in third

place overall with a total of 230.19.

"Not everything worked out today. But I'm very happy to be here considering these are the best six skaters in the world and in my first year on the Junior Grand Prix I got to the Final and won the bronze," said Samsonov. "I was a bit nervous to be skating in such a big competition in such a big arena with so many people. But when you have a lot of people you have a lot of support too."

Samsonov was so popular with the international media that he held his own press conference at the conclusion of the competition.

Japan's Yuma Kagiya ranked second heading into Torino, but struggled in both segments. He pulled up from sixth after the short to finish fourth with 227.09 points. Petr Gumennik of Russia, the runner-up at the 2018 Final, placed fifth with 212.62 points ahead of Italy's Daniel Grassl, the 2019 World Junior bronze medalist (195.66). Grassl later explained he had to skate in new boots after his old ones broke two days before the Final.

TWO-WAY BATTLE

It was a tight race in the ladies short program with the top four separated by just 2.17 points. From the outset, it was pretty much a given that the battle for gold would be between Russia's Kamila Valieva and Alysa Liu of the U.S., who ranked first and second, respectively, heading into Torino.

In a field that showcased the best junior ladies in the world, there was no room for error. Unfortunately for Valieva, an unsteady landing on a triple loop jump sealed her fate in the short program, leaving her in fourth place with 69.02 points. She later admitted to a case of nerves and said that after the loop problem she knew she had to "pull herself together, carry on and skate as well as possible."

It was a different story in the long program. The 13-year-old dynamo did not put a foot wrong in her routine to "Exogenesis: Symphony Part 3 (Redemption)" by Muse. Valieva reeled off seven clean triple jumps, including two combinations, earning Level 4s for her spins and the footwork

sequence. She racked up 138.45 points for the segment and, with a combined total of 207.47, claimed the gold. "It is a little unexpected," she said of her victory. "I'm happy with my skate and with the jumps I did, but it was a simple version today. I wanted to do a quad toe loop but I was injured three weeks ago and I do not want to attempt it until I feel confident again."

"Don't Rain on My Parade" was an apt choice of short program music for Liu, who landed a triple Axel-triple toe combination, which propelled her into the lead. (The triple Axel is not permitted as the solo Axel in the junior ladies short program and can only be done in combination). The 14-year-old earned 71.19 points for her efforts, giving her a 1.04-point lead at the end of the segment.

Speaking to the media backstage, Liu said she does not suffer from nerves and does not feel any pressure. "I just tell myself it's just another competition."

The free skate did not go quite as well. Though Liu landed six clean triple jumps in her program set to "Illumination" by Jennifer Thomas, both quad Lutz attempts and the second triple Axel were deemed under-rotated. She earned 133.46 points for her performance and dropped to second with an overall score of 204.65. "I'm happy I came here. It's a relief it's over, but I'm disappointed. I could have done better," the California native admitted. "My goal is always to skate a clean program but I didn't do it. It went OK, but I could have been better in a lot of things. I should have done only one quad, but I really wanted to go for it just for the fun of it. It was a big risk."

Russia's Daria Usacheva, 13, finished second at both her Grand Prix events and ranked fifth at the end of the Series. In Torino, she showed improvement in many areas, finishing second after the short program with 70.15 points.

But Usacheva also had technical issues in her long program set to "Je suis malade." Though she executed a clean triple Lutz-double toe combination, both her triple-triple combinations were downgraded. Nonetheless, Usacheva



Alysa Liu (USA - silver)
Kamila Valieva (Russia - gold)
Daria Usacheva (Russia - bronze)

earned a personal best score of 130.22 and finished third with a total of 200.37 points. “I expected a good result, but of course you always want to do and get more,” she said. “I’m happy to be on the podium but not so pleased that I didn’t get all my elements clean and perfect. I could have skated better. There were mistakes and issues and that’s not what I wanted today.”

Russia’s Kseniia Sinitsyna, third after the short, dropped to fourth overall with 195.57 points. South Korea’s Haein Lee finished fifth with 194.38 points ahead of Russia’s Viktoria Vasilieva (184.37).

DOMINATION

Five Russian pairs teams qualified to compete in Italy led by Apollinariia Panfilova and Dmitry Rylov. In their third trip to a Junior Final the duo finally captured the title that had eluded them the previous two seasons. They now have a complete set of medals after winning silver in 2017 and bronze in 2018.

However, their victory in Torino did not come easily. The 2019 World Junior silver medalists won the short program by a narrow margin of 2.16 points over their teammates Kseniia Akhanteva and Valerii Kolesov.

Rylov acknowledged they could have skated better. “On three elements we did not do as well as we could have done. We could have received more points and also got more in the components. At the end

of the step sequence, I just improvised a bit because we were ahead of the music.”

The duo made just one mistake in their long program set to the “Third Person” soundtrack when Panfilova fell on a throw triple loop. Though they executed a high-flying triple twist, a throw triple flip and Level 4 lifts and spins, their performance ranked only second best of the evening. But with 116.43 points for the segment and 185.23 overall, they held on to win by just 0.86 of a point.

“To come here as the leaders for the first time didn’t change anything inside, but it did give us extra confidence,” said Panfilova. “Right after our performance we didn’t feel so good and I guess everyone knows why. After the short we thought that we would be on the podium, but did not expect to be first. We are happy that we won. We always want to do our best, independent of the placement.”

Russia’s Diana Mukhametzyanova and Ilya Mironov, third after the short, won the free skate with a solid performance to music from “Chess” that included a Level 4 reverse lasso lift. The Moscow-based team achieved a personal best score of 119.47 and finished second overall with 184.37 points.

“This was our first Junior Final and we have very positive emotions. It’s our best performance by points but not the best by the quality for sure,” said Mironov, adding that their coaches changed the short program just weeks before they went to

Torino. “We are going to work on our skating skills and the quality of pair elements like height and clean landings because without these things our programs don’t look complete in our opinion.”

When asked about the Russian dominance in the junior pairs discipline, Mironov responded: “After the 2002 and 2006 Olympics, a lot of people took up skating and, of course, the most talented ones go into pairs skating.”

Akhanteva and Kolesov struggled with the side-by-side jumps in their “Shine On You Crazy Diamond” long program. Second after the short, they ranked fourth in the free and dropped to

third overall with 179.68 points. “The jumps did not work and there were also some errors on other elements,” Akhanteva admitted.

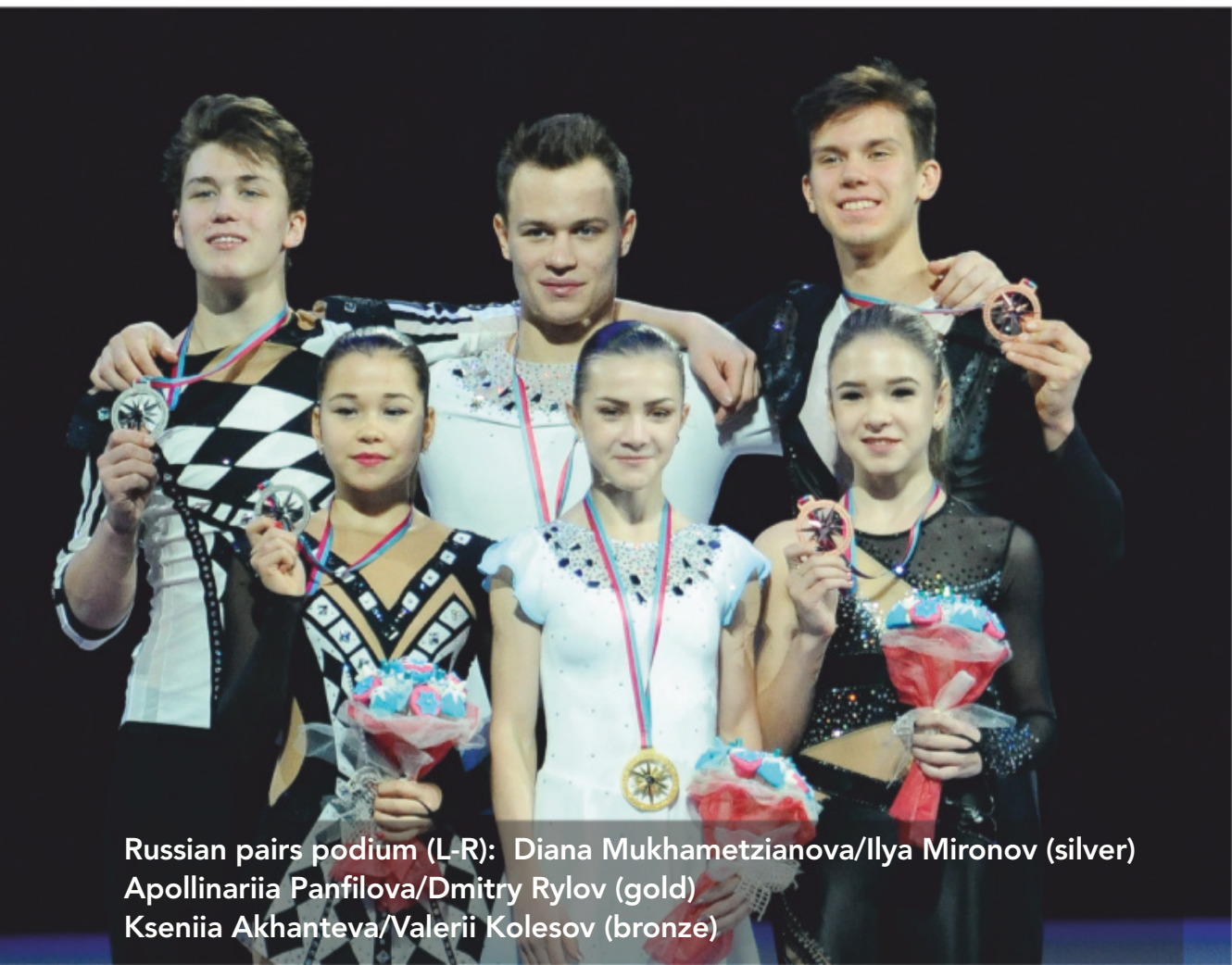
“We showed like 60 percent of what we can do,” Kolesov added. “We basically lost two elements and we’re quite upset with our performance. It is our own fault that we didn’t do better, but obviously it is nice to be on the podium.”

