

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Media Advisory

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2003 ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final St. Petersburg, Russia

Day 1

The 2003 ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final in St. Petersburg, Russia, started Friday with the Short Program and Free Skating A. St. Petersburg has hosted the Final once before, in 1999.

Competing in the Final are the top six skaters and couples of the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating series. The skaters collected points in two Grand Prix events in order to proceed to the Final. The day started with the Original Dance and the Short Programs. Then the skaters came back for the first Free Skating (Free Skating A) in the evening. The Short Programs/Original Dance count for 20 percent towards the final score (factor 0.4), while Free Skating A counts for 30 percent (factor 0.6).

Ice Dancing, Original Dance

World Champions Irina Lobacheva/Ilia Averbukh (RUS) took the lead ahead of their compatriots Tatiana Navka/Roman Kostomarov and Bulgaria's Albena Denkova/Maxim Staviyski.

Denkova/Staviyski skated first. The former imperial St. Petersburg was the perfect place for their dance that reminds those done in royal court in the 18th century. Dressed in baroque costumes, the European silver medalists performed strong footwork and an unusual side by side step sequence with mirror-moves, but they looked somewhat cautious. The program earned the Bulgarians marks up to 5.7 for composition/required elements and up to 5.8 for presentation. "We skated first, so it was a bit difficult", Staviski admitted. "On the other hand, we just tell ourselves that it's the OD that we've skated many times before, and we tell ourselves that this is a competition like all the others."

Navka/Kostomarov put out a dynamic performance that consisted of a very romantic Waltz and a crisp, almost military March. The European bronze medalists completed a good rotational lift and looked sharp throughout the dance. Their marks went up to 5.8 for both composition/required elements and presentation. "We're already thinking of the Free Dance this evening", Kostomarov commented. "The Final is new to us, and we don't really understand yet how it works! It's an endless day today. It started early this morning with practice, and it won't finish until late tonight."

Lobacheva/Averbukh had drawn to skate last. Their classical Waltz "The Blue Danube" was highlighted by the circular footwork, while their funny Polka part contained a difficult side by side footwork line and a rotational lift. The judges awarded marks ranging from 5.6 to 5.9 for composition/required elements and from 5.7 to one 6.0 for presentation. "It was very hard to go out and skate today. This is a very difficult competition", Averbukh explained. "We only had one week to prepare for this event, as Irina has been sick with the flu."

Elena Grushina/Ruslan Goncharov of the Ukraine finished fourth ahead of World bronze medalists Galit Chait/Sergei Sakhnovski (ISR) and Canadians Marie-France Dubreuil/Patrice Lauzon. All couples convinced with strong performances.

Ladies, Short Program

Sasha Cohen (USA) captured the Short Program ahead of World Champion Irina Slutskaya and Viktoria Volchkova (both RUS). It was a close competition with all top skaters doing

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very well. Cohen completed a triple Lutz-double toeloop combination, a triple Flip and impressive spirals in her precise program to “Malaguena”. The top qualifier of the Grand Prix series received marks ranging from 5.4 to 5.9 for required elements and from 5.7 to 5.9 for presentation. “I had a lot of experience this season, and I feel more confident with every competition. This is a new experience for me, first time doing the Grand Prix Final”, Cohen told the press.

Slutskaya was a strong second. Skating to “Victory” by Bond, the five-time European Champion nailed a triple Lutz-double toeloop, a double Axel, a triple Flip and showed fast spins. Her marks were as high as 5.8 for required elements and as high as 5.9 for presentation. “I think this was a performance good for the first place. Now I go back to the hotel, have some rest, and I’ll fight again in the Long Program”, Slutskaya announced.

Volchkova pulled out a clean program as well, landing a double Axel, a high triple Lutz-double toeloop combination and a triple flip – the last jump had eluded her in several events before. “I’m very happy to have done a clean Short Program. There were just minor things that I still can improve and that I have to work on. I was especially happy about my triple Flip, finally I did it!” the four-time European bronze medalist said.

Elena Liashenko (UKR) didn’t make any mistake either and came in fourth. Fumie Suguri of Japan stepped out of her triple Lutz (in combination with double toeloop) to finish fifth. Her teammate Shizuka Arakawa touched down with her hand on the triple flip and was ranked sixth.

