

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final, Tokyo (JPN) **Day 1 (Round 1)**

The Grand Prix of Figure Skating, in Tokyo opened with the Original Dance and the Short Programs for Pairs, Men and Ladies of Round One.

Ice Dance

European Champions, Barbara Fusar Poli/ Maurizio Margaglio (ITA) were first to skate. The Italians set the standard with their dazzling and confident Quickstep and Foxtrot, set to an "Puttin' on the Ritz" medley. They earned marks ranging up 5.9 for presentation, giving them the lead over their competitors. "We are very happy today's performance. We are happy with the marks", said a delighted Barbara Fusar Poli. Second in the first phase of the event were Russia's Irina Lobacheva/Ilia Averbukh. The European Bronze Medallists captivated the audience with a sultry Foxtrot and a dynamic Quickstep that featured innovative lifts. "We are satisfied although our best performance so far was at Europeans", Averbukh commented. "It's now about 4 o'clock am in the USA (where the couple trains). Imagine, someone wakes you up at that time and you have to dance!" Third, going into tomorrow's first Free Dance, are Margarita Drobiazko/Povilas Vanagas of Lithuania. They skated an entertaining Charleston and Quickstep and maintained high speed throughout the program. "This dance felt very good", Vanagas said. "We changed some minor things in our original dance to make it more difficult." Israel's Galit Chait/Sergei Sakhonovski came in fourth ahead of Kati Winkler/Rene Lohse (GER) and Marie-France Dubreuil/Patrice Lauzon (CAN), who replaced the injured World Champions Marina Anissina/Gwendal Peizerat of France.

Men

In the Men's event, two Russian skaters produced outstanding performances. Two-time European Champion Evgeni Plushenko put in another excellent Short Program. He landed an effortless looking quadruple toeloop-triple toeloop combination, a triple axel and a triple lutz in his fast paced "Bolero" routine. However, success did not come easy to the 18-year-old. "It was hard to skate. I had a difficult time after Europeans", he explained. "I just couldn't do my elements in practice, not even the triple Lutz. I was very tired after Europeans." Plushenko took the lead, but Alexei Yagudin was still to skate. The three-time World Champion also hit a quadruple-triple toeloop combination, but had a scratchy landing on his triple axel. He recovered immediately and produced a triple Lutz out of footwork, as well a fast step sequences. The Judges were divided over the two Russian skaters, but Yagudin came out on top. "It's night in the USA (where he trains), time to sleep for me", Yagudin said. "I really focused on the quad, and I was more relaxed for the rest of the program after I landed it. My body was dying, it said 'Alexei, you have to stop here', but my head said 'just a couple of steps, you have to do it'". Matthew Savoie of the USA came in third. The World Junior bronze medallist skated a clean program that contained a triple axel, a triple flip-triple toeloop combination, a triple lutz and well centred, fast spins. "The first jump was a little messy, but I finished the program nicely", Savoie said. Stanick Jeannette (FRA), who was a last minute

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replacement for Todd Eldredge (USA), sits in fourth going into tomorrow's first Free Program. He had fallen on the triple axel. US Champion Timothy Goebel fell twice and had to settle for fifth place. 1999 World Junior Champion Ilia Klimkin of Russia landed a quad-touble toeloop combination, but missed the triple axel, the triple flip and the camel spin to finish sixth. The Men conclude Round One tomorrow with the First Free Skating.