Russia’s Iuliia Artemeva and Mikhail Nazarychev landed in fourth with 178.56 points, ahead of their teammates Alina Pepeleva and Roman Pleshkov (172.53). Germany’s Annika Hocke and Robert Kunkel, the only non-Russian team to qualify for the Final, finished sixth with 159.22 points.

DANCE REVOLUTION

For 13 years, Russian and American ice dance teams had dominated the Junior Grand Prix Final. But this year, Maria Kazakova and Georgy Reviya of Georgia not only broke that stranglehold, they made history as the first skaters from their nation to ever claim the title at a junior or senior Final.

Though Kazakova and Reviya finished sixth in 2018, it was obvious to everyone that this was a talented team with loads of potential. This season, they finished second at their first Grand Prix assignment, losing to a Russian team by 0.33 of a point. At their second competition, the Georgian duo defeated another Russian team by almost



Russian pairs podium (L-R): Diana Mukhametzianova/Ilya Mironov (silver)
Apollinariia Panfilova/Dmitry Rylov (gold)
Kseniia Akhanteva/Valerii Kolesov (bronze)



Ice dance podium (L-R): Avonley Nguyen/Vadym Kolesnik (USA - silver)
Maria Kazakova/Georgy Reviya (Georgia - gold)
Elizaveta Shanaeva/Devid Narzhnyy (Russia - bronze)

15 points to win the gold.

They headed into the Final ranked fourth, but in Torino, Kazakova, 18, and Reviya, 20, led from the outset, claiming top spot in the rhythm dance with a new personal best score of 68.76 — just 0.04 of a point above the heavily favored American team of Avonley Nguyen and Vadym Kolesnik.

“It wasn’t easy today. We are very happy

with our marks but not so happy with the skate,” Reviya admitted. “We had a few small issues with the twizzles which didn’t go quite as we needed them to. On a few transitions we lost speed, but we got back into the program quite quickly.”

The Georgian team delivered a solid performance of their innovative free dance to “In the End” by Tommee Profitt, which

earned them a standing ovation from the audience. The duo collected 106.14 points for the segment for a total of 174.90, which gave them a winning margin of just 0.16 of a point. “We came out knowing that there was nothing to lose, that we had worked not to be afraid of anything. Of course, we have a lot of emotions now and it’s hard to realize that we won,” Reviya said.

When asked about the unique moves in their free dance Reviya smiled. “We like crazy, unusual elements. It is like Cirque de Soleil, but we feel totally OK with it because we do it every day,” he explained

Nguyen and Kolesnik earned Level 4s for the twizzles and the lift in the rhythm dance, but the midline step sequence and the first Tea Time Foxtrot sequence garnered a Level 2. They finished second with 68.72 points.

“We just want to do as well as we can and keep improving our programs. We hope the judges like what they see and we hope the people who see us feel something from our skating,” Nguyen said.

The American team flowed through their free dance, set to Rachmaninov’s “Piano Concerto No. 2,” earning 106.02 points for their efforts. With an overall score of 174.74 they captured the silver, narrowly missing the top step of the podium. “We’re a little disappointed,” Nguyen admitted. “We were only a fourth of a point behind after the rhythm dance and we felt we could push and get to the next level, but it didn’t work out.”

Russia’s Elizaveta Shanaeva and Devid Naryzhnyy won both their Junior Grand Prix assignments and ranked second heading into their first Junior Final. The duo finished third in both segments in Torino and captured the bronze with 164.22 points.

“We didn’t feel the Olympic atmosphere of the arena straight away, but when we saw the rings and our coach told us all about it we started to feel it has its own atmosphere,” Shanaeva said of Palavela, the venue in which figure skating events were held at the 2006 Winter Games. “It was really fun to skate for such a big audience. I couldn’t imagine skating for this many people.”

Russia’s Elizaveta Khudaiberdieva and Andrey Filatov finished fourth with a total score of 163.03, missing the third step of the podium by 1.19 points.

Loicia Demougeout and Theo Le Mercier of France placed fifth with 156.26 points, while Diana Davis and Gleb Smolkin of Russia finished sixth (152.21). **IFS**

Happy to Be Back

Han Yan Finds a Silver Lining

BY TATJANA FLADE



Han Yan made a successful return to competition on home soil at 2019 Cup of China in early November.

After being absent from the scene for the past 18 months, his second-place finish in Chongqing was a pleasant surprise not only for his fans, but also for the skater himself. Happy to be back and skating well, winning a medal was the icing on the cake for the Harbin native.

Tired and frustrated, Yan stepped away from competition after a disappointing 23rd-place finish at the 2018 Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang, South Korea.

The 23-year-old said there were many reasons for his decision to quit skating, some of which were related to how he was being treated. “I felt like I didn’t receive a fair platform to train because I didn’t even have a coach before the 2018 Olympics. I had no idea where I should go after that, either.

“After the Olympics, I felt like I was the abandoned one, and that I was treated like a piece of trash.”

Injuries played a role in his decision as well. The 2012 World Junior champion underwent shoulder surgery in 2017 and was dealing with other physical ailments.

“I did have a lot of injuries, but I still don’t think that I should have been treated that way. I was very unhappy and thought that maybe that was it. I didn’t want to get in touch with anyone related to the national team, or be involved in anything on the ice anymore,” he explained.

Yan said at that time he had a lot of options and planned to study and travel the world. However, the sport does not let you off the hook that easily, and figure skating remained not only on his mind but, more importantly, in his heart.

“The reason why I came back is that I kept dreaming about skating even when I didn’t skate anymore,” said Yan. “After all, this is something I’ve been doing for over 20 years, and through all these years, I always dreamed about figure skating.

“Then I realized that I was previously affected by people who looked at me with prejudice

and an attitude, which was totally unnecessary. That's why I decided to come back. I believe that I should keep doing what I like, and not care too much about what other people think or say. That's been my current attitude.

"And now, I just really enjoy the sense of fulfillment from each practice, the excitement from every competition, the love from the audience, the evaluation from the judges and their recognition of my programs."

Yan originally planned to begin his comeback at Nebelhorn Trophy last September, but a slight injury prevented him from doing so.

He began training fulltime a month before Cup of China, and though he knew he would not have the technical repertoire to compete with the top guns he wanted to show everyone a good attitude and what he could do. Yan does not have a quad in his arsenal at this time and has only one triple Axel in the long program.

However, he is inspired by the success he achieved in Chongqing and that has encouraged him to continue.

"From the experience of this competition, I felt like I really should come back. Otherwise, I will not live up to my own goals and will ruin my future because of other people, and that's very stupid," he said.

"Of course, I still feel nervous before stepping on the ice, but I would say that the pressure is not as big as before, like I was literally carrying something very heavy on my back and in my skating.

"Now I really enjoy everything — being free and relaxed — because as of now the result actually does not matter to me at all. Being able to compete at Cup of China is already an opportunity given to me. I came



back here to perform and to bring good programs to everyone. So, I wasn't really nervous or felt that much pressure."

He has kept his old short program, "A Thousand Years" by Christina Perri, and has a new long program to the "La La Land" soundtrack by Justin Hurwitz that suits him very well.

Despite his success, Yan is not sure what will happen next. Since his return he has been training with his former longtime coach Shuguang Jia, but said that this might not be a permanent arrangement.

"I haven't figured things out yet. As for where I will train after this competition, who my coach will be, or where I should

belong ... I don't know any of that yet. I've actually experienced many setbacks along my skating journey, and I think those things are all normal to me.

"Now that I'm really just enjoying skating, where I train does not matter that much anymore. No matter which ice rink, no matter where it is, none of these will affect my training because I really just enjoy skating. This is what I like, this is what I love, and that's it."

The three-time national champion said he feels support from his family, even if they do not directly express that to him. "I believe that my family actually also wants me to continue to skate.

"Their attitude and the way they educated me is that I have to make my own choices in life. They would not really force me to do anything or tell me what they think is the best. My family is like that.

"I also received some encouragement from the fans. They all pushed me and supported me when I was hesitating, and I'm very grateful to them."

Obviously, the 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Beijing played a role in Yan's motivation to return. "I believe this is the dream of every Chinese winter sport athlete," he said.

"We are especially lucky because the Olympic Games will be held in our country and we can participate. This is something that we are all proud of. I don't have a specific goal of what result I want to achieve yet because I don't even know what my next competition will be, or where I will be training tomorrow.

"But none of this will stop me. No matter where I train, as long as I can compete in 2022, it's a success for me." **ITS**



THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGING

New Era Ushered in at Grand Finale

REPORT AND PHOTOS BY SUSAN D. RUSSELL

New champions were crowned in two of the four disciplines contested at the 2019 Grand Prix Final in Italy, with four singles skaters and one pairs team landing on the podium in their senior debuts.

The Russian ladies made history with the first ever sweep of a senior Grand Prix Final podium in their discipline, and three teams from Montréal dominated in ice dance.

The showdown between Nathan Chen and Yuzuru Hanyu was the most anticipated event in Torino, but in the end it was no contest.

There was a changing of the guard at the 2019 Grand Prix Final with a new generation of ladies announcing their arrival.

