

November 27, 2020

Osaka, JPN

ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating 2020/21

ISU Grand Prix NHK Trophy Day One

Favorites [Yuma Kagiyama](#) (JPN), [Kaori Sakamoto](#) (JPN) and [Misato Komatsubara/Tim Koleto](#) skated to the lead as the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating event NHK Trophy opened Friday in Osaka (JPN) with the Rhythm Dance, Ladies and Men's Short Programs.

Following a decision of the ISU Council due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, the Grand Prix events are primarily domestically run events with domestic skaters and skaters who train in the host country or respective geographical region competing. Except for Korea's You, only Japanese skaters compete at NHK Trophy and there is no Pairs event being held. Overall, 28 skaters/couples that represent two ISU members compete at NHK Trophy.

Super Kaori Sakamoto (JPN) shines in Ladies Short Program

Top seed [Kaori Sakamoto](#) of Japan cruised to the lead in the Ladies Short Program. 2018 ISU World silver medalist [Wakaba Higuchi](#) of Japan came second and compatriot [Mako Yamashita](#) follows in third.

Skating to "Concerto En Re Mineur" by Johann Sebastian Bach and "Bach a la Jazz", Sakamoto hit a big double Axel, triple Lutz and triple flip-triple toeloop combination. Her layback spin was rated a level four while the other two spins and the footwork merited a level three. The 2018 ISU Four Continents Champion oozed confidence throughout her performance and netted 75.60 points.

"I was able to skate a good short program and I feel relieved," Sakamoto said. "It was for the first time that I had the (triple) Lutz (in the Short Program) for five years and I was able to skate clean. "It is very motivating to skate in front of an audience. In the free program, I hope to have more energy and to keep my position," she added.

Higuchi went for a triple Axel in her program to "Bird Set Free" by Sia, but fell. The 2018 World silver medalist recovered to hit a triple Lutz-triple toe combination, a triple flip and two level-four spins as well as a level-four step sequence. The skater from Tokyo earned 69.71 points.

"In my Axel, my axis was off so that was a mistake but was able to regroup and remain calm to land the next two jumps. It was the first time to attempt a triple Axel in the short program, because I need to earn points," Higuchi noted. "The entry into my Axel will be different in the free skating and I have long practiced this one so I will feel more confident going in tomorrow," she continued.

Yamashita delivered a strong performance of her program to "The Barber of Seville", completing a triple loop, double Axel, triple Lutz-triple toe combination. The 2018 ISU World Junior bronze medalist scored 67.56 points.

"I did all my jumps and the skating overall went very well. I wasn't nervous," the 17-year-old said. "It was really nice to skate with an audience. The best thing about my program was that I did the triple-triple combination in the second half of the program."

Japanese Junior Champion [Rino Matsuike](#) underrotated her triple flip in her combination to finish fourth on 65.74 points. [Yuhana Yokoi](#) (JPN) is not far behind in fifth on 65.18 points and [Mana Kawabe](#) (JPN) rounds up the top six at 63.62 points. 2017 ISU Four Continents Champion [Mai Mihara](#) (JPN), who returns to competition after missing the past season due to health problems, finished seventh (63.41 points). 2020 Youth Olympic Games Champion [Young You](#) (KOR) missed her triple Axel and triple Lutz and is currently ranked 12th (55.56 points).

Dream routine for Komatsubara/Koieto (JPN) to take Rhythm Dance lead

Japanese Champions [Misato Komatsubara/Tim Koieto](#) danced to a strong lead in the Rhythm Dance. The new team of [Kana Muramoto/Daisuke Takahashi](#) (JPN) edged [Rikako Fukase/Eichu Cho](#) (JPN) for second place.

Dancing to Blues, Swing and Disco from “Dreamgirls”, Komatsubara/Koieto produced a level-four curve lift and level-four twizzles as well as a level-three Finnstep pattern and pattern dance step sequence. However, the diagonal footwork garnered a level two. The Japanese Champions received 70.76 points.

“This year has been such a tough situation for everyone and I know that everybody has been working very hard. This competition, we were able to perform to a (live) audience and we are very lucky,” Koieto said. “It has been only a week since I obtained Japanese citizenship and it was great to share this moment with the Japanese audience,” the American-born skater added.

Muramoto/Takahashi, who debuted in competition, put out an upbeat performance to “The Mask”. They picked up a level four for the rotational lift and a level three for the twizzles. The Finnstep pattern was graded a level one while the pattern dance step sequence was rated a level three for her and a level one for him. The 2010 ISU World Champion in Single Skating and his partner earned 64.15 points.