Pairs

Elena Berezhnaya/Anton Sikhuralidze of Russia won the Pairs' Short Program with a stunningly powerful performance set to an orchestra version of the Russian Folk song "Meadowlands". The two-time World Champions opened their routine with rock solid side by side triple toeloops and went on to execute a perfect triple throw loop and a difficult lift. "The hardest element in the short program for me is the throw", Berezhnaya explained. "Today I was ready for it as I should be." Still Berezhnaya is striving towards perfection: "Today, our program was ok, but we could have done everything better." Fresh from their victory at Four Continents last week, Jamie Sale/David Pelletier (CAN) finished second in the Short today. The Canadian Champions also produced a fine performance, however, Sale stepped out of the landing of the triple toeloop. "It wasn't really a mistake, just a minor deduction", she said. China's Xue Shen/Hongbo Zhao didn't make any major mistake, but lost their balance in the pair spin combination. The World silver medallists placed third. "It wasn't our best tonight", Shen admitted. "Our elements weren't perfect especially the pairs spin." Reigning World Champions Maria Petrova/Alexei Tikhonov (RUS) sit in fourth after Petrova two-footed the triple toeloop. Poland's Dorota Zagorska/Mariusz Siudek made a mistake on the triple throw Salchow and came in fifth ahead of World bronze medallists Sarah Abtibal/Stephane Bernadis. Abtibal stepped out of the side by side triple toeloop and put her hands down on the throw triple loop.

Ladies

The Ladies Short Program was the last event of the day. Three-time World Champion Michelle Kwan (USA) had drawn first to skate. She set the standard with a clean, flowing performance that featured a double axel, a triple lutz-double toeloop combination, a triple flip out of footwork, good spins and an impressive spiral sequence. Kwan used her new Short Program "East of Eden" for the first time in an international competition and was pleased with how it went for her. "It's nice to get it over with right after the six minute warm up. I felt pretty good, the jumps were pretty solid. You can't expect too much, because they (the Judges) have to hold back for the other skaters", Kwan commented. 1999 World Champion Maria Butyrskaya of Russia opened her Short with a beautiful triple lutz-double toeloop combination, but then she fell hard on her triple flip. "I don't know what happened on the triple flip", she said. "I felt really good, strong going out there." Since the rest of her performance was fine, she finished third in the Short. Today's winner was Irina Slutskaya, also from Russia. Skating last to "Culture" by Chris Sphेरis, the 21-year-old World silver medallist nailed a triple lutz-double loop combination, a triple flip, a high double axel and also produced high quality spins. "It was ok, considering the jet lag and all this", Slutskaya said. "Since the second mark was lower than the first, I have to work on it (the presentation)!" Kwan took second place heading into tomorrow's first Free Skating. Elena Sokolova (RUS) came in fourth after two-footing her lutz in the combination. Sarah Hughes (USA), who doubled the flip, finished fifth ahead of

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Uzbekistan's Tatiana Malinina. Malinina had fallen on the triple flip. The Ladies will finish round one with the first Free Program and advance to the Final and Super Final respectively tomorrow.

Results

Ladies, Short Program

1. Irina Slutskaya (RUS) 0.5
2. Michelle Kwan (USA) 1.0
3. Maria Butyrskaya (RUS) 1.5
4. Elena Sokolova (RUS) 2.0
5. Sarah Hughes (USA) 2.5
6. Tatiana Malinina (UZB) 3.0

Men, Short Program

1. Alexei Yagudin (RUS) 0.5
2. Evgeni Plushenko (RUS) 1.0
3. Matthew Savoie (USA) 1.5
4. Stanick Jeannette (FRA) 2.0
5. Timothy Goebel (USA) 2.5
6. Ilia Klimkin (RUS) 3.0

Pairs, Short Program

1. Elena Berezhnaya/Anton Sikharulidze (RUS) 0.5
2. Jamie Sale/David Pelletier (CAN) 1.0
3. Xue Shen/Hongbo Zhao (CHN) 1.5
4. Maria Petrova/Alexei Tikhonov (RUS) 2.0
5. Dorota Zagorska/Mariusz Siudek (POL) 2.5
6. Sarah Abitbol/Stephane Bernadis (FRA) 3.0

Ice Dancing, Original Dance

1. Barbara Fusar-Poli/Maurizio Margaglio (ITA) 0.4
2. Irina Lobacheva/Ilia Averbukh (RUS) 0.8
3. Margarita Drobiazko/Povilas Vanagas (LTU) 1.2
4. Galit Chait/Sergei Sakhnovksi (ISR) 1.6
5. Kati Winkler/Rene Lohse (GER) 2.0
6. Marie-France Dubreuil/Patrice Lauzon (CAN) 2.4

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