



NEWS

Sochi sojourn: Brown's blog from the JGP Final

2011 Junior Grand Prix Final champ relays tales from site of 2014 Winter Olympics

By Jason Brown, special to icenetwork.com

(12/05/2012) - **Jason Brown**, last season's Junior Grand Prix Final champion, shares his adventures from the **2012 Junior Grand Prix Final** in Sochi, Russia.

Sunday, Dec. 9

FINAL DAY IN SOCHI

On the last day in Sochi, there was the exhibition and the closing banquet. In the morning, my mom arranged for an 11-seat van to take whoever wanted to go into Sochi. **Josh [Farris], Angela [Wang], Leah [Keiser]**, Leah's mom, Damon Allen, my parents, and [U.S. Figure Skating Media Manager] Renee [Felton] all made the van ride very fun as we made our adventure to Sochi.

For those, like me, who didn't know, the Olympics technically will not be in Sochi but in a suburb of Sochi located about 30-40 minutes away from the city, with no traffic. It was really fun to walk around the streets with everyone. We saw the countdown clock, walked in and out of small shops, and ate lunch outside a restaurant overlooking the sea. It was beautiful!

THE CLOSING BANQUET

The closing banquet was great. In between eating and speeches, a Russian singing group performed, along with a Russian folk dance group. Both were very entertaining and intriguing to watch. **Meryl Davis and Charlie White** were asked to make the athletes' speech at the banquet.

After the speeches and entertainment, the rest of the banquet was open for dancing, while a band played live music. I used part of this time to get pictures with some of my role models and favorite skaters.

It has been such an honor to be here, and to have the privilege of competing in Sochi. I've learned so much, and I leave with countless lessons and memories that will help me to grow as a skater.

The team here has been unbelievable. The nicest people and our team leaders, physical therapist and doctor have truly been outstanding, always there for us. I cannot thank them enough for all their hard work in making this event such a special and memorable one. I can't wait to go home and train for the **U.S. Championships** in Omaha!

Hope to see you all there. :)

Saturday, Dec. 8



Jason Brown, seen here cheering on his U.S. teammates along with Hannah Miller (middle) and Angela Wang, was his usual ebullient self in Sochi. (courtesy of Jason Brown)

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RECAP OF DAY THREE

On the third day of competition, both the junior ladies and the pairs competed their free programs. Both events were truly spectacular to watch. The junior ladies event was unbelievable, with the top four ladies from the short all scoring personal bests!

Leah skated a beautiful program, and she ended up sixth. It's truly amazing for her to be competing at the Final in her first year on the Junior Grand Prix circuit.

Angela skated an incredible, clean long program, opening with a spectacular triple Lutz-triple toe-double toe combination. She ended up second in the long and fourth overall.

Hannah [Miller] also skated an absolutely breathtaking clean performance and skated away with the silver.

The Russians swept the junior pairs podium, all skating great programs. The junior pairs girls were so tiny, it's amazing that they are strong enough to nail such huge throws!

Huge congrats to all the junior competitors!

SENIOR EVENTS

As the junior men finished competing before the senior events started, I was fortunate enough to see all the seniors compete their shorts and longs, screaming loud and proud from the stands! :)

SENIOR LADIES

The senior ladies shorts were amazing. **Christina [Gao]** skated two beautiful programs, finishing in sixth. She has had such a spectacular Grand Prix season this year ... she will be one to watch at nationals!

Elizaveta Tuktamishева of Russia finished fifth but skated a terrific long program, placing second in that segment of the event. **Kiira Korpi** of Finland was such a wonderful and beautiful skater to watch. She finished fourth. **Akiko Suzuki** of Japan rocked her short program, skating an energetic, non-stop performance from beginning to end. She finished in third place in the short and followed it up by hanging on to the bronze medal by skating a gorgeous long program.

Ashley [Wagner] skated a short that was practically flawless, scoring her personal best and finishing second. In her long, although she took an extremely hard fall on her second Axel, she got up and finished her program just as strong as she began it. She was a true role model and tough competitor, putting aside the pain, getting up quickly and finishing strong! She held on to claim the silver.

Mao Asada of Japan skated two stunning performances to two completely different types of music. Both her long and short were breathtaking, and she took home the gold.

SENIOR DANCE

The dance event, as always, was insane. From the outstanding lifts to the perfectly in-sync twizzles, every dance team was exciting to watch. Some highlights for me:

- **Nathalie Péchalat and Fabian Bourzat** of France, who skated outstanding short and free dances and won the bronze.
- **Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir** of Canada skating two jaw-dropping performances, finishing with their thrilling *Carmen* free dance, scoring their season's best and finishing second.
- Meryl and Charlie made history as they became four-time Grand Prix Final champions! They skated two mesmerizing performances, reaching their personal best in both segments to bring home gold.