“It is very special to perform for a live audience. Not everything was the way we hoped and it was not a 100 percent, but the Rhythm Dance was good,” Takahashi commented. “I did not realize how difficult ice dance is. So hat off to all ice dancers,” the former Single Skater shared.

Fukase/Cho collected a level for their lift and the twizzles in their dance to “La La Land” for a score of 63.46 points.

“We had a lot of challenges to overcome. Coming to Japan, we first had to practice under quarantine conditions. This is the first time we scored above 60 in the Rhythm Dance and we are very happy,” Fukase said.

Yuma Kagiyama (JPN) speeds to the lead in Men’s Short Program

Reigning ISU World Junior silver medalist [Yuma Kagiyama](#) of Japan took the lead in the Men’s Short Program in his senior-level ISU Grand Prix debut. Japan’s [Kazuki Tomono](#) placed second ahead of another Japanese newcomer, [Lucas Tsuyoshi Honda](#).

Kagiyama started well into his fast-paced routine to “Vocussion” with a solid quad Salchow-triple toeloop and quad toeloop. However, the 2020 Youth Olympic Games Champion popped the Axel into a single. He picked up a level four for his spins and steps to take the lead with 87.26 points.

“In the first half of the program I did the way I practiced and I thought I was going to have a clean performance, but then I got a little tired in the second half and I popped the Axel. I hated that. Axel is not my forte and maybe I became too careful going in,” the ISU World Junior silver medalist commented. “My Free Skating (to “Avatar”) is quite the contrast from the short program. I’ve never performed to this kind of music before,” he continued.

Performing to “Chroma 3 – The Hardest Button to Button”, Tomono completed a quadruple Salchow, triple Axel and a somewhat shaky quad toe-double toeloop combination. Two spins and the footwork were rated a level three. The ISU World Championships competitor scored 83.27 points.

“I think I lost speed and was a somewhat hesitant in the first half, but then I calmed myself down in the second half. I think I did well with the step sequence and the artistic impression,” Tomono said. “I felt that last season my Short Program was not at a 100 percent and I wanted to make sure to refine it. Therefore, I decided to keep it,” he added.

Newcomer Honda had skated first out of the 11 skaters and set the bar high with a clean performance to “S.O.S. d’un terrien en détresse” that included a triple Axel, triple flip-triple toeloop and triple Lutz. The freshly minted Japanese Junior Champion earned 79.22 points.

“To be honest, I am surprised myself. I would have loved to get into the second group (for the Free Skating), but I never thought I would be third,” the 18-year-old shared. “It is tough, challenging. I came back from Junior Nationals on Tuesday and on Thursday I was skating here. It is a tight schedule, but the conditioning went well.”

[Keiji Tanaka](#) (JPN) stumbled on his quad Salchow and reduced his combination to double flip-triple toe to come fourth on 76.57 points. [Yuto Kishina](#) (JPN) ranked fifth with 74.44 points followed by [Sena Miyake](#) (JPN) on 74.34 points. ISU Junior Grand Prix Final Champion [Shun Sato](#) (JPN) made errors on two jumping passes and sits in 7th (72.04 points).

[Mitsuki Sumoto](#) (JPN) withdrew before the Men’s Short Program citing illness.

NHK Trophy continues Saturday with the Ladies Free Skating, Free Dance and Men’s Free Skating.

For full entry lists and further information regarding the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series please visit: <https://isu.org/GrandPrix>. Follow the discussion on social media by using **#FigureSkating #GPFigure**.

Where to watch and follow the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating 2020

The ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating will be live streamed on the [Skating ISU YouTube Channel](#). Geo-restrictions will apply in markets where TV rights are in place. You will find the full list in the [Where to Watch news here](#).

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ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating 2020

- [2020 Guaranteed Rate Skate America, Las Vegas \(USA\) – October 22-24](#)
- [Shiseido Cup of China, Chongqing \(CHN\) – November 6-8](#)
- [Rostelecom Cup, Moscow \(RUS\) – November 20-22](#)
- [NHK Trophy, Osaka \(JPN\) – November 27-29](#)
- [ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final postponed](#)

The ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final that was to be held as an Olympic Test Event on December 10-13 has been postponed. The ISU, in consultation with all stakeholders and considering the pandemic developments, is evaluating the continuation of the 2020/21 season.

About ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series

The ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series started in 1995 (previously known as the ISU Champions Series) and consists of six invitational international senior events and the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final. Due to the current situation, the usual selection criteria do not apply. Please see the [ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating page](#) for further information.