Men, Short Program

To the delight of the home crowd, the three Russian skaters took the top three places in the Short Program. European Champion Evgeni Plushenko produced a strong program to “Adagio” that featured a solid quadruple-triple toeloop combination, a triple Axel, a triple Lutz and demanding footwork. He clearly took the lead with marks ranging from 5.6 to 5.9 for required elements and from 5.8 to 5.9 for presentation. “This is a tough format for a competition”, Plushenko stated. “It’s difficult to do the Short and the Free Program today and another Free Program tomorrow. It would be better and more interesting for the spectators to skate a Short, a Free and an Interpretative program. My legs felt a bit shaky today.”

Ilya Klimkin hung on to a quadruple-double toeloop combination and his triple Axel was wobbly, but he showed strong spins and footwork in his program to “X-Files” by Hugues le Bars to finish second. “I felt a lot of pressure. The competition is at home, in Russia, and everybody is expecting miracles, that we win everything”, the 1999 World Junior Champion explained. “Then there is also the pressure of having to compete again tonight. My back started to hurt again, from an old injury, and I was sick with a cold and fever prior to this event, so I’m not in my best shape, but I will try to give my best.”

Alexander Abt two-footed his opening quadruple toeloop (in combination with triple toeloop) and stepped out of his triple Axel. He pulled himself together to complete a triple Lutz and dynamic footwork. The Russian Champion scored marks up to 5.4 for required elements and up to 5.9 for presentation of his “Russian Sailors’ Dance”, which put him in third place.

“Alexander skated with confidence today”, coach Elena Tchaikovskaya commented. “He two-footed the quad, but that can happen. It’s a shame for the triple Axel, he could have done it clean, but he was a bit afraid. He is just coming back from a severe injury (ankle). The triple Lutz and all the other elements were excellent.”

European silver medalist Brian Joubert of France missed his triple Axel and came in fourth. Min Zhang (CHN), who was a last minute replacement for Takeshi Honda, had only arrived last night. He stumbled on his quadruple toeloop and placed fifth. His compatriot Chengjiang Li fell on the triple Axel and came in sixth.

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Pairs, Short Program

European Champions Tatiana Totmianina/Maxim Marinin of Russia beat World Champions Xue Shen/Hongbo Zhao (CHN) in an exciting Short Program competition. Shen/Zhao skated first and produced side by side triple toeloops, a huge throw triple loop and a double twist, but their side by side spin was out of sync. The Four Continents Champions earned marks up to 5.7 for both required elements and presentation of their program "Beethoven's Last Night".

"The feeling was very good this afternoon", Zhao said. "We had a little problem with our side by side spin, but our other elements were fine. After the Four Continents, we had to do two shows in Nagano (Japan) for the anniversary of the Olympic Games. So we had a very tight schedule."

Totmianina/Marinin pulled out an excellent Short Program. Their refined performance to "Morning" and "In the Hall of the Mountain King" by Peer Gynt included a side by side triple toe loop, a beautiful throw triple loop and a good side by side spin. The judges awarded the World silver medalists marks ranging from 5.6 to 5.8 for required elements and from 5.6 to 5.9 for presentation. "I was more nervous than usual. It's a different atmosphere to skate at home. It's a double responsibility to skate well", Marinin revealed. "Although there are not many people in the audience, there was a great support. I always struggle with my triple toe loop, but this time it was fine. These were the highest marks we got all season so far for our Short Program."

Maria Petrova/Alexei Tikhonov finished third. Tikhonov doubled the toe loop, but the couple produced a good double twist, a throw triple Salchow and a difficult one-armed lift to fend off the challenge of their teammates Julia Obertas/Alexei Sokolov. "(Except for the double toe loop) all other elements were well done, and it felt easy to skate. I was a bit blinded by the light on the throw triple Salchow, but I did it clean", Petrova told the press. Obertas/Sokolov especially impressed with their side by side spin. Dorota Zagorska/Mariusz Siudek (POL) and Anabelle Langlois/Patrice Archetto (CAN) also put in strong performances and were ranked 5th and 6th respectively.

Ice Dancing, Free Dance A

The Ice Dancers started the next round of the competition in the evening. Lobacheva/Averbukh strengthened their lead with a powerful performance of last year's Free Dance "A time for Peace". The husband and wife team drew extra applause for their spectacular lifts and fast paced footwork. The crowd gasped when Averbukh did two "flying Axels". The World Champions scored marks ranging from 5.7 to 5.9 for technical merit/required elements and from 5.8 to 6.0 for presentation, which meant a clear victory. "When I dressed in this costume, it was like a flash back to the Olympic Games", Lobacheva said. "We even laughed about it, Tanja (Navka) and I. It came all back to me, the excitement, the adrenalin rush. This costume will forever be associated with the Olympic Games."

