

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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2004 ISU World Figure Skating Championships, Day Four

The 2004 ISU World Figure Skating Championships continued in Dortmund, Germany Thursday with the Original Dance and the Mens' Free Skating.

Ice Dancing, Original Dance

The Ice Dancers opened today's competition with their Original Dance, the Swing Combo. The couples can choose any two or three of the following rhythms: Swing, Blues, Jive, Rock'n'Roll, Boogie-Woogie and Jitterbug.

Russia's Tatiana Navka/Roman Kostomarov, who stood in joint first place with Albena Denkova/Maxim Staviski (BUL) after the Compulsory Dance, took the lead while the Bulgarians came in second. Elena Grushina/Ruslan Goncharov of the Ukraine finished third.

Navka/Kostomarov entertained the crowd with their characteristic Blues ("Ain't no sunshine") and Rock'n'Roll ("Rock around the clock"). The European Champions impressed with their demanding side by side footwork line and their rotational lift in their routine to earn marks from 5.6 to 5.9 for composition/required elements and from 5.7 to one 6.0 for presentation. "That was it for this OD! It's a bit sad to say good bye to this good original dance, but we competed a lot this season, and so we're somewhat tired and we're looking forward to get some rest. I think it was one of the best performances of the OD, emotionally. It was very precise as well", Kostomarov said. "The 6.0 is super! I thought we might get such marks at the Europeans, but now we got it here, and it's great." Denkova/Staviski turned in a convincing performance as well. Their intense Blues ("It's a Man's, Man's World") and Swing program featured intricate footwork and a dance spin in a difficult sit position. The judges awarded the two-time European silver medalists marks up to 5.9 for both composition/required elements and presentation. "We gave all we have, emotionally and technically. Both our specialists (coaches) were satisfied with the emotional and technical aspects of the program. I think it was a very good performance, probably the best of the season", Staviski commented.

Performing to Swing, Blues and Swing, Grushina/Goncharov completed two difficult lifts and a side by side footwork line that contains many twizzles. The husband-and-wife team scored marks from 5.4 to 5.7 (A) and from 5.6 to 5.8 (B) to finish third. "We did a very good Original Dance today. I am satisfied with that and we like the theme of swing combo very much. It is like in a show", Grushina said. "This is the last competition and it is very important for everybody, so everyone is a little bit more nervous than in other competitions. But this group including the top ten couples motivates us always, doing a good show", her husband added.

Sitting in fourth place are Germany's Kati Winkler/Rene Lohse, who performed also very well. Four Continents Champions Tanith Belbin/Benjamin Agosto (USA) produced an entertaining Swing Combo to finish fifth.

Men, Free Program

The Men's event concluded with an amazing competition, full of passion, drama and extraordinary performances. First to skate in the final group was US Champion Johnny Weir. He did not risk a quadruple jump, but he executed eight clean triples in his elegant program to "Dr. Zhivago". Next up was Switzerland's Stephane Lambiel. The 18-year-old hit two quadruple toe loops (one in

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combination with triple toeloop), a triple Axel and five more triple jumps, and he showed excellent spins in his energetic Flamenco program. His marks went up to 5.8 (A) and 5.9 (B), and the next skater, Brian Joubert of France, knew what he had to do. The European Champion opened his routine to "The Matrix" with a quadruple toeloop, followed by a triple flip, a triple Axel and a quadruple-triple toeloop combination, but he turned out on the second jump. The 18-year-old went on to reel off three more triple jumps and then pumped his fist at the end of the performance. The judges awarded marks from 5.6 to 5.9 for technical merit and from 5.7 to 5.9 for presentation. Joubert took the lead and had to wait and see what would happen. Michael Weiss (USA) followed with a solid skate, but he two-footed the quadruple toeloop (in combination with triple toeloop). The crowd went crazy when the next skater was announced: Stefan Lindemann of Germany. There was an audible gasp when the German Champion touched down with his hand on his opening quadruple toeloop combination, but Lindemann recovered instantly to nail a triple Axel-triple toeloop combination. The 2000 World Junior Champion continued without further mistakes and produced five more triples and a fast serpentine footwork in his program to "Le Petit Poucet". He covered his face with his hands at the end, overwhelmed by the moment. The crowd fell silent as they waited for the marks: 5.6 to 5.9 for technical merit and 5.6 to 5.8 for presentation. Lindemann was ranked second in the Free Skating and overall at this moment, and he knew he had a medal. But the overnight leader and defending champion Evgeni Plushenko still had to skate. The Russian looked very focused when he took his starting position. The opening combination quadruple-triple toeloop-double loop was solid, and so was the following solo quadruple toeloop. The 21-year-old landed a big triple Axel and then a triple Axel-half loop-triple flip sequence, something probably only he had done before. The crowd cheered for his intricate straight line footwork, and Plushenko pulled out a triple Lutz and Salchow next. But then, in the final minute, he suddenly slipped and fell on the take off for the loop. The two-time World Champion got up quickly and finished his performance with two spins. Then he had to wait for the marks and seemed anxious in the Kiss and Cry, but when they flashed up, a smile crossed his face and he shook his fist in triumph: all 5.8s and 5.9s for technical merit and 5.8 to four 6.0s for presentation. Plushenko had defended his title successfully, Joubert took the silver, his first World medal, and the bronze went to Lindemann, who never medalled before at an ISU senior championships. Lindemann is the first German man to medal at Worlds since Norbert Schramm won the silver 21 years ago. Joubert is the first Frenchman on the World podium since Philippe Candeloro got the bronze in 1995.

"Finally I pulled myself together and did two quads (toeloop), I did my combination Axel-flip, unfortunately there was this weird mistake on the loop, I think there was something on the ice, because I don't know how my blade slipped", Plushenko explained. "The third World title is great, and I thank destiny for it. Yes, I waited anxiously for the marks, but I hoped that I had won, so I waited, waited, watched... the judges decide, and everything can happen. This was the hardest World Championship for me. Everyone skated so well, and I like this. We're pushing the level of skating."

Joubert commented: "Tonight my long program felt even better than at the European Championships. I was so relaxed and focused before and during my skate. Before the second quadruple toeloop I just said to myself: Brian you have done this before, you can do it now. And I did it. Everything seemed to be so easy tonight. I was relaxed before my program."

Lindemann said: "I believed from the very beginning that I could make it through the whole program. I didn't have to do much, the audience carried me through the program. After the mistake,

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I thought, oh, you put your hand down, you have to do everything else, but I was sure I would do it. And I did. At the end I believed it would be enough.”

Lambiel was fourth, Weir finished fifth and Weiss was sixth. Min Zhang of China landed a quadruple Salchow and a quadruple toeloop and was ranked seventh.

Ilya Klimkin of Russia had to withdraw due to injury (torn hamstring) before the Free Skating.

The Championships continue tomorrow (Friday) with the Ladies Short Program and the Free Dance. Full results are available from www.isu.org

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