SENIOR MEN

From start to finish, the senior men were unbelievable! All six men were rocking the quads -- many attempting more than one -- but the only person who landed more than one was **Javier Fernández** ... who landed THREE! Absolutely incredible and so inspiring to watch. Although he won the long program, he finished fourth overall, within tenths of a point away from third.

It is such a privilege to be able to watch live the skaters I look up to. It is amazing to see what it takes to compete at their level of skating. **Daisuke Takahashi** of Japan took home the gold, **Yuzuru Hanyu**, also of Japan, finished with a nearly perfect long, snatching the silver,

and **Patrick Chan** of Canada snagged the bronze.

SENIOR PAIRS

From the insanely high triple twists to the massive throws, the pairs event was non-stop action. All teams were incredible to watch, with **Tatiana Volosozhar and Maxim Trankov** winning the Final for their home country. The other Russian team, **Vera Bazarova and Yuri Larionov**, finished second, and **Qing Pang and Jian Tong** finished third. Both Canadian teams skated beautiful programs, finishing fourth and fifth.

PRESIDENTIAL EXCITEMENT

Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, came to watch the final competition day in Sochi. I bet it was a true honor to compete in your home country, and in front of your president! It was insane to think that the actual president of RUSSIA came to watch the senior final events.

Friday, Dec. 7

RECAP OF DAY TWO OF JUNIOR EVENTS

The day started off with the junior men's practice at 6:30 a.m. Luckily, I was still sort of jet-lagged and was pretty awake when my 4:30 alarm went off. When the bus left for the rink, it was extremely dark outside, and when we took the 8 o'clock bus back to the hotel, it was still just as dark. The sun was nowhere to be found.

The junior men's practice was followed by the senior ladies short program ice, along with practices for the other six events. The competition started at 1:45 with the junior men's free skate. Josh and I ended up finishing second and fourth. We both leave with a great learning experience that will help us to become better future competitors as we transition to the senior level.

The junior free dance was later that day, and it was extremely exciting. My roommate, Daniel Eaton, now steps in as the guest blogger to give his perspective on the junior free dance.

"All of the dance teams performed exceptionally. Teams have improved so much in such a short time since the JGP circuit ended."

Alex [Aldridge] and Daniel's free dance was beautiful. They skated so strong and were so fast. Their lifts kept me on the edge of my seat, and their twizzles were terrific. The junior dance event was an absolute pleasure to watch. They ended up taking home the bronze medal!

Thursday, Dec. 6

COMPETITION DAY ONE

The day started off with the junior men's official short program practice at 8:30 a.m. and ended with the junior pairs short a little after 10 p.m. It was a very exciting day from start to finish!

EVENTS BEGIN

The first event today was the junior men's short. It was such an amazing experience and honor to be competing and judged on the future Olympic ice! Josh and I ended up first and third, respectively, and became the first people to have a press conference in the venue!

We both were happy with our skates. Although I messed up my flip, I landed my first triple Axel in competition -- definitely a moment I will never forget. We both can't wait for our long tomorrow!

The junior dance followed the men, and Alex and Daniel took fourth in the segment and are more than within striking distance of a medal. They skated unbelievably, and I was screaming loud and proud from the stands.

The final group of Americans for the night were the junior ladies. Leah opened the event with a beautiful skate, sitting in sixth, and is four points away from fourth. Hannah skated second with an absolutely stunning performance, shattering her season's best, totalling a 59.18. She lies in second heading into the free skate on Saturday. Angela sits fourth. She had a wonderful skate as well.

The ladies event was a great way to wrap up Team USA's first competition day. I can't wait to give them all huge congratulatory hugs when I see them tomorrow!

FRIDAY'S PREVIEW

Friday begins competition day two, which marks the start of the senior events along with the end of the junior men and dance. The day begins with the junior men's free and concludes with the senior pairs. All senior disciplines compete their short programs, and the junior men and dance have their final skates. It will be one huge day of excitement ... please continue to send us your best vibes! :)

Wednesday, Dec. 5

DRIVE TO THE RINK

The drive to the rink was very exciting! Although this morning it took over an hour to travel from the hotel to the rink, for others who came later in the day, it only took 20 minutes. It seems to truly depend on the traffic. There is construction everywhere as the city prepares for the Olympics.

As we neared the rink, it became obvious that nearly every building in the area is under construction and will be used in some capacity at the Winter Games in 2014. Everyone on the bus was speculating about what was being built:

- "That's the Olympic village?"
- "Is that where the opening ceremonies will be held?"
- "What are they building over there?"

It was really an amazing sight and a major motivation to make it back in a year and a half and see the area when everything is finished. The only building that seems complete is the Iceberg ... thank goodness!

THE RINK

The rink is called the Iceberg and is made to look just like an iceberg: It's massive inside and out, and is themed with a combination of white and shades of blue throughout the entire building. From the windows to the spectator seats, it's true to its name. The backstage area is like a maze: doors everywhere you go, hallways in every direction.