The trio of Russian teenagers that dominated the junior ranks last season — Alena Kostornaia, Alexandra Trusova and Anna Shcherbakova — continued that trend in their senior debuts this year, claiming all six titles on the Grand Prix circuit, and the top three steps of the podium in Torino. Eteri Tutberidze and Sergei Dudakov coach all three in Moscow.

Many expected Trusova, the reigning World Junior champion who has three quads in her repertoire, would capture the title, but in a repeat of what transpired at the 2018 Junior Final, it was Kostornaia who stood atop the podium.

First to skate in the short program, Kostornaia was flawless, earning a World

record score of 85.45 — 0.41 of a point higher than the record she set at NHK Trophy in Japan in November. The 16-year-old does not have a quad in her arsenal, but a consistent triple Axel has been a formidable weapon for her in both the short and long programs this season. “I’m very happy that I managed to do everything and that I did my best. I enjoyed it,” said Kostornaia, adding that when she steps onto the ice she does not think about numbers or records, “I just skate.”

Performing to “New Moon” and “Supermassive Black Hole” in the free, Kostornaia opened the program with a triple Axel-double toe combination immediately followed by a second triple Axel. She went on to execute six more triple jumping passes, high-level spins and footwork to earn a personal best score of 162.14 for the segment. Her combined score of 247.59 beat the World record previously held by Trusova.

Despite having the only clean free skate, Kostornaia ranked second in the segment, 0.51 of a point behind Shcherbakova. But her combined score held up, and Kostornaia claimed her first major victory at the senior

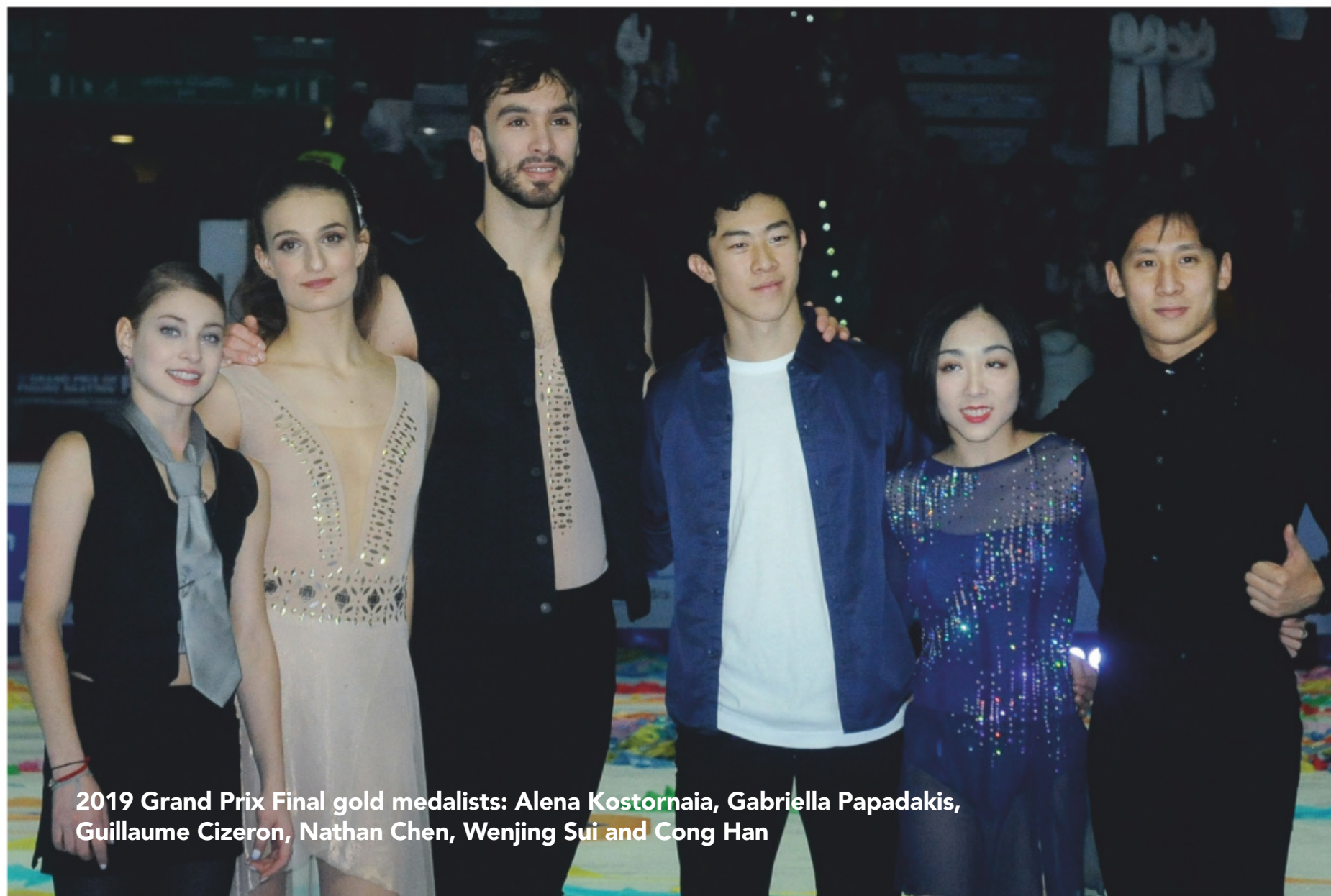
level. She is only the fifth skater in history to capture the Junior Grand Prix and Grand Prix Final titles in consecutive years.

“I was motivated to beat the record for the total score today,” she said. “I’m very happy because just like yesterday I managed to skate clean, and of course having so many people in the rink helped me to do this. This whole season has been very unexpected for me.”

Kostornaia said her most memorable moment at the competition was when Japan’s Yuzuru Hanyu offered to share some of his gifts with the trio. “Yuzuru allowed us to look through his toys and choose something that we liked.”

Shcherbakova has been surprising herself and the skating world all season. The 15-year-old, who has two quads (Lutz and flip) in her repertoire, sailed through her Challenger Series event and two Grand Prix last fall, mining gold at all three. Shcherbakova had struggled with the short program at previous competitions, but that was not the case in Torino. Though she finished third with 78.27 — 7.18 points behind Kostornaia — she was happy with her performance.

Left: Russia’s Anna Shcherbakova, Alena Kostornaia and Alexandra Trusova swept the podium in Torino. The bouquets given to the medalists were made of Italian chocolate.



2019 Grand Prix Final gold medalists: Alena Kostornaia, Gabriella Papadakis, Guillaume Cizeron, Nathan Chen, Wenjing Sui and Cong Han

"I am in a very good mood after that skate. All my practices had been really good so I went into the program very calm. They say you can't win a competition with the short program but you can lose it, so this is a good starting point."

Skating fourth in the field of six, Shcherbakova opened her long program set to "Six Gnossiennes" and "The Firebird" with a quad Lutz-triple toe loop combination, which earned a whopping 19.15 points. She crashed on the next jumping pass, a quad flip, under-rotated a second quad Lutz, but without missing a beat went on to land five triple jumps.

The 2019 Russian champion won the free skate with 162.65 points, and her combined total of 240.92 moved her into second place. Shcherbakova remained upbeat about her performance and said she was pleased with the result. "I'm a little bit sad that I didn't land the quad flip. It's the first time I tried it and I will do it better next time. I'm happy I did everything else."

The competition did not get off to a brilliant start for Trusova. The two-time World Junior champion found herself buried in fifth after the short, 14 points

out of first place following a fall on an attempted triple Axel. Trusova said she had only been landing the jump in practice consistently for a week prior to the Final.

"I was nervous thinking about how to do it correctly. I like to take risks because if I did not take risks I would not have achieved what I already have at this moment. You have to start doing new elements somewhere, so we decided to do it here."

Her ambitious "Game of Thrones" long program, which included four quads (flip, Lutz and two toes, one in combination with a triple Salchow), did not go as planned. Trusova only managed to land three of the quads, going down on an under-rotated second toe attempt.

Nonetheless, the 15-year-old was awarded 161.73 points for her efforts and, with a combined score of 233.18 she ascended to the third step of the podium. "My skating was really bad. I had mistakes on the quad Salchow and quad toe loop. The quad flip was one of my main goals for this event and I'm glad that I did it," said Trusova, who wrote her own piece of history as the first lady to land that jump in competition. "I think I was a little bit

nervous and got tired by the end of the program. I'm happy with bronze."

Japan's Rika Kihira, the 2018 Grand Prix Final champion, struggled with her jumps in both the short and long programs. She moved up from sixth after the short to finish fourth with 216.47 points, while Bradie Tennell of the U.S. skated into fifth with 212.18.

It was a disappointing competition for Russia's Alina Zagitova. The reigning Olympic and World champion placed second in the short, but technical issues in the free left her in a distant sixth place overall (205.23).

NO CONTEST

The Palavela was packed to the rafters for the much-anticipated short program showdown between the two top guns, Nathan Chen and Yuzuru Hanyu. The last time these two met at the 2019 World Championships in Japan, Chen emerged as the victor.

In the hunt for a third consecutive Grand Prix Final crown, the American's campaign began with a solid outing in the short program. Performing to "La Boheme"

by Jacques Plante and Charles Aznavour, he opened his routine with a quad Lutz, followed by a triple Axel and a quad toe-triple toe combination. With Level 4 spins and footwork, Chen earned a personal best score of 110.38. “I’m very happy with the score, but there are a lot of things I can improve on. I’m happy with the Lutz, but I was a little shaky on the Axel and a little shaky on the toe,” said the two-time World champion.

