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Vancouver, CAN

ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating 2021-22 Skate Canada International, Day One

Nathan Chen (USA), Kamila Valieva (RUS), Wenjing Sui/Cong Han (CHN) and Piper Gilles/Paul Poirier (CAN) skated to the lead as Skate Canada International opened in Vancouver Friday with the Short Programs and the Rhythm Dance. Skate Canada International is the second of six events in the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating series 2021-22.

Wenjing Sui/Cong Han (CHN) rule in Pairs Short Program at Skate Canada

Two-time ISU World Champions Wenjing Sui/Cong Han (CHN) ruled in the Pairs Short Program. Russia's Daria Pavliuchenko/Denis Khodykin sit in second followed by Minerva Fabienne Hase/Nolan Seegert of Germany.

Skating to the Flamenco "Nyah", Sui/Han completed a side by side triple toeloop, triple twist, a huge triple flip and earned a level four for the lift, the twist and the side by side spin. The step sequence and the death spiral merited a level two and three. The 2018 Olympic silver medalist scored 78.94 points.

"We feel very good in the short program," Han said. "We're very excited to compete here in Canada and to see the audience that gives us support. We know that we have some level problems from the last competition, but there was little time before this competition. So, this is maybe our next goal."

Pavliuchenko/Khodykin put out an entertaining performance to "Be Italian", producing a triple twist, a throw triple loop and side by side triple toes. However, she fell on a transition move. The 2020 European bronze medalists earned 69.46 points.

"We enjoyed skating here. We missed international competitions a lot last season," Pavliuchenko told the press. "We still need to work on our program, but for today it was OK."

Hase/Seegert's program to "You Are the Reason" was highlighted by a set of triple toes, a triple twist and throw triple Salchow. The 2019 Rostelecom Cup bronze medalists achieved a new season's best with 67.93 points.

"We are happy to finally be here after a very long travel," Hase said. The Germans had been delayed coming into Vancouver as they missed their connection and arrived Thursday afternoon. "It is our first time at the Grand Prix in Canada. We are very happy with our skate. There are still some levels we need to catch up on."

Kirsten Moore-Towers/Michael Marinaro (CAN) are sitting in fourth place on 66.43 points after she stepped out of the triple toeloop. The new team of Vanessa James/Eric Radford (CAN) placed fifth. She stumbled on the throw triple Lutz (65.02 points).

Nathan Chen (USA) dominates in Short Program

[Nathan Chen](#) (USA) skated to a strong lead in the Short Program with 12 points to spare, redeeming himself from the subpar performance at Skate America the week before. Teammate [Jason Brown](#) came second ahead of Canada's [Keegan Messing](#).

Performing to "Eternity" and "Nemesis" by Benjamin Clementine, Chen hit a quad Lutz, triple Axel and quad toe-triple toe and level-four spins and footwork. The three-time World Champion picked up a season's best of 106.72 points.

"I had pretty tough skates at Skate America. I'm happy to have an opportunity right off the bat to give myself another shot and I'm much happier with how today went," Chen said. "Between Skate America and Skate Canada I came to Canada early and I was here for the past couple of days. It was really nice to be able to skate here and to kind of get my feet under me right after competition.

"I find that anytime, both in practice and in competition, when you don't do well, I want immediately another opportunity to try. I don't know if it is going to be successful or not, but at least I want that next opportunity to try again."

Brown delivered a delightful performance to "Sinnerman" that featured a triple Axel, triple flip, triple Lutz-triple toe and level-four spins. The 2020 ISU Four Continents silver medalist earned 94.00 points.

"I'm pleased with my short program today. I keep gaining more confidence with the program as the season goes on," Brown said. "There are still points left on the table that I am determined to grab. I'm pleased, but also hungry for more."

Messing landed a quad toe-triple toe, triple Axel and triple Lutz and impressed with fast spin in his routine to "Never Tear Us Apart" to set a season's best of 93.28 points.

"To skate with a live audience again, to be back with a home crowd, is just a fantastic feeling. To put out a strong skate and to be here with these excellent skaters, I am overjoyed," the 2020 ISU Grand Prix Skate America bronze medalist said.

[Makar Ignatov](#) (RUS) landed a quadruple loop and is currently ranked fourth with a personal best score of 89.79 points. [Evgeni Semenenko](#) (RUS) came fifth (87.71) followed by Keiji Tanaka (JPN) on 78.83 points.

Piper Gilles/Paul Poirier (CAN) rock the Rhythm Dance

To the delight of the home crowd, Canadians [Piper Gilles/Paul Poirier](#) danced to a confident lead in the Rhythm Dance. [Charlene Guignard/Marco Fabbri](#) of Italy finished second and Spain's [Olivia Smart/Adrian Diaz](#) are sitting in third.