The rink is truly breathtaking. Definitely a site to see.

PLAYING AT THE BEACH

After practice ice, Christina, Renee Felton (U.S. Figure Skating's media manager) and I went to the beach (shore of the Black Sea), which is about a minute walk from the hotel. The waves were pretty big and would at times come pretty far ashore, so Christina and I would run through the sand as fast as we could, collecting rocks in between each wave and then sprinting back to the walkway where we wouldn't get wet. We got there just in time to watch the sun setting -- absolutely beautiful.

OPENING RECEPTION

The opening reception was very nice, and the food beautifully presented. After a quick team meeting and picture, we went to the opening reception room, which was very formal. A banquet table in the center of the room, abundant with hors d'oeuvres, included delicious white and dark chocolate fountains. It was hard to leave that area! We were entertained by a Russian band, which was later joined by dancers in traditional Russian costumes who interacted with the crowd for even more fun. Patrick Chan and Josh were the stars, as they graciously participated in the activities! The most ironic part was that the only song I understood was one I'd learned in Spanish class (which they performed in Spanish!).

Tuesday, Dec. 4

THE DAY BEGINS

I woke up early this morning because the unbelievable skating director at one of my home rinks in Northbrook, Ill., Heather, opened up the building early so that I could skate one last practice session before heading to the airport. During the morning practice, one of my best

friends, Joy, stopped by the rink in her pajamas to wish me good luck and bring us some homemade delicious cookies for the journey. What a great friend and a great way to start my day!

OFF TO SOCHI! TRAVEL DAY

We had a smooth and easy -- but long -- travel day, beginning with a flight to New York, 45-minute layover, nine-hour flight to Moscow, six-hour layover and finally a two-hour flight to Sochi! During the trip, Kori [Ade] and I watched the entire first season of *The New Normal* ... It was the first time I had ever seen it, and I honestly fell in love! We got to Sochi around 8:30 p.m., where Kori and I were met by LOC (local organizing committee) volunteers who took us straight to our hotel. After a long day of travel, we appreciated the ready-made credentials that meant we didn't have to take a picture!

THE NEXT MORNING!

As Kori and I came in a day earlier than most of the U.S. team, it was exciting to wake up this morning psyched for everyone else to come today! The dining room was huge, and I had to contain my excitement when I walked in and saw Tatiana and Maxim, and Patrick. While finishing the delicious buffet-style breakfast, I saw Leah and her mom. They arrived after midnight, and they both said they had a good trip from California to Sochi!

OUR ADVENTURE TO THE RINK?

After breakfast, Kori and I decided to go walk around outside. We were surprised to see the Black Sea only a few steps from the hotel. We were walking up onto a pier about 20 feet above the water when we saw a woman at the edge suddenly get drenched by the deceptively large waves crashing on the shoreline. The lady looked at us soaking wet, and we all broke out in laughter!

In an effort to continue our exploration, we decided to find the rink ... so I typed "Adler Ice Arena" into my GPS. The map showed a destination and indicated it was about a 30-minute walk, so we decided to do it!

We walked for quite some time ... over highways, through small side streets and on very skinny sidewalks. Well, let's just say I led us to the "destination" -- which ended up being in the middle of the main highway directly across from the airport. NO RINK IN SIGHT!

Kori was not pleased, but we stood there on the edge of the highway hysterically laughing. Moral of that story: An old-fashioned map or some hand-written directions from a trustworthy local would still fare better than modern technology.

Hi it's Kori. This is where I come in to tell my version of the adventure:

The walk was long, muddy, confusing, long, tumultuous, rainy, long and -- worst of all -- uphill both ways. :-)

FIRST SIGNS OF OLYMPIC SETUP

During our adventure to the "what we wanted to be the rink," we did come across sculptures alongside the highway of the Olympic rings representing each continent. It's so exciting to see the city as it prepares for the 2014 Winter Games!

HOTEL

The hotel is a huge gated resort-like place that we learned from Tamara Moskvina was built around 1930. There are many individual buildings that make up the hotel complex, with facilities that include a gym, three pools and a private beach on the Black Sea.

The weather today was beautiful! The climate is tropical, and the area is abundant with palm and fruit trees. The people working at the event have been extremely helpful.

Today, one of the LOC volunteers, Anya, took us around town and helped us find a bank! She also showed us around the hotel and -- because she happens to have lived in Ohio for six years, and speaks perfect English -- we grilled her about the differences between Russian and American cultures. It was like having our own tour guide and peek into real Russia!

WEDNESDAY'S PREVIEW

Almost all the skaters have arrived, and we can't wait for tomorrow's first day of official practice ice! All disciplines have 30-40 minutes of ice tomorrow, beginning with the junior and ending with senior. Goodnight from Sochi!

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