Skating after Hanyu in the free, Chen had to wait until the ice was cleared of the hundreds of gifts and toys tossed by the fans. Chen has said in the past this does not bother him, as he knows what to expect when he skates immediately after the Japanese superstar. “Hanyu is one of the best skaters on the ice. He definitely pushes me to be a better skater and is someone I want to reach up to. It is an honor to be competing against him.”

Chen did not put a foot wrong in his “Rocket Man” program, executing five quads (flip-triple toe, Lutz, two toes, one in combination with a Euler-triple Salchow, and a solo Salchow) and three triple jumping passes. He was rewarded with 224.92 points for the free and 335.30 in total — both of which are the highest scores ever awarded under the new system. “It felt amazing. I got pretty gassed at the end of my program so I guess I need to work on my stamina a little bit, but overall I’m really happy to be here and I’m really thrilled with the score,” said the 20-year-old. “It’s awesome experience and exposure for me to be able to compete against these amazing guys. Every time it’s a lot of fun, so I’m happy to be here and excited to keep moving forward.”

Hanyu arrived in Torino without a coach, which gave rise to much speculation. However, the Japanese star said he was

expecting one of them, Ghislain Briand, to be with him for the long program. “Because Brian Orser was busy I asked another coach, but he had some difficulty getting here and is coming later,” Hanyu explained.



Kévin Aymoz

“I felt so confident when I went out, but when the music did not play I felt so lonely standing there on the ice — like I was the only one in the world.”

—Kévin Aymoz

He opened his “Otonal” short program with a solid quad Salchow and a triple Axel, but a stumble out of the quad toe loop left him with no combination, which proved costly. Though he earned Level 4s for his spins and step sequence, his score of 97.43 had him 12.95 points behind his rival. “To be honest, I am a little disappointed,” the two-time and reigning Olympic champion admitted. “The point gap between Nathan and me is a little big, so it will be hard to come back. I just want to think about what to do in the free skate, take it one step at a time and give a good performance.”

He also reflected on the fact that Johnny Weir had placed second in the short with this program at the 2006 Olympic Games, which were held in the same venue, and “I also wanted to have a good performance.”

The day of the free skate was also Hanyu’s 25th birthday and he was hoping to celebrate it with a victory. For the first time, he attempted five quads in his “Origin” (“Art on Ice”) program — loop, Lutz, Salchow and two toes, one in combination with a double toe. Midway through the program he under-rotated a triple flip and popped a planned triple Axel into a single. It was game over for the two-time World champion. Hanyu

earned 194.00 points for the segment but his combined score of 291.43 kept him in second place — 43.87 points behind Chen.

“I’m really satisfied that I could land a clean quad Lutz and I’m also happy about the quad loop,” said Hanyu. “I also felt the connection with the audience. I’m satisfied with the first half of the program but regret the second half. I was too tired in the end that I wasn’t able to hang on to the ending pose. I want to be better. Nathan makes me stronger and makes it more fun to skate.”

When asked about adding a fifth quad to



The international media celebrated Yuzuru Hanyu's 25th Birthday at the end of the competition.

his long program, Hanyu said he decided to do five after the short. “I knew winning was a long shot at that point, but I wanted to make sure I accomplished something here. I am glad I landed the quad loop and quad Lutz and I am really happy that I attempted the quad Axel in practice yesterday. I wish I had landed it, but it was still an honor for me to be able to attempt that jump in this arena.

“Trying different quads is so interesting and fun because I constantly need to think how to approach each kind of quad. But, then again, some skaters like Javi (Fernández) approach all quads the same way and just land them. So, I guess each skater is different.”

Rising star Kévin Aymoz has been making headlines every step of the way this season. He was the first French man to qualify for a Grand Prix Final since Brian Joubert in 2006, but things did not get off to a raging start in Torino when the wrong music was played for his short program. Aymoz kept his cool as officials scrambled to correct the music gaffe and did not let

it affect his concentration. He nailed all the elements in his routine set to “The Question of U” by Prince, including a quad toe loop and a triple Axel, and closed out the program with an energetic step sequence.

When the marks came up Aymoz was in tears — a new personal best of 96.71 points. “The Grand Prix Final was not my goal for this season and so I was not stressed. I am just happy to be here and I just had fun,” Aymoz said. “I was so confident when I went out, but then when the music did not play I felt so lonely standing there on the ice — like I was the only one in the world. But when the music started it was just a pleasure to share. It’s the job of the skater to stay focused whatever and I thought this is my moment.”

He kept the momentum going in the free with an artistic performance to “Lighthouse” by Patrick Watson. Aymoz opened with a quad toe-triple toe, but crashed to the ice on a second quad toe attempt, which was also deemed under-rotated. He followed that up with two triple Axels and four more clean triple jumping passes. His efforts earned

a personal best score of 178.92 and, with 275.63 points in total Aymoz ended the 13-year French drought with a third-place finish in his debut. “It was a great experience to be here, though I’m a little confused to be here as I never imagined to be next to these two guys,” Aymoz said at the subsequent press conference. “My goal coming here was to get 95 in the short and 175 in the free and I did better in both. I wasn’t thinking about the place, just the score.”

Fifth after the short, Russia’s Alexander Samarin finished fourth overall with 248.83 points, ahead of Boyang Jin of China (241.44). It was not a good outing for Dmitri Aliev of Russia who fell three times in the long program, which dropped him from fourth to sixth in the final standings (220.04).

HIGH FLYERS

There was never a doubt from the outset that China’s Wenjing Sui and Cong Han would reign supreme in Torino, but the final standings showed the teams coming up behind them are nipping at their heels.

Last to skate in the short program, Sui and Han executed all but one element cleanly and earned Level 4s for the footwork sequence and the death spiral, but there were some deductions. Sui touched the ice with her hand on the throw triple flip and their reverse lasso lift was rated a Level 2. The two-time World champions admitted it was not their best performance and their score of 77.50 confirmed that. “The skating and execution was a little tight, and we also made some small mistakes,” Sui admitted.

Their free skate set to “Rain, In Your Black Eyes” also did not go as planned. The triple twist, the throw triple Salchow and the throw triple flip were clean as were the Level 4 lifts and backward outside death spiral, but they experienced problems on other elements.

Han struggled with the solo jumps, the first of which received a downgrade, and the second intended triple Salchow was turned into a double. The performance ranked second best of the evening with 134.19 points, but Sui and Han held on to win their first Grand Prix Final title with a combined total of 211.69.

“This is our fourth time at the Final. Before coming here we were quite nervous because we hadn’t had a gold medal from a Grand Prix Final yet,” Sui explained. “We were also a little exhausted because of the quick turnaround from our previous

Grand Prix (NHK Trophy). We had a lot of problems this time with the levels and consistency of the jumps, but we will work on them and make the programs better.”

Their teammates Chen Peng and Yang Jin had their backs to the wall from the outset due to Jin’s luggage being lost by an airline. The team was unable to practice for days and properly prepare for the competition. “I think my luggage traveled around the world without me, leaving me alone, so I was unable to practice,” Jin said with a smile.

Peng is also dealing with a stubborn ankle injury, which is taking a long time to heal. Consequently, the duo got off to a rocky start, finishing fifth in the short program with 69.67 points.

They turned it around the following day, skating an almost flawless performance to music from the “Cloud Atlas” soundtrack. Peng and Jin won the free skate with a season high score of 134.60 — just 0.41 of a point better than Sui and Han — and with 204.27 in total moved up to second place. It was the Chinese duo’s second consecutive silver medal at a Final.

“Today I’m really happy. For the short program we didn’t do that well, but we were able to adjust ourselves mentally and skate a clean free program today,” said Jin. “Overall, we are happy with the score and the performance, and everything was as it needed to be.”

The Russian team of Anastasia Mishina and Aleksandr Galliamov felt right at home in Torino with the many former junior skaters from last season competing at the Final.

Unfortunately, the reigning World Junior champions did not have the short program they were aiming for, and technical



Cheng Peng and Yang Jin

“I think my luggage traveled around the world without me, leaving me alone, so I was unable to practice.”

—Yang Jin

problems left them in fourth place with 71.48 points.

As with the Chinese team, Mishina and Galliamov rebounded in their free skate set to “The Master and Margarita” soundtrack, earning 131.65 points for the segment. With a total tally of 203.13, the Russian duo finished in third place in their debut at the senior level. “We made mistakes which we didn’t expect to make. Bad times happen but they don’t last forever,” Mishina said with a shrug.

“When we went to the Junior Final last year it was a completely different competition for us. That is such a children’s

level,” Galliamov added. “Junior and senior are two completely different things and it is more pleasant to compete with adults. Last year at the Junior Final there were only three favorites, but this year with all these pairs, we didn’t know what to expect. After the short program we pulled ourselves together and started from scratch.”

For Aleksandra Boikova and Dmitrii Kozlovskii of Russia it was a disappointing competition. The team had enjoyed a winning season up until this point and, with a second-place finish in the short, they seemed destined to land on the podium. But uncharacteristic mistakes on four

elements in the free dropped them to fourth overall with 201.84 points.

Canada’s Kirsten Moore-Towers and Michael Marinaro landed in fifth in their Grand Prix Final debut with 197.99 points, while Russia’s Daria Pavliuchenko and Denis Khodykin finished sixth (194.75).

MONTREAL SWEEP

The ice dance competition was a hotly contested event, with three teams from the same Montréal training centre landing on the podium. Though Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron claimed the title ahead of their training mates, the French duo will no doubt be looking over their shoulders at the teams that are drawing ever closer to them.

Papadakis and Cizeron delivered a strong performance of their energetic rhythm dance set to the musical “Fame.” The team earned Level 4s for the twizzles and the stationary lift, but the Finnstep and pattern sequences were graded Level 3. Papadakis also had an uncharacteristic stumble during

the midline step sequence. They closed out the segment with 83.83 points.

