

ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series 2015/16 Progressive Skate America, Day One

The ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating 2015/2016 kicked off Friday with the Short Programs and Short Dance at Progressive Skate America, the first of six events in Milwaukee, WI (USA). Skaters compete for points to qualify for the Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final and a prize money of US \$ 180,000 per individual event of the Grand Prix.

Scimeca/Knierim (USA) lead after Pairs Short Program

Alexa Scimeca/Chris Knierim (USA) took the lead in the Pairs Short Program followed by China's Wenjing Sui/Cong Han and Xuehan Wang/Lei Wang.

Skating to "Nothing Else Matters" by Metallica, Scimeca/Knierim produced a high triple twist, throw triple flip and level four footwork, pair spin and death spiral. The only glitch came when Knierim put his hand down on the side by side triple Salchow. The U.S. Champions picked up a personal best of 69.69 points. "We are very proud of ourselves and happy with the way we skated. Since our last event Nebelhorn (Trophy) we took the choreography and basically started from scratch. We rebuilt the emotion and fire that needs to be brought on when we skate. It felt really great to bring it today. I think that we made everyone in the audience feel something and that was the goal", Scimeca told the post-event press conference.

Sui/Han's Spanish themed program included a side by side triple toe, big throw triple flip and triple twist, but he stumbled on the pair spin which received no value. The World silver medalists earned 68.28 points. „This Grand Prix is our first competition this year. We are glad to join, but we were very nervous. We don't know how our programs will be received by audience and judges. Yesterday I slept too much and I lost my pair spin", Han said.

Wang/Wang, who are not related, turned in a strong performance to "Romance", landing a triple twist, triple toe and throw triple loop to score 64.95 points. "This is the first time for us to come to the USA. We have to overcome the jetlag and we are sleepy. Coming here, I was asking myself whether I am awake or sleeping", Lei Wang commented.

World Junior silver medalists Julianne Seguin/Charlie Bilodeau (CAN) are sitting in fourth place (64.85 points) while 2014 World and Olympic silver medalists Ksenia Stolbova/Fedor Klimov (RUS) are currently ranked fifth after she fell on the throw triple Lutz (63.41 points)

Evgenia Medvedeva (RUS) takes Ladies Short Program

Evgenia Medvedeva of Russia won the Ladies Short Program, setting a new personal best en route. Gracie Gold (USA) and Japan's Satoko Miyahara are currently ranked second and third.

Medvedeva's program to "Melodies of a White Night" was highlighted by a triple flip-triple toe, triple loop, double Axel and three level four spins. The 15-year-old collected 70.92 points. "I am overall quite pleased. There was a little mistake in the combination, but I don't think it affected my performance. It's the second season that I have been using this layout of my program (putting all jump elements into the second half). At the beginning, it was a little harder, but now I am used to it and obviously I'm doing it to get more points", the World Junior Champion explained.

Gold hit a triple Lutz-triple toe right out of the gate in her “El Choclo” Tango routine, but then doubled the flip. She earned a level four for two spins and the footwork and got 65.39 points. “I’m really pleased with how I performed today, but also very frustrated. Things that I did in the program were so good, but just can’t mess up a jump in the short program”, Gold said.

Performing to “Firedance” by Bill Whelan Miyahara landed a triple Lutz-triple toe, double Axel and three level four spins, but her triple flip was underrotated. The World silver medalist scored 65.12 points, a seasons best. “I was a little nervous, but I am glad that I didn’t miss my jumps”, the Japanese skater noted.

Karen Chen (USA) finished fourth with 62.28 points ahead of Julia Lipnitskaia (RUS) with 62.24 points. Both had underrotated one jump.

Chock/Bates (USA) dance to lead

Madison Chock/Evan Bates (USA) danced to a confident lead. Victoria Sinitsina/Nikita Katsalapov of Russia came second, followed by Canadians Piper Gilles/Paul Poirier.

Chock/Bates unveiled a new Short Dance set to “More” for the Foxtrot and “Unchained Melody” for the Waltz. The World silver medalists collected a level four for the twizzles and curve lift while the Waltz pattern merited a level two and three. The U.S. Champions earned 70.56 points, which is a new seasons best. “We made the change after Nebelhorn (Trophy) and decided to completely make a fresh short dance and really try to make something elegant and sophisticated in the ballroom dance world. It was kind of a stressful two weeks for us getting ready for the event, so considering the timetable, we’re really thrilled tonight”, Bates explained.

Sinitsina/Katsalapov turned in a solid performance to Waltz, March and Polka from “Swan Lake” and had the same levels for their elements as Chock/Bates. The Russian duo that competes in their second season as a team posted a personal best score of 62.76 points. “We are really excited. This is our first competition this season, so today was a good day. We did a good job, I think. It was fun to skate. Thanks for the audience. We’ll fight tomorrow”, Katsalapov commented.

Gilles/Poirier went for Waltz and March to “Sergeant Pepper” by the Beatles and German Dance No. 6 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Their twizzles and rotational lift were rated a level four, but the two sequences of the Ravensburg Waltz garnered only a level two. The 2014 Four Continents silver medalists scored 61.33 points. “We skated very well and very much enjoyed our performance today. It’s easy to lose yourself in this interesting program. I think we’re very happy with what we did today but I think there are things we can still work on”, Gilles told the press.

Kaitlyn Hawayek/Jean-Luc Baker (USA) placed fourth (56.54 points) and Anna Yanovskaya/Sergey Mozgov (RUS) are ranked fifth (53.35 points).

Max Aaron (USA) wins Men’s Short Program

Max Aaron (USA) won the Men’s Short Program. Han Yan of China came second and Russia’s Konstantin Menshov finished third.

Performing to “Nessun Dorma”, Aaron nailed a quadruple Salchow-triple toe, triple Axel, triple Lutz and a level four flying sit spin to earn a new personal best score of 86.67 points. “86 is a great score but I’m more pleased that I was able to come out here and perform the way I’ve trained. The number doesn’t matter to me. My goal is to compete two clean performances so we’re halfway there. I’m moving on to the long already and I’m excited”, the 2013 U.S. Champion shared.

Yan produced a somewhat shaky quad toe and a good triple Axel in his program to “Sing Sing Sing”, but he was off balance on the back end of his triple Lutz-triple toe combo and put down both hands. The 2015 Four Continents bronze medalist picked up 86.53 points. “I think my performance today was quite good, up to my level. There was a mistake, but still I enjoyed skating and I am quite pleased with the program”, the 19-year-old said.

Menshov was the only skater to go for two quadruple jumps and landed both, a quad-triple toe combo and a quad Salchow, in his routine to “Rotting Romance”. However, the triple Axel was wobbly. The Russian skater scored 86.15 points, which is a new seasons best. “I’m pleased with my program today. In Russia, it’s 6 in the morning. I wasn’t nervous because I was in a bit of a sleepy state. There was an error on the triple Axel, maybe because the rink is narrower. The most important thing is to pull myself together tomorrow for the free program”, the 32-year-old noted.

World Junior Champion Shoma Uno (JPN) placed fourth at 80.78 points ahead of Adian Pitkeev (RUS) with 79.90 points. Olympic and World bronze medalist Denis Ten (KAZ) currently sits in sixth with 79.02 points.

Progressive Skate America continues Saturday with the Free Skating and the Free Dance. For full results please refer to www.isu.org under Single& Pair Skating/Ice Dance then select Grand Prix.

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