

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

HEADQUARTERS ADDRESS: AVENUE JUSTE-OLIVIER 17 CH 1006 LAUSANNE SWITZERLAND
TELEPHONE (+41) 21 612 66 66 TELEFAX (+41) 21 612 66 77 E-MAIL: media@isu.ch

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ISU World Team Trophy 2017 **Team Japan leads after Day One**

The fifth edition of the ISU World Team Trophy in Figure Skating opened Thursday at Yoyogi National Stadium in Tokyo, Japan with the Short Dance, Ladies and Men's Short Programs.

Team Japan edges Russia for the lead

Team Japan skated to the lead on day one of the ISU World Team Trophy in Figure Skating, edging Russia by a tie breaker. Both teams have 44 points. Team USA follows in third at 43 points.

Strong performances by Shoma Uno, Mai Mihara and Wakaba Higuchi helped Team Japan to take a narrow lead. Uno put out a strong Short Program to "Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra" by Nigel Hess that included a somewhat shaky quadruple flip, quad toe-double toe combination and a triple Axel. The World silver medalist won the Men's Short Program with a personal best score of 103.53 points. He collected 12 points for the team. Mihara landed a triple Lutz-triple toe combination and triple flip in her Short Program to "Rondo Capriccioso" to earn 72.10 points and third place (10 team points). Wakaba Higuchi turned in a clean performance as well and ranked fifth (71.41 points). However, World and Olympic Champion Yuzuru Hanyu sits in seventh after popping his planned quad loop and almost falling on his quad Salchow. Ice Dancers Kana Murakami/Chris Reed came in fifth in the Short Dance.

"Today we had the dance event, the women and the men and I really believe everybody did their best and put in a great effort. Tomorrow we have the dance again, the pairs and the men and we would like to work together as a team to make sure we cheer on our team to fully support them from the beginning to the end. Most of our skaters did well. One of our guys didn't do his best and all we can do is cheer him up", team captain Muramoto said.

Russia was able to rely on their Ladies. World Champion Evgenia Medvedeva set a new record score of 80.85 points in the Short Program with an excellent performance to "River Flows in You" and "Winter" that featured a triple flip-triple toe combination, triple loop and level-four spins. Two-time European silver medalist Elena Radionova hit a triple Lutz and a triple loop-triple toe combination to finish second in the Ladies Short Program (72.21 points). Ice Dancers Ekaterina Bobrova/Dmitri Soloviev came third in the Short Dance (68.44 points). He struggled with the twizzles that garnered only a level two. Mikhail Kolyada placed fourth with a clean performance (95.37 points) while Maxim Kovtun was 11th.

"First of all I want to mention that the World Team Trophy is one of the hardest competitions of the season, because it is the last one, everybody is tired and this reflects on the performances. But at the same time it is one of the most cheerful events, you are usually only skating for yourself, but here obviously the team result depends on your placement. Tomorrow we will try do better (in dance) and we expect good performances from the men and the pair", Bobrova commented.

Madison Chock/Evan Bates got Team USA off to a good start by winning the Short Dance. The two-time World medalists scored 79.05 points with their Blues "Bad to the Bone" and funky Hip Hop "Uptown Funk" routine that got the crowd going. Nathan Chen added 11 points to the team score by coming second in the Men's Short Program nailing a quad flip-triple toe combination and quad toe (99.28 points). Jason Brown ranked fifth with a clean program that was highlighted by a triple Axel, triple flip-triple toe and excellent spins (94.32 points). Ashley Wagner placed sixth in the Ladies Short Program. She under rotated the triple flip-triple toe combination (70.75 points) and Karen Chen sits currently in 8th place.

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“Today was a great day for team USA. We have some newbies and they handled this event very well. Our men did exactly what they needed to do tonight. I’m pretty happy with my own performance and I think that Karen (Chen) will definitely bring it on in the long program and we’re obviously very happy with where Maddie (Madison Chock) and Evan (Bates) ended up”, Wagner told the post event press conference.

Team China is ranked fourth at 32 points. Their highest scoring team member Boyang Jin finished third in the Men’s Short Program. Team Canada, led by ice dancers Kaitlyn Weaver/Andrew Poje, who were second in the Short Dance, placed fifth (31 team points). Team France has 19 points and is currently ranked sixth.

The ISU World Team Trophy continues Friday with the Pairs Short Program, Free Dance and Men's Free Skating. For more information and results please refer to www.isu.org and http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/figure/wtt2017/index_en.html.

For further information please contact:

Selina Vanier, ISU Media Coordinator
+41 21 612 66 66
email: media@isu.ch