“We had a couple of mistakes in the sequences, which explains why we didn’t get that much for those elements,” Papadakis explained. “But we got high scores at our previous Grand Prix, so it’s fine. We might just be tired from the last two Grand Prix competitions.”

The French champions captivated the audience with their free dance performance

“It feels great to be at such a prestigious event — arguably the most prestigious of the whole season in a non-Olympic year.”

—Evan Bates

to “I Will Find You,” executing difficult footwork that looked effortless, along with solid twizzles, lifts and a combination spin, all of which garnered Level 4. However, the circular step sequence and the one-foot step sequence were graded Level 3. Papadakis and Cizeron earned 136.02 points for the free dance and, with an overall total of 219.85, captured their second consecutive Grand Prix Final crown.

“We felt amazing tonight. Seeing so many people watching in this historic rink was so special,” Cizeron said. “We’re just really proud of ourselves and our team. We got one, two and three on the podium today — it is a very special Final for us.

“Regarding the programs, I don’t know how close we are to perfect, but I’m sure there are always things to improve. Our coach will probably go back, watch the details and have lots of comments about it. I think we will push ourselves a little more until Worlds in Montréal.”

The American team of Madison Chock and Evan Bates sizzled in their rhythm dance set to “Too Darn Hot.” They earned Level 4s for the lift and the twizzles and finished third in the segment with 81.67 points. “It feels great to be at such a prestigious event — arguably the most prestigious of the whole season in a non-Olympic year — and it’s just wonderful to be here among the best in the world,” said Bates. “We’ve had a great season thus far and we got a season’s best score here. We’ll have to look at the protocols to see where we can get some more points, but overall we’re happy with how we skated.”

Chock and Bates wowed the audience with their innovative and entertaining “Egyptian Snake Dance” program. The American team earned Level 4s for four elements, and racked up 14.79 points for their curve lifts. With a personal best score of 129.01 for the free dance and 210.68 in total, Chock and Bates moved up one spot to capture their third Grand Prix Final silver medal. “I think it went very well. It was so fun. I was



Madison Chock and Evan Bates

so present and enjoyed the skate so much,” said Chock. “I think it’s the creativity and ingenuity of the choreography that makes the program stand out. It’s very different. There’s no other program like this in ice dance. It’s new and innovative and we take great pride in delivering it to the best of our abilities.”

Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue’s Marilyn Monroe-themed rhythm dance to “My Heart Belongs To Daddy” and “Let’s Be Bad” was a hit with the audience in Torino. The straight-line lift earned a Level 4, but the Finnstep and pattern sequences were both graded a Level 3. The American duo finished second with 82.72 points — just 1.11 behind their French training mates.

“I think once you get to the Grand Prix Final there’s such a curated group of skaters it’s always going to be really close,” Hubbell said. “Everyone skated really well with

pretty strong performances from what I see, but it was a tough panel and not everyone got the levels they were hoping for.”

Donohue said that this is what they have been working toward from a performance standpoint. “Being able to push through the whole program and not think about fatigue but just really being committed to the character — and more so than the character, being committed to performing with each other.”

The American team produced a strong free dance performance to “A Star Is Born,” earning a Level 4 for the combination spin and the straight-line and rotational lifts. Hubbell and Donohue racked up 125.21 points for the segment and with 207.93 overall they finished third.

“We’re feeling good. Luckily I have a very strong partner who kept me up during my little almost slip before the twizzles,” Hubbell said. “It’s a testament to how

precise we’ve been training that I can slip a little bit, have a little moment where I catch my blade right before a twizzle sequence, and we can still do our twizzles.

“We want to be on the World podium and there’s a lot of competition as you can see, so I don’t think anything changes after today. We feel we have a much better program now than we did at the beginning of the Grand Prix Series and we’ll just keep building on that.”

It was a disappointing competition for both Russian teams as well as the Canadians.

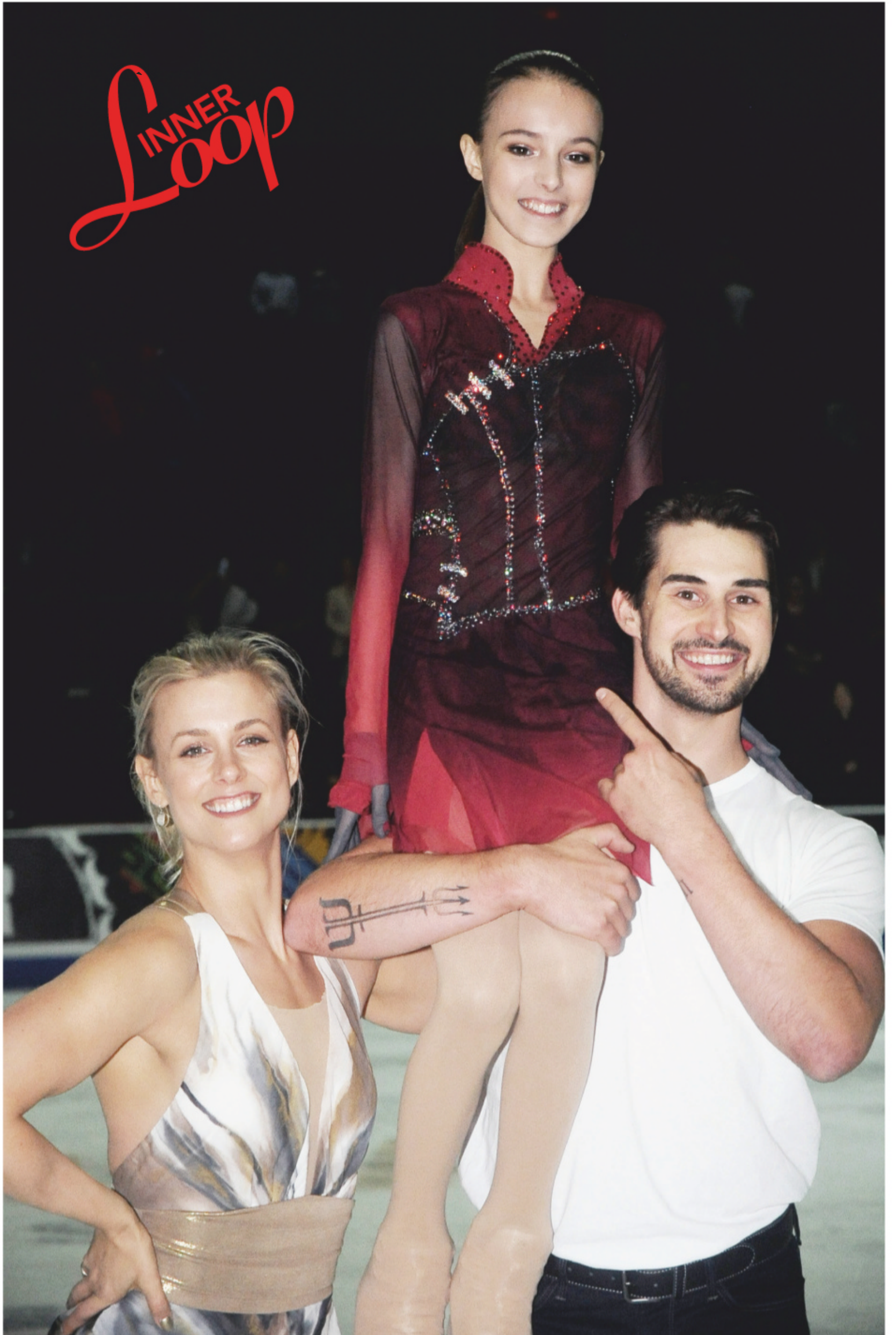
Alexandra Stepanova and Ivan Bukin finished fourth with 204.88 points, ahead of the Canadians Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier, who ranked fourth in the free dance and fifth overall with 203.50.

Low levels on key elements dropped Russia’s Victoria Sinitsina and Nikita Katsalapov, the reigning World silver medalists, to sixth (203.39). **IFS**

Skaters celebrated the end of the 2019 Grand Prix Final exhibition gala amid streamers and fireworks.



2019 GRAND AFFAIRS





OPPOSITE PAGE:

- Skate America ice dance champions Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue celebrated at the end of the exhibition gala with Russia's golden girl, Anna Shcherbakova.
Photo: Susan D. Russell

THIS PAGE:

- Carol Lane (center) congratulated her students Paul Poirier and Piper Gilles on capturing the first Grand Prix title of their career at Skate Canada. Gilles and Poirier backed up that victory with a second-place finish at Rostelecom Cup three weeks later and punched their ticket to the Grand Prix Final.
Photo: Susan D. Russell
- Nathan Chen captured his second Grand Prix title of the season at Internationaux de France. Russia's Alexander Samarin mined silver and Kévin Aymoz of France collected the bronze, the first Grand Prix medal of his career. All three men are headed to the Final. *Photo: Robin Ritoss*





OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE:

■ Maé-Bérénice Méité of France and Mariah Bell of the U.S. shared a few laughs as they waited for the ladies draw to begin at Internationaux de France. Bell finished third, and two weeks later added to her medal stash with a third-place finish at Rostelecom Cup. *Photo: Robin Ritoss*

