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Russia's Zagitova and Stepanova/Bukin lead way on Day One of Helsinki Grand Prix

Olympic Champion [Alina Zagitova](#) (RUS), Pair Skaters [Nicole Della Monica/Matteo Guarise](#) (ITA) and Ice Dancers [Alexandra Stepanova/Ivan Bukin](#) (RUS) are leading after Day One of the Grand Prix Helsinki on Friday. The event in the Finnish capital is the third of six in the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series 2018/19.

Della Monica/Guarise (ITA) grab lead in Pairs Short Program

Italy's [Nicole Della Monica/Matteo Guarise](#) grabbed a narrow lead in the Pairs Short Program ahead of [Natalia Zabiiko/Alexander Enbert](#) of Russia. [Daria Pavliuchenko/Denis Khodykin](#), also from Russia, are currently ranked third.

Della Monica/Guarise made a solid performance to "Never Tear Us Apart" that included a throw triple loop, a triple twist as well as a level-four lift and death spiral. However, Della Monica stepped out of the side by side triple Salchow. The Italian Champions picked up 68.18 points, a new season's best.

"We were well prepared, we've trained a lot in the past weeks, but the legs were shaky," Della Monica said. "It was not our best performance."

Guarise added: "We've trained very well, we're in good shape and there is no excuse. We really wanted to show our new program and there was some pressure."

Zabiiko/Enbert got off to a good start in their program to "Alexander Nevski" by Sergei Prokofiev with a high triple twist, but then Enbert fell on a triple toeloop attempt. The European bronze medalists recovered to land a throw triple loop and scored 67.59 points. "There was a huge mistake on the jump, but it happens," Zabiiko said. "Now we'll just prepare for tomorrow."

Explaining their program, in which they play two knights, Enbert said: "Our music is not typical for us or for figure skating and at first we had some doubts about it. But when we started working on it with choreographer Peter Tchernyshev, we realized it works."

World Junior Champions Pavliuchenko/Khodykin produced a side by side triple toeloop and a triple twist in their routine to "When Winter Comes", but Khodykin stumbled in the step sequence.

The Grand Prix debutants earned 63.80 points, which is a season's best. "We were a little nervous. We try to do our work well and we want to skate flawless and clean," Pavliuchenko said. "Our music is slow and beautiful and it's about love."

[Miriam Ziegler/Severin Kiefer](#) (AUT) are not far behind in fourth place on 62.69 points followed by Four Continents bronze medalists [Tae Ok Ryom/Ju Sik Kim](#) (PRK) on 56.87 points. Ryom missed the triple toeloop.

Alina Zagitova (RUS) captures Ladies Short Program

Olympic Champion [Alina Zagitova](#) of Russia captured the lead in the Ladies Short Program. In an event with some surprises, Japan's [Yuna Shiraiwa](#) placed second, edging [Loena Hendrickx](#) of Belgium.

Performing to the "Phantom of the Opera", Zagitova went for her trademark triple Lutz-triple loop combination, but singled the loop. The European Champion rallied back to nail a double Axel and a triple flip and picked up a level four for her spins and footwork to earn 68.90 points.

"(After missing the combination) I thought I have to do all the other elements clean," the 16-year-old said. "The combination was the first element and I still had all the other elements. I knew that the season after the Olympic Games will be hard, especially emotionally. I had my two weeks' vacation as usual, then the training camp and the preparation for the season started."

Shiraiwa's entertaining program to "Nightmare" and "On Board" featured a triple Lutz-triple toeloop combination, a triple flip and double Axel, but two spins and the footwork merited only a level two. The Japanese skater set a season's best with 63.77 points.

"I am happy to land the combination," the high school student said. "That was the focus for this season, so I'm very happy I did it. The story of my program is – I am a crew member and guide the passengers. The audience are the passengers for me and I hope I guide them well."

Hendrickx landed a triple Lutz-triple toe, but the toeloop was underrotated. She also underrotated her triple flip, but collected a level four for her spins and footwork to score 63.17 points. "It wasn't perfect, but I can be very happy," she said. "I had to withdraw from my first Grand Prix Skate America (after the Short Program) due to illness."

[Stanislava Konstantinova](#) (RUS) came fourth on 62.56 points after falling on a triple flip attempt. [Emmi Peltonen](#) (FIN) sits in fifth with a solid performance (59.90 points), followed by [Daria Panenkova](#) (RUS). The 2018 Four Continents Champion [Kaori Sakamoto](#) (JPN), a medal favorite, finished seventh on 57.26 points as she fell on two jumps.

Stepanova/Bukin (RUS) take narrow lead in Rhythm Dance

[Alexandra Stepanova/Ivan Bukin](#) of Russia danced to a narrow lead in the Rhythm Dance, edging Italy's [Charlene Guignard/Marco Fabbri](#) by less than a point. [Lorraine McNamara/Quinn Carpenter](#) (USA) came third as the first day of competition at the Helsinki Grand Prix concluded Friday.

Stepanova/Bukin delivered a captivating performance to the Paso Doble "Malaguena" and the Tango "Carmen Story", highlighted by their trademark twizzles, a difficult curve lift and precise footwork. The two-time European bronze medalists collected a level four for the twizzles and the lift and a level three for the Tango Romantica and the midline step sequence to score 78.18 points.

"The Tango Romantica is a very difficult dance," Bukin said. "But we really like this dance, it is full of elements and it blends in harmoniously with the program. So for us, the Tango Romantica is very interesting."

“This is the first competition in the season where we were able to show our complete short dance,” Stepanova said, referring to the fact that the pair had to interrupt their performance at Finlandia Trophy last month because of debris falling on the ice. “The coaches were pleased, the audience also approved and we’re also pretty pleased.”

Guignard/Fabbri had to overcome an early setback when the wrong music was switched on for them at first. The team from Milan did not lose focus and produced a strong dance that included a unique stationary lift, level-four twizzles and a level-four Tango Romantica sequence. The Skate America silver medalists earned 77.36 points.

“We are very happy with our performance,” Fabbri said. “It was much better than at Skate America. At Skate America, we did some small mistakes. We just had a small problem with the music – we had a problem with the music at the beginning and then we felt that the music was slower and we got a time violation. We don’t know what happened tonight.”

The Italians got a one-point deduction for the timing violation. Fabbri went on: “The Tango Romantica is one of the most beautiful dances that have been created for us. We were very excited to hear that we will skate to the Tango Romantica this season and we never had the opportunity to do Tango before.”

Dancing to the Waltz “Desde el Alma” and the Tango “Quejumbroso”, McNamara/Carpenter picked up a level four for the twizzles as well as for the rotational lift and scored 71.40 points.

“We’re really excited to be here,” Carpenter said. “It’s our second Grand Prix of the season. We both had a great time with the Rhythm Dance tonight. We’re definitely looking forward to tomorrow.”

McNamara added: “We personally really love the Tango Romantica. We think it’s one of the most fun dances. It’s a difficult dance because of how intricate it is, but it makes a lot of fun to incorporate it into the program.”

The 2018 World Junior silver medalists [Christina Carreira/Anthony Ponomarenko](#) (USA) are currently ranked fourth at 66.93 points followed by Spain’s [Sara Hurtado/Kirill Khaliavin](#) on 66.25 points and [Juulia Turkkila/Matthias Versluis](#) (FIN) on 63.06.

The Helsinki Grand Prix continues Saturday with the Men’s Short Program, Pairs and Ladies Free Skating and the Free Dance. For full entry lists and further information regarding the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series please visit [here](#). Follow the discussion on social media by using **#FigureSkating #GPFigure**.