

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

HEADQUARTERS ADDRESS: CHEMIN DE PRIMEROSE 2 - CH 1007 LAUSANNE - SWITZERLAND
TELEPHONE (+41) 21 612 66 66 TELEFAX (+41) 21 612 66 7 E-MAIL: info@isu.ch

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For immediate release

ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series 2014/15 Lexus Cup of China, Day 1

The Lexus Cup of China opened Friday in Shanghai with the Short Dance, the Ladies, Men and Pairs Short Programs. The Lexus Cup of China is the third of six events in the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating series. The world's top figure skaters are competing for a prize money of US \$ 180,000 per individual event of the Grand Prix and are collecting points towards the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final in Barcelona (ESP).

Maia Shibutani/Alex Shibutani (USA) lead after Short Dance

Maia Shibutani/Alex Shibutani (USA) took the lead in the Short Dance. Anna Cappellini/Luca Lanotte of Italy are sitting in second place, followed by France's Gabriella Papadakis/Guillaume Cizeron.

Shibutani/Shibutani delivered a strong performance to the Flamenco "Asturias Variations" and the Paso Doble "The Last Corrida" that featured level-four twizzles and a level-four rotational lift while the Paso Doble sequence and the side by side step sequence merited a level three. The brother-and-sister team set a new seasons best with 65.20 points. "We only had a week since our last Grand Prix at Skate America, but we feel like we have made great improvements on our performance and our program. Our Paso levels also improved, so this is just great step for us for this season", Maia Shibutani said.

Dancing to "Capriccio Espagnol", Cappellini/Lanotte picked up a level four for their lift and a level three for the twizzles and the first Paso Doble sequence, but the second part of the Paso Doble and the parallel footwork were graded a level two. The World Champions scored 62.70 points. "We were very happy with the way we skated. We skated clean and we performed well. Clearly something didn't go quite as planned. But we'll look into that and try to come back strong tomorrow", Cappellini told the post-even press conference.

Papadakis/Cizeron completed three level-four elements in their routine set to Flamenco and Paso Doble to earn 62.12 points, a new seasons best. "We are very happy with the way how we skated today. We improved a lot from the beginning of the season and it was a great performance today", Cizeron noted. "We've changed our way to work, we've optimized it and also we have been working a lot on our technique and it paid off", added Papadakis.

Elena Ilinykh/Ruslan Zhiganshin (RUS) finished fourth at 60.48 points followed by Alexandra Paul/Mitchell Islam (CAN) with 56.46 points.

Julia Lipnitskaia (RUS) takes Ladies Short Program

Russia's Julia Lipnitskaia took the Ladies Short Program, followed closely by her teammate Elizaveta Tuktamysheva. Kanako Murakami of Japan finished third.

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Skating to “Megapolis”, Lipnitskaia hit a triple toe-triple toe combination, a triple flip and double Axel. The World silver medalist produced as well impressive spins, collecting a level four for all of them. The 16-year-old earned 69.56 points. “I didn’t compete in a long time and the past season was tough for me. I was very nervous in training, so I am pleased with how I did today”, Lipnitskaia commented.

Tuktamysheva’s performance to “Bolero” by Maurice Ravel included a triple toe-triple toe, a triple Lutz, double Axel and two level-four spins. The Skate America silver medalist posted a new seasons best with 67.99 points. “After Skate America, it took me a long time to overcome the jetlag. Only in the last two practices I felt that I was ready for this competition. My practice here wasn’t so confident either, so I am glad that I was able to skate a good short program”, the 17-year-old noted.

Murakami landed a triple toe-triple toe combination and a double Axel in her program to “Think of Me” from the “Phantom of the Opera”, but she stepped out of of an underrotated triple flip. The 2014 Four Continents Champion scored 60.44 points. “Today is my 20th birthday and I am happy that I was able to show my new short program to the audience today. I skated “Christine” (short program) for the first time (in competition) and I wanted to show strong emotions”, the Japanese athlete said.