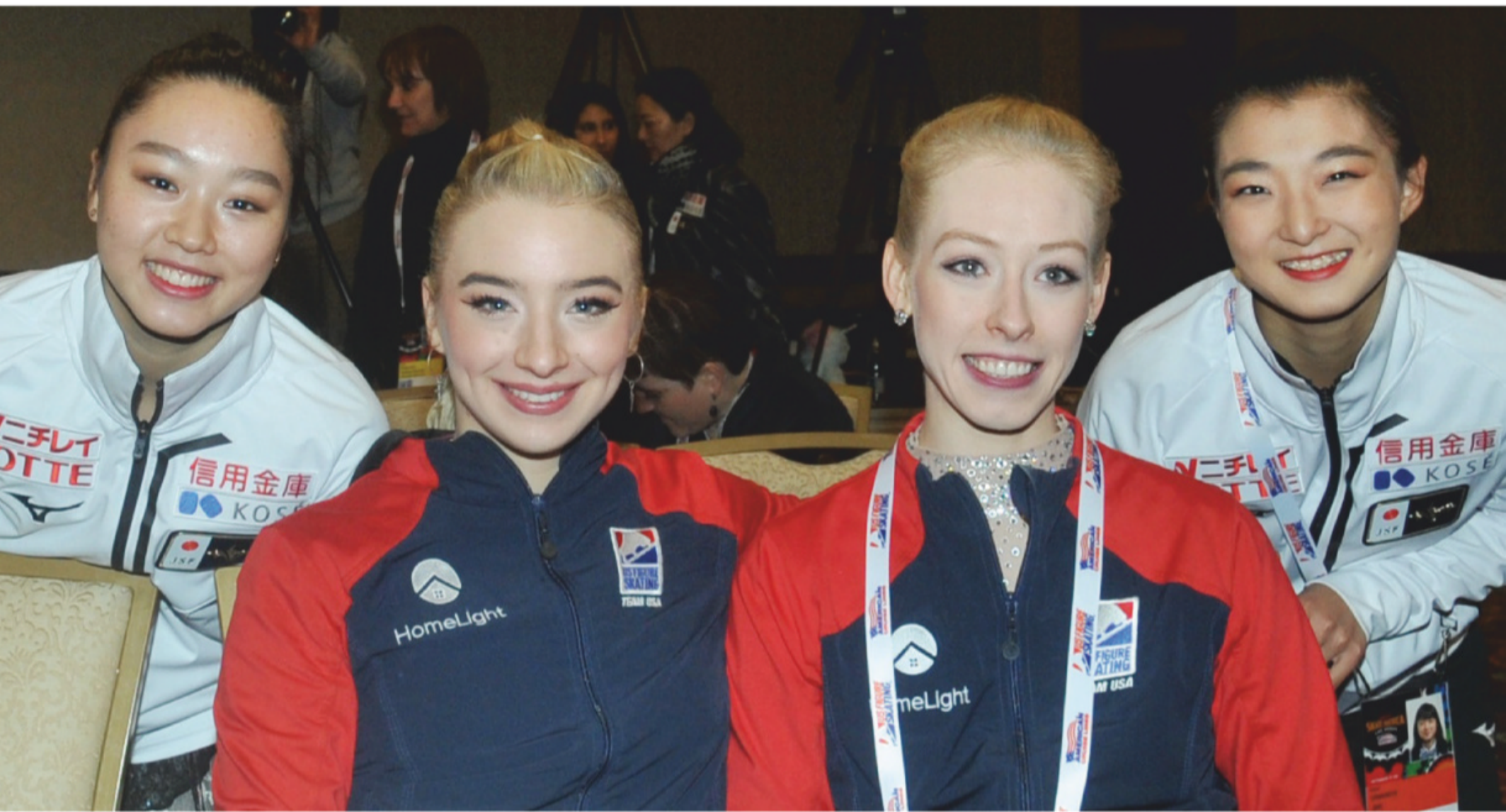
■ Despite not having a great competition at the French Grand Prix, Japan's Shoma Uno was still in a peaceful mood. Uno finished eighth, the lowest placement in his entire senior career. He moved up to fourth at his second event in Russia. *Photo: Robin Ritoss*

■ Japan's Koshiro Shimada (left), made his senior Grand Prix debut at Skate America. He was joined by his teammate Kazuki Tomono at the draw for the long program. *Photo: Susan D. Russell*

THIS PAGE:

■ Czech star Michal Březina and his wife Danielle Březinová are getting ready to welcome their first child, a girl, in early 2020. *Photo: Susan D. Russell*

■ Japan's Wakaba Higuchi, Amber Glenn and Bradie Tennell of the U.S., and Kaori Sakamoto of Japan were all smiles as they waited for the ladies short program draw to begin at Skate America. Tennell won the silver, Sakamoto was fourth, Higuchi finished sixth and Glenn placed seventh. *Photo: Susan D. Russell*





WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

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OPPOSITE PAGE:

- Anna Shcherbakova of Russia joined Canada's Véronik Mallet and Eunsoo Lim of South Korea for the ladies short program draw at Skate America.
Photo: Susan D. Russell

- Camden Pulkinen of the U.S. was thrilled to place second in the men's short program at Skate Canada. Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu and Nam Nguyen of Canada finished first and third, respectively. *Photo: Susan D. Russell*

THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE:

- Russia's Alexandra Trusova continued the Russian ladies winning streak by capturing the Skate Canada title in her senior debut. Three weeks later she scored a runaway victory at Rostelecom Cup in Moscow.
Photo: Susan D. Russell
- Canadian ice dancers Laurence Fournier Beaudry and Nikolaj Sørensen captured bronze at both their Grand Prix events, Skate America and Cup of China.
Photo: Susan D. Russell
- Boyang Jin of China and South Korea's Jun-Hwan Cha finished sixth and eighth, respectively, at Skate America. Jin won Cup of China two weeks later ahead of Cha, who finished sixth. *Photo: Susan D. Russell*



INNER Loop



THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE:

- Former World pairs champions Qing Pang and Jian Tong were in Chongqing for 2019 Cup of China. The couple recently welcomed a second son.
Photo: Robin Ritoss
- Madison Hubbell and her fiancée, Spanish ice dancer Adrián Díaz, posed for some fun photos after the Skate America gala in Las Vegas.
Photo: Susan D. Russell
- Canada's Keegan Messing (right) looked out for his teammate Conrad Orzel, who made his senior Grand Prix debut at Cup of China.
Photo: Robin Ritoss

OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE:

- Russian ice dancers Nikita Katsalapov and Victoria Sinitsina won back-to-back Grand Prix events — Cup of China and Rostelecom Cup. *Photo: Robin Ritoss*
- Wenjing Sui and Cong Han mined gold in China and Japan and ranked first in the pairs standings heading into the Grand Prix Final. *Photo: Robin Ritoss*
- Marin Honda and Satoko Miyahara of Japan had some fun in the pressroom at Cup of China while they waited for the ladies free skate draw to begin.
Photo: Robin Ritoss





FRANK CARROLL



ICE THEATRE OF NEW YORK (ITNY) honored renowned figure skating coach Frank Carroll with a Lifetime Achievement Award at its annual Benefit Gala and Home Season Performances on Oct. 21 at New York City's Sky Rink at Chelsea Piers.

The gala evening began with on-ice performances by the ITNY cast. Guest artists Zabato Bebe and Julien Dulière, who are currently touring with Cirque du Soleil's "Crystal," delighted the audience with their "Freestyle" hip hop/street skating routine.

Elisa Angeli, ITNY's ensemble director, choreographed three of the group numbers for the ensembles. Theron James performed "Presence," a piece by Deneane Richburg (a 2017 McKnight Choreographer Fellow), and Armen Agaian brought life to Eliot Halverson's "Take Five."

Tenley Albright, the 1956 Olympic

champion, introduced Carroll at the gala dinner and recalled how they had met as young skaters.

Later, Carroll spoke about the kindness Albright had shown him in those days. He brought many of the guests to tears with recollections of his coach Maribel Vinson Owen and her fight for equal access for Jews and African-Americans to join skating clubs.

He also recounted how Owen made it possible for Mabel Fairbanks to learn to skate in the days when African-Americans were essentially excluded from the sport. "Mabel became a skating star and the first coach of Tai Babilonia and Randy Gardner, the 1979 World pairs champions," he said.

Carroll's passion for the sport was first ignited one afternoon at his neighborhood movie theatre. He recalled the newsreels that were shown between the features,

highlighting current stories. "One day, on that big theatre screen, when news footage of Dick Button winning the Olympics flashed on, that did it for me. Watching him jump and spin, the athleticism, the power — I wanted to do that!"

Carroll showed great promise in his early days, finishing third at the 1959 U.S. Junior Championships, and capturing silver the following year. Had he not turned professional and joined *Ice Follies*, it is likely he would have been one of the U.S. Figure Skating team members that perished in a plane crash in Brussels en route to the 1961 World Championships in Prague.

Carroll turned to coaching, guiding many skaters to Olympic, World and national titles. Linda Fratianne, Christopher Bowman, Michelle Kwan, Timothy Goebel, Evan Lysacek and Denis Ten were some of those success stories.

HONORED BY ICE THEATRE OF NEW YORK



L to R: Jirina Ribbens, John Hughes, Emily Hughes, Amy Hughes, Sarah Hughes, Frank Carroll, Tenley Albright and Moira North

Fratianne was his first big star, winning two World titles (1977 and 1979) and silver at the 1980 Olympic Winter Games. “She was the best student,” Carroll recalled. “When I told her what she was doing wrong, there would be no arguments — she’d simply fix it.”

Carroll recalled Kwan as “the best all-around skater ever. She was a great jumper and spinner, and untouchable when it came to connecting with an audience.

“I’d describe Tim (Goebel), in his competitive days, as scrappy. If you got him angry, you were in for a fight,” he said of his student who was the first person to land three quads in a long program.

“A Boeing 747,” Carroll said of Lysacek. “He would skate his programs six times a day. I was a stickler for a skater always doing a program in practice from beginning to end, without stopping. I would tell them, ‘If

you stop, I’ll walk out of here.’ No danger of that with Evan. He was the most passionate skater I ever taught.”

ITNY founder Moira North said she could not think of anyone more worthy of the organization’s Lifetime Achievement Award. “Frank is one of a kind, and we were so proud to honor him.”

