

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games **Preview**

The figure skating competition at the 2014 Olympic Winter Games will start in Sochi, Russia, on February 6. skaters/couples from 30 ISU members have been entered for the Olympic Winter Games. All 30 single skaters will compete in the Short Program and the top 24 proceed to the Free Skating. All 20 pair couples will compete in the Short Program and the top 16 advance to the Free Skating. In the Ice Dance, all 24 couples will perform the Short Dance and the best 20 couples qualify for the Free Dance. For the first time, a figure skating team event will be contested at the Olympic Winter Games.

Overview over the top contenders

The Pairs event focuses on the teams from Russia, Germany, China and Canada. Reigning World and European Champions Tatiana Volosozhar/Maxim Trankov (RUS) set a new highest total score with 237.71 points this fall, however, four-time World Champions and 2010 Olympic bronze medalists Savchenko/Szolkowy beat them at the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final in December, posting a personal best of 227.03 points. The Germans then had to withdraw before the Free Skating at the ISU European Figure Skating Championships 2014 due to Savchenko being ill.

2010 Olympic silver medalists Qing Pang/Jian Tong (CHN) proved that they are still in business with strong performances at the Grand Prix Final that earned them the bronze medal there (seasons best 213.98 points).

2013 World bronze medalists Meagan Duhamel/Eric Radford (CAN/seasons best 193.38), 2013 Four Continents silver medalists Kirsten Moore-Towers/Dylan Moscovitch (CAN/seasons best 208.45 points) and 2014 European silver medalists Ksenia Stolbova/Fedor Klimov (RUS/seasons best 207.98) can challenge for the podium as well. Other contenders include Vera Bazarova/Yuri Larionov (RUS) and Stefania Bertone/Ondrej Hotarek (ITA).

The field in the Men's event is deep and promises an exciting competition. The hot favourites are three-time and reigning World Champion Patrick Chan (CAN) and Grand Prix Final Champion Yuzuru Hanyu (JPN). Chan set a new record total score at the Trophée Bompard in November with 295.27 points. However, Hanyu has emerged as a real threat to the Canadian, first taking the short program record from him (99.84 points) and then upsetting him at the Grand Prix Final (seasons best 293.25). World bronze medallist Javier Fernandez (ESP) comes fresh from defending his European title and seems ready to attack with three quadruple jumps in the free skating (seasons best 267.11 points). But once again all eyes will also be on veteran Evgeni Plushenko (RUS). The 2006 Olympic Champion and two-time Olympic silver medallist is entering his fourth Olympic Games and wants to prove that he is still a force to be reckoned with. 2010 Olympic bronze medallist Daisuke Takahashi (JPN) missed the Grand Prix Final due to injury but is back in action and has set his eyes on the podium (seasons best 268.31 points). History could be made in the men's event: No Canadian or Japanese man ever has won Olympic gold, no Spanish figure skater has an Olympic medal of any colour and no living skater has more than three Olympic medals.

Several other men are in medal contention as well: Tatsuki Machida (JPN), Michal Brezina (CZE), Tomas Verner (CZE), Jeremy Abbott (USA) and World silver medallist Denis Ten (KAZ), who has been handicapped by injury this season. Brian Joubert (FRA) will compete in his fourth Olympic Winter Games.

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In the Ice Dance event, reigning Olympic Champions Tessa Virtue/Scott Moir (CAN) and Olympic silver medallists Meryl Davis/Charlie White (USA) have dominated the past Olympic title and seem to be a lock for gold and silver. Davis/White have a slight edge over their Canadian rivals after beating them at the 2013 World Championships and the recent Grand Prix Final. The U.S. team comes with a seasons best of 191.35 points to Sochi while Virtue/Moir scored a seasons best of 190.00 points. The battle for a spot in the podium will be fierce among several talented teams. Two-time European Champions Nathalie Pechalat/Fabian Bourzat (FRA) claimed bronze at the Grand Prix Final (seasons best 171.08 points), Ekaterina Bobrova/Dmitri Soloviev (RUS) are the current World bronze medallists (seasons best 168.32 points), but newly crowned European Champions Anna Cappellini/Luca Lanotte (ITA/seasons best 171.61 points), Elena Ilinykh/Nikita Katsalapov (RUS/seasons best 171.89 points) and Kaitlyn Weaver/Andrew Poje (CAN/seasons best 175.23 points) have a shot at the podium as well.

2010 Olympic Champion Yuna Kim (KOR) is back and wants to defeat her title. However, since winning the world title in 2013, Kim only competed once in a smaller international event as she sat out the Grand Prix series because of a foot injury. 2010 Olympic silver medallist Mao Asada (JPN) on the other hand comes with a seasons best of 207.59 points to Sochi and won the Grand Prix Final. Reigning World silver medallist Carolina Kostner (ITA/seasons best 191.39 points) is hoping to reach the podium in her third Olympic Winter Games. 15-year-old Julia Lipnitskaia (RUS) might be the youngest competitor in the figure skating event, but she is a threat for the established competitors as she proved by claiming the European title last month and silver at the Grand Prix Final. Her seasons best of 209.72 points is the highest score any Lady achieved this season.

2014 European silver medallist Adelina Sotnikova (RUS), Japanese Champion Akiko Suzuki, 2014 Four Continents Champion Kanako Murakami (JPN), U.S. Champion Gracie Gold and Grand Prix Final bronze medallist Ashley Wagner (USA) are in the medal hunt as well.

The schedule of the figure skating events at the 2014 Olympic Winter Games is as follows:

Tuesday, February 11: Pairs Short Program
Wednesday, February 12: Pairs Free Skating
Thursday, February 13: Men Short Program
Friday, February 14: Men Free Skating
Sunday, February 16: Short Dance
Monday, February 17: Free Dance
Wednesday, February 19: Ladies Short Program
Thursday, February 20: Ladies Free Skating
Saturday, February 22: Exhibition Gala

For more information, full entry lists and results please see: www.isu.org and www.sochi2014.com

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