Navka/Kostomarov put out an entertaining dance to a selection of songs by Michael Jackson and George Benson. They skated with energy and showed strong rotational lifts. Their marks went up to 5.7 (A) and up to 5.9 (B), and they defended their second place ahead of Denkova/Staviyski. "I liked this program very much, it's a lot of fun. I enjoyed skating it", Navka commented on their choice of music. "It's an unusual schedule for us. We didn't know what to expect. It wasn't easy for us, but I think we did well."

Dancing to "O" from Cirque du Soleil, Denkova/Staviyski completed innovative moves, an interesting change of edge lift and intricate steps. The Bulgarians earned marks as high as 5.8 for both technical merit/required elements and presentation. "It was a decent skate. Actually, it was easier for me to skate now than this afternoon", Denkova explained. "It was unusual to start the competition with the Original Dance. This Free Dance felt confident."

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Grushina/Goncharov (UKR) presented a new Free Dance to “Spente le Stelle” and remained in fourth place. Chait/Sakhnovski (ISR) skated to “Variations on the Theme of Paganini” by Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Dubreuil/Lauzon (CAN) chose “Madame Butterfly”.

Ladies, Free Skating A

Cohen was to skate first of the leading three skaters. The 18-year-old started off strongly into her “Carmen” routine, hitting a triple Lutz-double toeloop combination, a triple Lutz, a triple Flip-double toeloop and a triple toeloop. Then she struggled with her edge jumps, two-footing the Salchow and falling on the loop. The American finished on a high note with her trademark spirals and excellent spins. Cohen’s marks ranged from 5.3 to 5.7 for technical merit and from 5.7 to 5.8 for presentation. “It was something different doing a long right after the short. But it’s a learning experience for me. I can skate better than that. I have a chance to do that tomorrow”, the athlete told the press.

Next up was Volchkova. The Russian landed a triple Lutz, but stumbled on her next jump, a triple loop. Her classical program to “Air” by Bach and Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons” contained three more triple jumps and nice spirals, but was lacking speed. Volchkova earned marks up to 5.6 for technical merit and up to 5.7 for presentation, which meant she remained behind Cohen. “During the short I was just concentrating on the elements. After the short I felt like after finishing a competition. I hope it will be better tomorrow. I have to do the triple-triple combinations then”, Volchkova concluded.

Slutskaya skated last. The World Champion looked very determined when she took the ice. She had opted for her dramatic “Tosca” program and pulled out a strong performance that featured six triples and a double Axel as well as fast spins. The Muscovite was awarded the highest marks of the Ladies’ event – all 5.7 and 5.8 for technical merit and up to one 6.0 for presentation. “There were so many Russian flags in the crowd, and everyone crossed their fingers for me”, Slutskaya said. “I felt pressure, I thought I really had to skate well tonight, but it was hard. It was a very good performance, the best. I went out there and fought.” Cohen slipped to second while Volchkova remained in third place in the combined result.

Liashenko skated also well to stay in fourth place. Arakawa moved up one spot while Suguri dropped to sixth after she made some errors.

Men, Free Skating A

Then it was the turn of the Men again. Plushenko took command immediately and never let it go. The 2001 World Champion nailed a solid quad-triple toeloop combination right at the beginning of his “Carmen” program, followed by a triple Axel, a triple Salchow and a rare triple Axel-half loop-triple Flip combination. The 20-year-old produced two more triples as well as fast paced footwork. The crowd cheered for each move. “I’m tired, but it was a great pleasure to skate at home in St. Petersburg”, Plushenko commented. “I skated it (the Carmen program) during the Tom Collins Tour in 93 shows, and so I feel this program really well.” The reigning Olympic silver medalist scored marks ranging from 5.7 to 5.9 for technical merit and from 5.8 to two 6.0s for presentation to defend his lead.

Klimkin opened his innovative program to “Sunny Boy” by Rene Aubry with a triple Axel-triple toeloop combination, but then he missed his planned quadruple toeloop on two attempts. The Muscovite recovered to land a triple Salchow out of a camel spin and three more triples. His spins were excellent, and the marks went up to 5.6 (A) and up to 5.8 (B). Klimkin held on to the second place. “It was very hard to skate for the second time today. I felt like an empty bottle after my program this afternoon. But I managed somehow”, the 22-year-old smiled. “Until tomorrow’s competition, I need to have a lot of rest. I have to take some energy from somewhere, I just don’t know where from!”

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Abt felt similar. The 2002 European silver medalist two-footed his opening quadruple toeloop (in combination with triple toeloop) and also his first triple Axel. The Muscovite pulled off four triple jumps, but he doubled the Salchow and loop in his "Bolero" program. "I'm so tired, I'm almost dead. I tried to rest between the competitions and to prepare", he said. Abt remained in third place behind Klimkin.