Button described Carroll as the Olympic champion of teaching. “It’s a God-given gift to be a great teacher, and he has proven many times that he is.”

The Hughes family, all of whom have been part of ITNY in many different ways for 26 years, was named the recipient of this year’s Ice Angel Award.

The family’s skating adventure began with John Hughes, who was the captain of the 1969-1970 Cornell hockey team. He and his wife, Amy, made it possible for their six children to skate, with two of their

daughters finding international success. Sarah won the 2002 Olympic title and Emily claimed bronze at the 2005 World Junior Championships and competed at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games.

“Ice Theatre of New York is one charity that is close to our hearts and has been closely intertwined with our family’s skating journey since the first show Sarah performed with them in 1993 in Annapolis,” said Rebecca Hughes Parker, the eldest of the Hughes siblings.

“One reason that ITNY appeals to us so much is because we believe that ice skating is more than jumps and spins and points — it is about artistry, performance and passion. We also deeply appreciate how ITNY brings the joy of skating to people who may not otherwise be exposed to it, with its outreach programs, shows and related work.” **ITS**

Quicksteps

► PARISIAN PROPOSAL



For **Sasha Cohen**, 2019 will mark a number of turning points in her life.

On Oct. 19, she announced her engagement to Geoffrey Lieberthal and a couple of weeks later revealed she and Lieberthal are expecting their first child, a boy, in early January.

Lieberthal, a partner in a New York City equities firm, popped the question during a visit to the Jardin des Tuileries (Tuileries Gardens) in Paris, France.

► ON THE MEND

Russia's **Mikhail Kolyada** underwent nasal surgery in late October to cure a sinusitis problem that had haunted him for more than a year.

"According to the doctors, everything



went well and I will still live," Kolyada said. In mid-December it was announced that he is still recovering and would not compete at Russian nationals, effectively ending his season.

► SHOCKING NEWS

Former U.S. ice dancer **Maia Shibutani** had a tumor removed from one of her kidneys on Dec. 14. The 25-year-old said she fell sick in Oct. 2019 and was diagnosed with a stomach virus.



Further tests showed an abnormality and an MRI revealed a mass on one of her kidneys.

"Receiving this news has been incredibly shocking and difficult to handle. I've been so scared," Shibutani shared in an Instagram post.

She said her doctor thinks there is a 60/40 chance that the tumor was malignant versus benign, but at press time she was still awaiting confirmation of that prognosis.

► CONTROVERSY

Alexei Yagudin found himself in hot water following his commentary

at NHK Trophy on a Russian television network. Russian fans started a petition to have the 2002 Olympic champion removed from his job for making derogatory remarks about skaters who are not his favorites.

"We believe that Aleksey should not be able to carry his opinion to the masses, setting up an inexperienced spectator against strong and worthy athletes ... Assessing skaters solely by his personal criteria for the 'masculinity' of skating, he completely ignores the merits of these athletes and discredits them in the eyes of the public.

More than 1,000 people have signed the petition.

► INSTA INTROS

Aljona Savchenko and her husband Liam Cross introduced their daughter to the world via an Instagram post on Nov. 7.



"We would like to officially welcome our beautiful daughter Amilia Savchenko-Cross to the world! Amilia came in to this world a little bit too

early, this is why we've kept a little quiet until now. We are so in love!"

Robin Szolkowy and his wife Romy welcomed their second child, George, in mid-November. The couple also has a 4-year-old son, Henry.

Bruno Massot and his wife, Sophie, announced they are expecting a second child in 2020. Their son, Louka, is 15 months old.



► TIME OUT

Following her sixth-place finish at the Grand Prix Final Russia's **Alena Zagitova** announced that she would not be competing for the remainder of the season.

She will continue to train and plans to skate in various shows around the world in the early part of 2020.

► ISU AWARD

At the International Skating Union (ISU) Council meeting held in Geneva in mid-October, Canada's **Sally Rehorick**, an ISU judge and referee for almost three decades, received the ISU Gold Award of Merit — the organization's highest honor — for her contributions to the sport.

SHOWTIME!



Oliver Höner, Patricia St. Peter, Leanna Carron, Benoit Lavoie and Ari Zakarian unveiled the new concept at 2019 Skate Canada.

An exciting new concept will be introduced at the conclusion of the 2020 World Championships in Montréal. The International Skating Union (ISU) has opted to replace the traditional exhibition gala with an entertainment show featuring live music and innovative performances by current and former competitive skaters.

This event, which will be preceded by a red carpet affair, is scheduled to take place on Sunday, March 22 from 4-6:30 p.m. EST, bringing the Championships to a glamorous close.

All medalists from the four disciplines at 2020 Worlds will perform as well as invited guest skaters, who will all present innovative programs.

Oliver Höner, a former 11-time Swiss national champion and the founder and CEO of the acclaimed "Art on Ice" extravaganzas that take place in Switzerland each year, will produce the show.

"We want to bring more glamor to skating with more celebrities from within the skating world and also from outside," Höner explained.

"I am really looking forward to this because it really adds a new element to figure skating. It does not change the competition format but gives something extra to it.

"As well, we will have group skaters and special skills skaters that we will bring in specifically for the show.

"Our goal is to have a fast-paced entertaining show and not a slow award show that you often see on TV."

Some of the sport's finest will be celebrated during a gala awards ceremony.

Nominees will be selected from seven figure skating categories.

A list of candidates was announced on Dec. 1. Online voting is open to everyone until Feb. 10. Three finalists in each category will be selected. Those names will be announced on March 10.

A jury comprised of former competitors representing the six nations that host the Grand Prix Series will determine the winner of each category: Eric Radford (Canada), Lu Chen (China), Miki Ando (Japan), Surya Bonaly (France), Tatiana Navka (Russia), and Todd Eldredge (USA).

Ari Zakarian, who has managed Evgeni Plushenko's career for two decades, has been pushing for this format change for years and had presented the concept to the ISU on many previous occasions.

"Finally, we can have a show where we can recognize and salute the people that really made a difference in skating," Zakarian said.

"This event will open so many doors for so many people that never had a chance to be really celebrated before."

AWARD CATEGORIES:

Most Valuable Skater: Honors the singles skater or pairs or ice dance team that best contributed to an increase in the popularity of figure skating, in relation to fan base involvement, media attention and sponsors. (5 nominees)

Best Costume: A singles skater or pairs or ice dance team that presented a costume reflecting creativity, contemporary implementation, fashion, style and originality. (15 nominees)

Most Entertaining Program: Recognizes the singles skater or pairs or ice dance team for music selection, expression, creativity, contemporary implementation, originality and overall performance. (15 singles skaters, 10 pairs and 12 ice dance teams)

Best Newcomer: Acknowledges a young, talented singles skater or pairs or ice dance team that competed successfully at ISU events at the senior level for the first time. (10 nominees from all four disciplines)

Best Choreographer: Honors the work of a person who successfully inspired one or several singles skaters or pairs or ice dance teams. (5 nominees)

Best Coach: Honors a coach who delivered professional and efficient work and achieved outstanding results with one or more singles skaters or pairs or ice dance teams. (5 nominees)

Lifetime Achievement Award: Honors a legend in the sport who has achieved success and popularity, and is considered a role model in the world of figure skating.

The honoree will be selected by the aforementioned panel and will be announced on March 22.

BY ELVIN WALKER

OBITUARY

Noted U.S. figure skating historian Benjamin Wright passed away on Nov. 30, 2019, at age 97.

Wright became a national judge in 1950 and worked his way up to become a World ice dance referee in 1974. He was president of the USFS from 1973 to 1976.

During his decades-long career, Wright authored three books: "Reader's Guide to Figure Skating's Hall of Fame" (1978); "Skating Around the World: International Skating Union, the One Hundredth Anniversary History 1892-1992;" and "Skating in America (1921-1996): The 75th Anniversary History of the United States Figure Skating Association" (1996).

Wright was inducted into both the World Figure Skating Hall of Fame and the United States Figure Skating Hall of Fame in 1997.

WADA Hands Russia Four-Year Ban

At a meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, on Dec. 9, the executive committee of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) unanimously voted to ban Russia from all major sporting events for a four-year term.

In a repeat of the sanction that was in place in 2018, the Russian flag and anthem will not be permitted at the 2020 Olympic Summer or 2022 Winter Games and the respective Paralympics.

The agency also decided that Russia would lose the right to host major international sporting competitions or to apply for them during the four-year ban.

Athletes who can prove they are untainted by the doping scandal will be able to compete under a neutral flag just as they did at the 2018 Olympic Winter Games.

According to WADA, as a condition of reinstatement after a three-year suspension, Russia's Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) was required to hand over data to the agency.

However, Russia was declared non-compliant for manipulating laboratory

data it delivered to investigators in January 2019. "For too long, Russian doping has detracted from clean sport. The blatant breach by the Russian authorities of RUSADA's reinstatement conditions demanded a robust response. That is exactly what has been delivered," said WADA president Sir Craig Reedie, adding the decision showed WADA's "determination to act resolutely in the face of the Russian doping crisis."

"Russia was afforded every opportunity to get its house in order and rejoin the global anti-doping community for the good of its athletes and the integrity of sport, but it chose instead to continue in its stance of deception and denial."

Alexander Gorshkov, the president of the Russian Figure Skating Federation, called the decision defamatory. "In no case should we give up. We must fight, seek justice and, above all, we must defend the interests of athletes."

Renowned Russian coach Alexei Mishin called the ban "a disaster."

"Surely we will file an appeal. Let's wait for the results of the appeal. Maybe there are some arguments that will save us from these sanctions," he told a Russian news agency.