Gabrielle Daelemann (CAN) came fourth at 58.49 points. Zijun Li (CHN) placed fifth (53.66 points) while Viktoria Helgesson (SWE) is ranked sixth (52.00 points).

Maxim Kovtun (RUS) wins Men’s Short Program

Maxim Kovtun of Russia won the Men’s Short Program. Japan’s Yuzuru Hanyu is currently ranked second and Han Yan of China came third.

Kovtun nailed a quadruple Salchow-triple toeloop combination and quadruple toeloop in his program to “Bolero”, but then he popped the Axel. The Russian Champion collected a level four for two spins and the footwork to earn 85.96 points. “I landed two quads, although they were not working very well in practice. On the other hand, the Axel worked well in practice and not in the program. In the free skating I want to fight. I have a technically demanding program and I want to give the maximum”, the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Finalist commented.

Hanyu opened his routine to a ballade by Chopin with an excellent triple Axel and produced difficult spins. However, the Olympic Champion tripled his planned quad toe and stepped out of the triple Lutz. The 19-year-old earned 82.95 points. “It is my first competition this season and I took a risk with my elements. I didn’t skate my program very well, but I got a quite good score. Tomorrow I want to challenge new things”, the World Champion said.

Yan stumbled on the triple Axel and stepped out of his quad toe to score 79.21 points. “The warm up was good, but I made mistakes in the program maybe because this is my first competition and I was very nervous. I had high expectations of myself”, the 2012 World Junior Champion told the press.

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Richard Dornbush (USA) placed fourth with 77.23 points. Alexei Bychenko (ISR) is ranked fifth (76.96 points) and Nam Nguyen (CAN) round up the top six (72.85 points).

Cheng Peng/Hao Zhang (CHN) top Pairs Short Program

Cheng Peng/Hao Zhang led a Chinese sweep in the Pairs Short Program. Xuehan Wang/Lei Wang and Xiaoyu Yu/Yang Jin finished second and third.

Peng/Zhang delivered a clean Short Program to Peter Tchaikovski's "Arabian Dance" that was highlighted by a triple toeloop, triple twist, throw triple loop and difficult lift. The Skate America bronze medalists earned a new seasons best with 69.11 points. "Today we performed in front of our home crowd and it meant pressure and motivation at the same time. I am pleased we were able to skate well", Peng explained. "We were fifth at Worlds and so we are now among the top teams. If we can improve some details in our program, we can score even more points", Zhang noted.

Skating to a Romance, Wang/Wang completed a triple twist, side by side triple toeloop and throw triple loop, but he fell at the end of the side by side spin. The team scored 57.27 points, slightly surpassing their previous personal best. "It was a bit surprising to us to be in second place, because our performance was not perfect today. I fell on the spin at the end of the program. This is only our second international competition together, so we were nervous", Lei Wang said.

Yu/Jin's program to "Spirit Dance" featured a triple toe and a level-four triple twist, but she missed the throw triple loop. The World Junior Champions picked up 57.03 points. "Today was not our best performance. We made a mistake in the throw jump and also in the transitions, which is too bad", Jin commented.

Vera Bazarova/Andrei Deputat (RUS) are within striking distance of the podium at 56.85 points. Natasha Purich/Andrew Wolfe (CAN) are not far behind with 56.14 points.

For full entry lists and results of the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating 2014/15 please refer to www.isu.org/en/single-and-pair-skating-and-ice-dance/series/isu-grand-prix-of-figure-skating. The Lexus Cup of China continues Saturday with the Free Dance, Ladies, Men's and Pairs Free Skating.

For further information please contact

ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating & Final
Selina Vanier, Media Coordinator
+41 21 612 66 66 (phone)
email: vanier@isu.ch

Lexus Cup of China
Ding Yang, Press Officer
+86 18 601 204 826 (cell)