Joubert is currently standing in fourth place. He made mistakes on his quadruple toeloop and on his first triple Axel. Li moved up one spot to fifth, while Zhang slipped to sixth.

Pairs, Free Skating A

To the delight of the home crowd, Totmianina/Marinin put out an excellent Free Program to keep their lead. The European Champions looked confident and their elements were rock-solid. The "West Side Story" routine included a side by side triple Salchow, a triple twist, two beautiful triple throws (loop and Salchow) as well as a side by side triple-double toeloop combination and good lifts. The couple received marks ranging from 5.6 to 5.8 for technical merit and from 5.7 to 5.9 for presentation. "This was our best performance for the last two years. I was tired before I went out, but when I came out, the people started to applaud, and I was ready to start", Totmianina explained.

Shen/Zhao's program "Spirit of Spring" had a few glitches. Zhao fell on the first triple toeloop and later aborted a lift, but the World Champions hit their second triple toeloop as well as their huge triple throws. Their marks were as high as 5.7 for technical merit and as high as 5.8 for presentation, which put them in second place. "This was not good", Zhao admitted. "We felt tired. I tumbled on the triple toe. It was difficult to do the old program, because we didn't remember all the linking elements."

Petrova/Tikhonov had to overcome a shaky start when she fell on the first element, the triple toeloop. But the team recovered instantly and continued their program to Rachmaninov's "Symphonic Dances" without any further mistakes. The 2000 World Champions executed a side by side double Axel-double toeloop sequence, a triple twist, throw triple loop and a gorgeous throw triple Salchow as well as interesting lifts. They scored marks up to 5.6 for technical merit and up to 5.7 for presentation to remain in third place. "My fall (on the triple toe) was a stupid mistake. I worried more about the sequence with the throw triple loop, so maybe I was too relaxed when I went into the triple toe", Petrova said. "But I pulled myself together immediately and didn't let the mistake affect the rest of the program."

Obertas/Sokolov (RUS) skated a strong program and are standing in fourth place. Zagorska/Siudek (POL) had some problems with their side by side jumps and finished fifth, ahead of Langlois/Archetto (CAN).

The 2003 ISU Grand Prix Final will continue tomorrow with the second Free Skating.

Full results are also directly available on the ISU Internet site on www.isu.org

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Ice Dance

FPl.	Name	Nat.	TFP	OD	FDA	FDB
1	Irina Lobacheva/Ilia Averbukh	RUS	1.0	1	1	
2	Tatiana Navka/Roman Kostomarov	RUS	2.0	2	2	
3	Albena Denkova/Maxim Staviyski	BUL	3.0	3	3	
4	Elena Grushina/Ruslan Goncharov	UKR	4.0	4	4	
5	Galit Chait/Sergei Sakhnovski	ISR	5.0	5	5	
6	Marie-France Dubreuil/Patrice Lauzon	CAN	6.0	6	6	

Ladies

FPl.	Name	Nat.	TFP	SP	FSA	FSB
1	Irina SLUTSKAYA	RUS	1.4	2	1	
2	Sasha COHEN	USA	1.6	1	2	
3	Viktoria VOLCHKOVA	RUS	3.0	3	3	
4	Elena LIASHENKO	UKR	4.6	4	5	
5	Shizuka ARAKAWA	JPN	4.8	6	4	
6	Fumie SUGURI	JPN	5.6	5	6	

Men

FPl.	Name	Nat.	TFP	SP	FSA	FSB
1	Evgeni Plushenko	RUS	1.0	1	1	
2	Ilia Klimkin	RUS	2.0	2	2	
3	Alexander Abt	RUS	3.0	3	3	
4	Brian Joubert	FRA	4.0	4	4	
5	Chengjiang Li	CHN	5.4	6	5	
6	Min Zhang	CHN	5.6	5	6	

Pairs

Pl.	Name	Nat.	TFP	SP	FSA	FSB
1	Tatiana Totmianina/Maxim Marinin	RUS	1.0	1	1	
2	Xue Shen/Hongbo Zhao	CHN	2.0	2	2	
3	Maria Petrova/Alexei Tikhonov	RUS	3.0	3	3	
4	Julia Obertas/Alexei Sokolov	RUS	4.0	4	4	
5	Dorota Zagorska/Mariusz Siudek	POL	5.0	5	5	
6	Anabelle Langlois/Patrice Archetto	CAN	6.0	6	6	