AUSSIE

A new radio documentary on figure skating is in the works, which is set to air on the ABC network in Australia in early 2020.

Brisbane resident Nikola Van der Wetering is producing the documentary, tentatively called "Fanyuism," in a nod towards two-time Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu. It was the Hanyu angle that convinced the ABC to get on board with the project.

"Initially, I showed them an image from the PyeongChang Olympics of the Pooh Bears raining down, and they just couldn't wrap their heads around it. They were fascinated to know more. What they are particularly interested in is hearing about the



DOCUMENTARY

sport in context with Australian athletes, but also the fans of the sport," Van der

Wetering explained.

"Narrative driven features are becoming more popular in radio. Figure skating is a perfect subject for this format. It's all put together in a really beautiful soundscape, and it can present really well in a radio format."

"If that gets people interested enough then maybe they will seek out more information."

Washington D.C. resident Chau Nguyen was brought on board to supplement the documentary with photos and videos that will be available

to listeners online. Van der Wetering and Nguyen met on an Internet message board and became friends.

"There aren't a lot of fans in Australia, so the only place I could talk about the sport was online," Van der Wetering explained. "Chau and I met online and have been friends for the last couple of years."

The project, which is currently scheduled to run 30 minutes, will string together material from this season's Skate America, Skate Canada, and perhaps the Grand Prix Final.

The goal is for the documentary to air in advance of the 2020 Four Continents Championships, slated to take place in Seoul, South Korea, in February.

ELITE SPINNER

British pairs skater Christopher Boyadji has invented a new tool for skaters. The Elite Spinner, a product he believes will revolutionize the way figure skaters learn how to spin and jump, aims to help strengthen the body's core and the skater's body awareness, which can help improve spins and the rotation and speed of jumps.

"You stand on the Elite Spinner and create the rotation by yourself," he explained. "It is good for core balance and body awareness — you can do many, many things."

Boyadji said the Spinner also helps skaters learn how to use their bodies to assist with the rotation of jumps.

"I saw an electric spinner online where a kid was put on the machine and they worked against the rotation. But I wondered about the kid using counter-rotation or rotation to start feeling the snap to start using their hip and body.

"I talked with the designer and we figured out how to make that part of our product."

Although still in its infancy — the prototype was only completed in January 2019 — it is already being used across Europe, North America and Asia. Boyadji noted that 2018 Olympic pairs champions Aljona Savchenko and Bruno Massot have been using it with their respective students.

Made entirely of aluminum, the Elite Spinner is lightweight and portable, allowing for use anywhere there is a flat surface.

To ensure the product meets his standards of excellence, Boyadji personally tests each unit before sending it to a customer.

"Obviously I put my heart into



it because my reputation as an international skater is on the line," he said. "I make sure that it is a good product — I have 100 percent control of it, and I test every single one of them when they come out of the factory. I know that when I give this product to the client that it is working."

Sold by Boyadji's Elite Skating Company, the Elite Spinner retails for £539.99 (about US\$675) and he expects each one will last about 10 years.

Boyadji and his pairs partner, Zoe Jones, use the device every day in training and their own students also train on one.

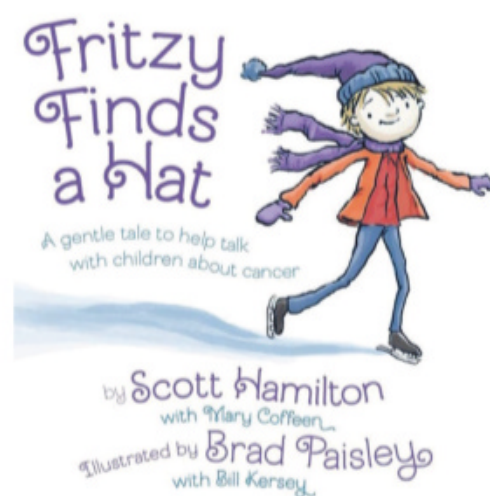
"My kids like to play on it at home," Jones said. "They are working on their core and don't even know it. It really has helped our students improve the rate at which they progress in spins and jumps. I really like it."

The product is available in eight colors. To learn more, go to eliteskatingcompany.com.



Maia Shibutani and Alex Shibutani are collaborating with author Michelle Schusterman on the first of a middle grade book series for Penguin Young Readers.

"Kudo Kids: The Mystery of the Masked Medalist" — scheduled for release in May 2020 — features siblings Mika and Andy Kudo attending the 2020 Olympic Summer Games in Tokyo, Japan, where they share some unexpected adventures.



Scott Hamilton, 61, has written a book aimed at helping children and their parents talk about cancer. "Fritzzy Finds a Hat" — scheduled for release Feb. 4, 2020 — features illustrations by country music star Brad Paisley.

The book is available for pre-order on Amazon. Proceeds will benefit cancer research through the Scott Hamilton CARES Foundation and other treatment centers.

A Glorious Battle

BY SUSAN D. RUSSELL



Kaitlyn Weaver and Sheldon Kennedy waltzed off with the “Battle of the Blades” crown at the end of October and \$100,000 in prize money for their charity, JumpStart, which helps give children in need a chance to participate in sports.

Fan favorites from the outset, Weaver and Kennedy were never one of the bottom two teams that faced elimination during the six-week competition, which paired figure skaters with former professional hockey players.

For Kennedy, the experience was an all-encompassing one he said he would never forget. “I was in kindergarten going into this. I could not even count music when I started. I had such a fear of performing and just getting out of my comfort zone was a major fear for me. But I had to take that risk to trust and to me that was huge. I knew I could skate — it was the performance stuff that really scared me. That was something

I was worried about coming into this competition.

“But with Julie (Marcotte) and Kaitlyn encouraging me...they had to coach and teach me like I was in kindergarten, and to me that is a skill. I had to trust them that things like the Charlie Chaplin routine looked OK because I was thinking, ‘God, how bad does this look?’”

Kennedy, who was abused as a teenager by his junior hockey coach, has become a global advocate to empower children through sport. He said the opportunity to compete on this show breathed new life into him. “I felt so responsible to be the champion for child abuse issues — I was scared to step away from that. But this show consumed me so much that I did not think about that for 10 weeks. I was able to focus on something fresh and challenging, I met new people, I had new thoughts and there were new things in my life. It was so important for my growth. It was huge for me.”

The experience was also a positive one for Weaver, who said she also gained a new perspective. “Coming into this I thought ‘I don’t know if I can do this. I don’t know if I can do lifts ...’ But we found such a great chemistry and we did ice dance. That is what I was really excited about. We represented Canada’s tradition in ice dance and that is special to my heart because it is my passion.

“As soon as I met Sheldon, I was so enamored with him because of who he is as a person, how he moved on the ice, his energy, his enthusiasm and his personality. It became my passion that this man needs to win. This man needs to be the champion.

“When I saw that he was willing to bring it every day, I knew we could do a lot of cool things. Whatever we asked Sheldon to do, he did it. Julie and I would be laughing saying, ‘Oh, maybe we should try this, or let’s see if he can do this,’ and then he would just go and do it. He has an incredible capacity to learn, the desire to try new things and to push himself. So we just ran with that.

“And we had fun. We had such an incredible team spirit. We didn’t go anywhere without each other and were together always. It really was an incredible group synergy. I told someone I did not know I could have a good day every day.

“I did not know that was possible until I met Sheldon. It was something so special. We laughed and had joy together. We had to create programs fast and we felt the pressure — but there was just overwhelming amounts of joy.”

Weaver said the experience also gave her a new insight into what is possible when everyone is on the same team.

“It was a safe place and that helped me feel so good about myself in every way — not just the choreography or skating. Going in before the first episode, we said this is more than figure skating and that is really how I feel about it in all ways. We all shared ideas in an equal way and I am just so grateful.” **IFS**

PHOTO: COURTESY CBC SPORTS

MEDIA GUIDE

CBC TELEVISION SCHEDULE

DATE	2020 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS	TIME
Wed. March 18	Pairs Short	3 – 5 p.m.
Thu. March 19	Men's Short	4 – 6 p.m.
Fri. March 20	Rhythm Dance	4 – 6 p.m.
	Ladies Free	8 – 10 p.m.
Sat. March 21	Dance Free	3:30 – 6 p.m.
Sun. March 22	Men's Free	12 – 2 p.m.

CBC.ca SCHEDULE

DATE	2020 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS	TIME
Wed. March 18	Pairs Short	10:30 a.m.
	Opening Ceremony	2:45 p.m.
	Ladies Short	3:45 p.m.
Thu. March 19	Men's Short	11:45 a.m.
	Pairs Free	6 p.m.
Fri. March 20	Rhythm Dance	11:25 a.m.
	Ladies Free	6 p.m.
Sat. March 21	Free Dance	2:30 p.m.
	Men's Free	7 p.m.
Sun. March 22	ISU Awards Show	4:00 p.m.

NBC TELEVISION SCHEDULE

DATE	2020 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS	TIME
Wed. March 18	Pairs Short	12:30 – 2:30 p.m. NBCSN Live
Thu. March 19	Ladies Short	6 – 8 p.m. NBCSN
	Pairs Free	8 – 10 p.m. NBCSN Live
	Men's Short	10 p.m. – 12 a.m. NBCSN
Fri. March 20	Rhythm Dance	6 – 8 p.m. NBCSN
	Ladies Free	8 – 10 p.m. NBCSN Live
Sat. March 21	Ladies Free	1 – 3 p.m. NBC
	Men's Free	9 – 11 p.m. NBC Live
Sun. March 22	Free Dance	4 – 6 p.m. NBCSN

(All times EST. Airdates are subject to change. Check your local listings)

CBC.ca will live stream the 2020 Four Continents Championships. The schedule for this event is not yet available. Please check our website at ifsmagazine.com for full details.