Dancing to "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues" and "Still Standing" by Elton John and dressed in bright orange, Gilles/Poirier collected a level four for the Blues Pattern, the twizzles and the lift while the Pattern Dance step sequence was rated a level three and the midline steps were a level two. The reigning ISU World bronze medalists netted 85.65 points, a new personal best.

"Piper and I are so proud of our performance today. This is a program we've made a lot of changes to since the last competition, Autumn Classic," Poirier said. "It's been a scramble in a few weeks really trying to nail everything down and get it as ready as possible for this Grand Prix."

"We knew this was going to be our first performance in front of a crowd in almost two years and so we really fought to be able to manage our energy with the energy of the crowd behind us. I think we accomplished that pretty well. We were able to stay focused and deliver a strong performance. It was so nice to be able to entertain people."

Guignard/Fabbri put out a dynamic performance to songs by Michael Jackson, earning a level four for their straight line lift and a level three for the twizzles. Their Blues Pattern and midline step sequence garnered a level two. The multiple Italian Champions scored 78.82 points.

"We are proud of our performance and we see a big improvement from the first competition a few weeks ago," Fabbri said. "The program still needs a lot of work, it is not 100 percent ready yet. I don't know yet why we lost levels basically everywhere, but we are happy with the performance and sometimes that is more important than the score."

Smart/Diaz' dance to "Proud Mary" by Tina Turner included level-four twizzles and a level-four straight-line lift, but the midline got only a level one. Nevertheless, the Spaniards set a new personal best with 76.97 points.

"It was a good, smooth performance," Diaz said. "This is our fourth competition and we feel the program gets smoother and easier to perform."

Caroline Green/Michael Parsons (USA) placed fourth on 72.40 points followed by Lilah Fear/Lewis Gibson (GBR), who scored 71.89 points after she wobbled on the twizzles. Majorie Lajoie/Zachary Lagha (CAN) round up the top six (71.87 points).

Kamila Valieva (RUS) takes lead in battle of triple Axels

Kamila Valieva of Russia took the lead in a battle of triple Axels in the Women's Short Program. Valieva's teammates Elizaveta Tuktamysheva and Alena Kostornaia came second and third on the first day of competition.

Valieva opened her performance to "In Memoriam" by Kirill Richter with a triple Axel with both arms raised above her head and followed up with a triple flip, triple Lutz-triple toe and level-four spins and footwork. The 2020 ISU World Junior Champion improved her personal best score by almost 10 points with 84.19 points.

"I am happy that I did 100 percent today. I skated calmer and for tomorrow I want to have the same mindset," the 15-year-old said. "It was hard to be in the room for 24 hours (in quarantine). We tried to train a bit in the room, which was difficult, but possible."

Tuktamysheva nailed a triple Axel, triple Lutz-triple toe and triple flip in her sensual program to "Oblivion" ("J'oublie"). She collected a level four for her spins and step sequence to score a season's best of 81.24, just short of her personal best.

"I am not in the best condition and I learn to skate under different circumstances. My body was not happy to do something today, I felt the jetlag," said the 2021 ISU World silver medalist. "Tomorrow I want to skate with more energy."

Kostornaia landed a triple Axel in her program to "New York, New York" as well, but she slightly underrotated the jump (q). The 2020 European Champion went on to complete a triple Lutz and triple flip-triple toe to score 75.58 points.

"I am pleased that I was able to do my content at least partially. Tomorrow I'll focus again on each element and on showing my program," said Kostornaia during the post-event press conference.

[Alysa Liu](#) (USA) went for a triple Axel, but underrotated. She came fourth on 73.63 points. 2018 World silver medalist [Wakaba Higuchi](#) (JPN) is currently ranked fifth (69.41 points) while [Karen Chen](#) (USA) finished sixth (68.74 points).

Skate Canada International continues Saturday with the Pairs and Men's Free Skating, Free Dance and the Women's Free Skating.

Viewers are able to watch the [ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating series](#) either via their national broadcaster / channel or via the [Skating ISU YouTube Channel](#) for countries where there is no broadcaster agreement in place. For more information, please see [here](#).

The [General Announcement](#) of the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series is available at the ISU website. The individual announcements are published under the respective events. For full entry lists and further information regarding the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series please visit [here](#). The ISU has an anti-Covid protocol in place to keep all participants of the events as safe as possible.

The ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating series consists of six events: [Guaranteed Rate Skate America](#) in Las Vegas (USA) October 22-24, [Skate Canada International](#) in Vancouver (CAN) October 29-31, [Gran Premio d'Italia](#) in Turin (ITA) November 5-7, [NHK Trophy](#) in Tokyo (JPN) November 12-14, [Internationaux de France](#) in Grenoble (FRA) November 19-21 and [Rostelecom Cup](#) in Sochi (RUS) November 26-28. The [ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final](#) will take place in Osaka (JPN) December 9-12.

About ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating

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. The top six of the past World Championships are seeded. Competitors collect points in their events towards the qualification for the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final. Only the top six Skaters / Couples in each discipline can qualify for the Final.